



Montgomery County, MD  
Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC)  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
October 21 2025

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 6:59 pm.

2. Introductions

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

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

Guests: Caroline Davenport, Sierra Gray, Ruben Rosario, Tom Hoffman, Craig Wilson, Nkosi Yearwood

3. Approval of the September 16, 2025, AAC minutes

Jane Evans introduced a motion to approve the minutes, Ellen Gordon seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

4. Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) and Building Lot Termination (BLT) Programs

The County Executive signed an executive order setting the base and maximum prices the County will pay for a BLT easement at \$380,800 and \$435,200, respectively, based on the Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board's recommendation. However, the amount that will be paid for a public TDR easement has not yet been established.

The next steps for the OAG to establish a public TDR purchasing program are: 1) an amendment to Chapter 2B (Agricultural Land Preservation) of the County Code and 2) an Executive Order from the County Executive to set the price the County will pay per TDR.

5. Proposed solar projects in the Agricultural Reserve

The Public Services Commission (PSC)'s deadlines to render decisions on the Chaberton Solar [Sugarloaf](#) project (4 MW array proposed for 16 acres on 20507 Darnestown Road, Dickerson) and Chaberton [Ramiere](#) project (3 MW array proposed for 11 acres on 17600



Whites Ferry Road, Poolesville) were August 15 and December 31, 2025, respectively. However, the Chief Public Utility Law Judge asked the PSC to extend the deadline to make a decision on the Chaberton Sugarloaf project to February 17, 2026. Chaberton responded requesting that the deadline be set to October 15, 2025 to allow the company to take advantage of the federal tax credits that will expire for projects that begin construction after July 4, 2026.

6. [SB0931/HB1036](#), Public Utilities – Generating Stations – Generation and Siting  
*No update since September 2025*
7. [Bill 18-25, Forest Conservation – Trees](#)

On September 16, the County Council enacted this bill with the amendment removing the language that would have defined a “tree” as a woody plant starting at one inch diameter. This amendment was based on the unanimous recommendation of the Agricultural Advisory Committee, Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board, and Soil Conservation District.

On behalf of and with approval from the AAC, the OAG submitted a letter to the County Council recommending amendments to the County Code that would enable a true exemption from the Forest Conservation Law for clearing woody vegetation as part of agricultural land management.

8. [Zoning Text Amendment \(ZTA\) 25-10, Landscaping Requirements – Native Plants](#)

The County Council introduced this ZTA on June 17. Many zones in the county require developers to include open space (rural, common, public, and/or amenity open space, depending on the zone and type of development). Rural open space carries the requirement of having 100% native plant species. This ZTA would require that common, public, and amenity open spaces have 50% native plant species and would define native species as those native to MD, VA, DE, NJ, NY, PA, NC, WV, and DC.

On July 22, the Council held the public hearing for this ZTA. Members of the sod production, nursery, and landscaping industries testified against it due to the negative impacts they would suffer, given that there are no native, sod-forming grasses and limited native plants suitable for landscaping and erosion control. On October 6, the Council’s Planning, Housing, and Parks Committee held a work session on this ZTA and took no action.

9. Office of Agriculture (OAG) Roadside Signage Project

During the State's 2025 fiscal year budget cycle, \$25,000 was provided to the MD Department of Agriculture (MDA), and in turn to the OAG, to fund roadside signs directing motorists to agritourism businesses.



In coordination with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), the OAG recently announced the FY26 Montgomery County Office of Agriculture Signage Project and began accepting applications. MCDOT will construct and install signs on County-maintained roads for agritourism businesses that meet the eligibility criteria. An "agritourism business" is defined as one that has a farm market, pick-your-own, and/or farm alcohol production. Interested businesses should email Natalia Salazar ([natalia.salazar@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:natalia.salazar@montgomerycountymd.gov)) for more information.

10. MDA value-added agriculture analysis and AAC discussion on farm alcohol production and agritourism

MDA released its statewide guidance and analysis document on agritourism and value-added agriculture. Martin Proulx, the author, will be presenting on this document before the County Council's upcoming work session on agritourism, which has been scheduled for November 12, from 1:30 to 4:30 P.M. Mike Scheffel summarized the main points of the analysis document, asked the AAC members for their informal opinions, and answered their questions.

The MD Agricultural Commission is asking the agricultural community for assistance in creating a definition of agriculture for MDA. They have proposed a definition, which Mike Scheffel emailed to the committee members for their input.

Fred Lechliden introduced a motion to resubmit the AAC's 2023 letter to the County Council recommending changes to the "Farm Alcohol Production" use zoning standards ([Subsection 3.2.10.B](#)), Ellen Gordon seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

11. Junior Achievement Program of Greater Washington

This program teaches 7<sup>th</sup> graders in the county about financial literacy, work readiness, and entrepreneurship. Located in Finance Park at Thomas Edison High School, the program includes a simulated shopping center where the students learn to "shop" for food and other necessities within their budgets.

The OAG entered into an agreement with Junior Achievement to fund the buildout and maintenance of an agricultural "store front", which is now open. It teaches students about the Agricultural Reserve, agricultural products, and careers in agriculture. The County will hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony for this project in the near future.

12. The next meeting of the AAC will be held on November 18, 2025, at 7:00 pm via Microsoft Teams.



13. Upcoming meetings and events:

Montgomery County Farm Bureau Annual Banquet: November 4, 2025

Farm-to-Table Symposium, BlackRock Center for the Arts: November 10, 2025

Veteran's Day (office closed): November 11, 2025

Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board meeting: November 14, 2025

14. Adjourn

Debbie Tropp introduced a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ellen Gordon seconded the motion, and the motion carried, adjourning the meeting at 8:00 pm.