

Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee -Revised Agenda June 20, 2023
Office of Agriculture- Jeremy Criss

Call the meeting to Order and Introductions-

Approval of the May 16, 2023, AAC minutes-

1. Bill 40-21, Individual Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Systems – Amendments

The OAG will continue to monitor this bill, which will be scheduled for a second T&E Committee Work Session.

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2023/20230307/20230307_3A.pdf

2. Bill 18-22, Noise Control – Leaf Removal Equipment – Amendments

The County Council tabled this bill, but the OAG will continue to monitor it.

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2023/20230321/20230321_4G.pdf

3. MDA News Release on the Privatization of the Nutrient Management Program

On June 1, 2023, MDA sent out a news release announcing it will no longer partner with the University of Maryland to fund a Nutrient Management Advisor in each county. Instead, it will help the current advisors find employment in the private nutrient management sector and will have cost-share programs that will provide partial funding to farmers for private sector nutrient management plan services. MDA will continue to fund until the end of August, Nutrient Management Specialists at the university, who will continue to train farmers to write their own nutrient management plans and will be able to write plans for eligible farms with less than 50 acres.

The full details of this transition will be released this month in MDA’s Nutrient Management Summer Newsletter. MDA will also host a forum for farmers on July 17, 2023 to meet and discuss this transition. MDA has stated that if individual farm operations have questions and believe they will not be served by the mentioned options, they should contact Dwight Dotterer at 410-841-5877 or Bryan Harris at 410-841-5951 for assistance.

4. Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) Report on the Status of Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) and Building Lot Termination (BLT) Easements

The County Council has informed the Office of Agriculture that they will not schedule the OLO Report on the Status of TDRs and BLTs until after the summer recess. **The OAG is proposing**

the attached Letter of Intent/Interest for any farmer that leases farmland that still has retained TDRs as these farmers will need the ability to use these retained TDRs as equity to help purchase the farm. The OAG hopes this approach will enable the MNCPPC to better understand how many TDRs they will need to be planned for in TDR Overlay zones.

5. Update on the October 2023 Retirement of Jeremy Criss, Director of the Office of Agriculture

The Montgomery County Food Growers Association, Agricultural Advisory Committee, Montgomery Soil Conservation District, and the Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board should have all received a letter from the County Executive’s Office in response to their letters regarding the process to replace Jeremy Criss.

This letter states that the position of Director of the Office of Agriculture will continue to be merit-based and the agricultural groups will be invited to participate in the interview process. The position search was announced on May 30 and will be open until the end of June. The County approved the request for overage, which means that the OAG can hire a replacement before Jeremy retires on October 1, 2023.

6. County Plans to Build Utility-Scale Solar Facility in Dickerson

The County owns a 729-acre property in Dickerson known as Site 2, which was purchased as an emergency landfill site in case of malfunction of the incinerator. It is currently being farmed by David Scott Jr. under a lease that expires in 2025. The County Executive (CE) is very interested in using the land for a utility-scale solar energy facility.

The OAG met in person on May 16, 2023, with the CE, his staff, and others to discuss this project. The County’s intention is to use all of the farmland on the property (approximately 375 acres) for the solar facility. However, the size of the solar facility will be limited by the transmitting capacity of the power line between the Dickerson incinerator power plant and the nearby PEPCO sub-station, which is 73 MW.

The County’s goal is to use the ground between and under the panels for a variety of agricultural crops in order to allow farmers to continue using the land and to perform agrivoltaic research in collaboration with a university.

The property has approximately 69% Class I and II soils. The possibility of such a facility is highly dependent on the ability to obtain federal funding. It will likely take years to build a facility of the intended size.

A committee will be formed to advise the CE as the project continues, and we believe the OAG will be included in this committee.

7. Meeting between OAG and MCDOT on Rustic Roads

On May 23, 2023, the OAG and representatives of the agricultural groups met virtually with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) to discuss maintenance on rustic roads. Christopher Conklin, Director of MCDOT, said that a road being designated as rustic has no impact on the level of maintenance it receives. Maintenance on these roads must comply with

the standards set by the Rustic Roads Functional Master Plan. MCDOT acts as the steward of these roads and does not need permission from the Rustic Roads Advisory Committee, which is an advisory body, not a regulatory one, to carry out maintenance. However, he also said that this committee has influence in the county and MCDOT must come to agreements with them on certain matters (not safety).

Richard Dorsey, Chief of the Division of Highway Services, said that all roads in the county are inspected every two years and maintenance decisions are based on a road's condition and level of use. MCDOT's budget is far below what it would take to maintain all roads adequately, which is why there is a high percentage of roads in poor or fair condition and a long backlog of tree trimming requests.

When informed about dangerous situations caused by excessive vegetation along roads and at intersections, Brett Linkletter, Chief of Tree Maintenance Section, responded that safety is a high priority at MCDOT and encouraged farmers to alert MCDOT to these situations, as all roadside trimming is complaint-driven, not inspection-driven. Jeffrey Knutsen, Chief of the Field Operations Section, said that farmers should use the County's 311 system, which MCDOT takes seriously.

When asked whether the resurfacing work done on Willard Road in Poolesville was preventative maintenance, Mr. Conklin replied that it was done because of the upcoming opening of the Crossvines facility. Mr. Dorsey said that the rest of Willard Road will be resurfaced in fiscal year 2025.

8. The Crossvines Ribbon-Cutting ceremony -June 12, 2023.

The Montgomery County Revenue Authority conducted a Ribbon Cutting ceremony to officially open the Crossvines facility.

<https://www.crossvines.com/>

9. Amendments to Chapter 49 Streets and Roads-Rustic Roads Advisory Committee-

On June 20, 2023, the County Council will introduce Bill 30-23 to amend the section in Chapter 49, Article 8 on the Rustic Roads Advisory Committee. The public hearing will take place on July 11, 2023, the Transportation and Environment Committee work session will take place on July 17, 2023, and action by the full Council will take place on July 25, 2023.

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2023/20230620/20230620_1C.pdf

10. Kevin Atticks Visits One Acre Farm and the MCFB Picnic

On May 26, 2023, Secretary of Agriculture Kevin Atticks visited Michael Protas' One Acre Farm in Dickerson, along with the OAG, Heather Bruskin (Director of the Office of Food Systems Resilience), and Compost Crew. We toured the farm and compost outpost and discussed a variety

of topics, including on-farm composting, the increased cost of farming, institutional procurement of local food, GAP certification, and the Farm-to-Food Bank Program.

Kevin and his wife also attended to Montgomery County Farm Bureau Picnic on June 11, 2023.

11. The OAG remitted the **attached Report** on the status of Farm Alcohol Production to the County Council. This is the second biennial report since the ZTA 20-01 was adopted in October 2020.

12. The OAG has been busy with farm visits in June.

June 2, 2023- Councilmember Dawn Luedtke

June 7, 2023- Afri-Thrive-Council members Natalie Gonzalez and Andrew Friedson

June 10, 2023-Ribbon Cutting for Lone Oak farm Brewery-3rd Anniversary.

June 14, 2023- MoCo Food Council-Council members Marily Balcombe and Laurie Ann Sayles and staff

June 15, 2023-Leadership Montgomery

13. Agricultural Advisory Committee Appointments

Interviews for new AAC candidates were conducted on May 31, 2023. The interview committee was Doug Lechluder, Mike Scheffel, Natalia Salazar, and Jeremy. Currently, we still need one more farmer member and one more non-farmer member.

14. Next Meeting of the AAC is July 18, 2023, at 7:00 pm

15. Upcoming Meetings and Events:

Agricultural Advisory Committee – June 20, 2023

Community Solar Webinar-MCA, MC Green Bank, OAG – June 22, 2023

Rural and Agricultural Symposium – July 10, 2023

Public hearing on bill to amend Chapter 49, Article 8-RRAC – July 11, 2023

Montgomery County Farm Bureau Board of Directors Meeting – Rescheduled to July 11, 2023

Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors – July 14, 2023

Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board – Rescheduled to July 18, 2023

Agricultural Advisory Committee-July 18, 2023

Annual Farm Tour Weekend – July 22 and 23, 2023

Montgomery County Agricultural Fair – August 11-19, 2023

Agricultural Leaders Luncheon – August 14, 2023