



Montgomery County, MD
Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC)
Regular Meeting Minutes
November 18, 2025

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 pm.

2. Introductions

Committee: Lori Larson, Ben Butler, Amanda Cather, Debra Tropp, Ellen Gordon, Fred Lechliden, Matt Lechliden, Jane Evans, Jeff Dowling, Russ Allnutt, Tom Precht, Paula Linthicum

Office of Agriculture (OAG) staff: Mike Scheffel, Mike Weyand, Natalia Salazar

Guests: Doug Lechliden, Tony Jones, Marcia Kingman, Margaret Chasson, Ruben Rosario, Dale Tibbitts, Craig Wilson, Nkosi Yearwood

3. Approval of the October 21, 2025, AAC minutes

Jane Evans introduced a motion to approve the minutes, Paula Linthicum seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

4. Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) and Building Lot Termination (BLT) Programs
No update since October 2025

5. Proposed solar projects in the Agricultural Reserve

On November 12, the MD Public Services Commission (PSC) granted Chaberton Solar a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to build the proposed [Sugarloaf](#) solar energy project (4 MW array proposed for 16 acres on 20507 Darnestown Road, Dickerson). This approval was contingent on several conditions, including the use of agrivoltaics, as defined in Maryland's Public Utility Article § 7-306.2(a)(2), throughout the life of the project. Previously, Chaberton had shared with the OAG and others a draft request for proposals (RFP) from farmers interested in practicing agrivoltaics on the site; however, the company has not yet issued that RFP.



Should Chaberton fail to maintain active agrivoltaics throughout the life of the project, Montgomery County, the MD Power Plant Research Project, or any other party to the case will be able to file notice to Chaberton, who will have 45 days to file a summary explaining how the issue has been addressed or is being addressed. Given that the Montgomery County zoning code does not include a definition for agrivoltaics, the county's Planning Department, with input from the Department of Permitting Services and OAG, will propose language to the County Council for introducing such a definition.

6. [SB0931/](#)[HB1036](#), Public Utilities – Generating Stations – Generation and Siting

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) is exploring legislation for the upcoming session that would address some of the concerns the MD county governments had last year with this bill. As passed, the bill limited the total land area that can be approved for community solar development to 5% of the area of each county's priority preservation area (PPA). MACo is considering recommending an amendment that would apply the 5% to the PPA acreage minus the total acreage under permanent agricultural easements. Montgomery County's PPA corresponds roughly to the Agricultural Reserve, which has approximately 93,000 acres in total and 24,000 acres under purchase of development rights easements, the most restrictive type of agricultural easements. If this protected acreage is subtracted from the Agricultural Reserve acreage, the community solar cap would decrease from approximately 4,650 acres to 3,450 acres, effectively lowering the cap from 5% to 3.7% of the Agricultural Reserve.

7. County Council work session on agritourism

On November 12, the Council's Economic Development Committee and Parks, Housing, and Planning Committee held a joint work session on agritourism. The purpose of the work session was for Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) to present its recently released statewide guidance and analysis document on agritourism and value-added agriculture. No legislative proposals were mentioned during this meeting.

8. Farm-to-Table Symposium

On November 10, the office of Councilmember Laurie-Anne Sayles held a symposium on farm-to-table sourcing at the BlackRock Center for the Arts. The purpose of the symposium was to connect county food producers to local restaurants and caterers, as well to discuss how the County and other partners can strengthen the local food system.



9. MD Agricultural Commission definition of agriculture

After gathering feedback from multiple agricultural groups, the MD Agricultural Commission revised their first draft of a definition for “agriculture” and arrived at the following revised definition.

*“**Agriculture** includes but is not limited to; the cultivation, production, management, maintenance, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of food, feed, fiber, fuel, forestry, turf, and ornamental horticultural products, as well as equines. It includes traditional land-based farming as well as aquaculture, agroforestry, silviculture, hydroponic, aquaponic, and controlled-environment production, along with the refinement of outputs into bio renewable products such as biofuel and biochar. Further discretion and determinations of agriculture shall be deferred to the Secretary of Agriculture.*

***Agricultural activities** include but are not limited to;*

- (i) managing the nutrients in soil to support biochemical processes, application of fertilizers, manures, and soil amendments to replenish critical elements of life, and the adoption of technologies and management practices to maximize soil health,*
- (ii) pest management practices throughout the growing season, the storage and application of soil amendments, nutrients, and crop management tools like pesticides,*
- (iii) harvesting, extraction, and processing of agricultural products that were raised,*
- (iv) marketing agricultural products, both for off-site and on-site sales through global, national, regional, and local markets.*
- (v) further discretion and determinations of agricultural activities shall be deferred to the Secretary of Agriculture.”*

The Commission is requesting input on this definition. The final definition will be presented to the MD Secretary of Agriculture, Kevin Atticks, for departmental consideration. The definition will not necessarily be proposed for regulatory/statutory action. The MDA currently lacks a definition for the term, which has unintentionally created regulatory challenges.

The AAC members agreed to submit any comments on this definition to the OAG by December 3, to allow time to submit an AAC letter to the County Executive for approval and subsequently to the MD Agricultural Commission.



10. Agritourism Position Paper

The Montgomery County Farm Bureau, Montgomery Agricultural Producers, Sugarloaf Citizens Association, and Montgomery Countryside Alliance recently submitted a joint letter to the County Council, County Executive, and Department of Permitting Services with recommendations on how to regulate agritourism in the county. The letter recommended that the County only approve agritourism proposals that are truly accessory to agriculture; i.e. ones where agricultural production is at the center of the business and agritourism is conducted as part of and in support of this agricultural activity. It also recommended clarifying the regulatory requirements for new agritourism businesses and creating a stand-alone definition for agritourism in the county zoning code.

The AAC members decided to discuss whether to take action in response to this letter during the following AAC meeting.

11. The next meeting of the AAC will be held on December 16, 2025, at 7:00 pm via Microsoft Teams.

Because the AAC has already met the statutory requirement to meet 10 times in 2025, the committee members agreed to meet in December only if an item arises that requires timely discussion. The OAG will announce whether this is the case.

12. Upcoming meetings and events:

Thanksgiving Day (office closed): November 27, 2025

Montgomery County Farm Bureau Board of Directors meeting: December 2, 2025

Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board meeting: December 9, 2025

Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board meeting: December 12, 2025

13. Adjourn

Paula Linthicum introduced a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ben Butler seconded the motion, and the motion carried, adjourning the meeting at 7:47 pm.