

Montgomery County Farm Bureau, Inc.

September 7, 2012
Francoise Carrier, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland
20910

Dear Madam Chair:

RE: Consolidated Draft Zoning Rewrite Process

On behalf of the Montgomery County Farm Bureau-MCFB Board of Directors please accept this letter as our comments concerning the July 16, 2012 Consolidated Draft for the Zoning Rewrite Process.

The MCFB has been following the progress of the Zoning Rewrite Process that the MNCPPC has been leading for the past few years and we have a great appreciation for how complex this process is and the time MNCPPC has spent on it. The MCFB has been following the discussions between your staff and the Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee-AAC on the process and we are encouraged the MNCPPC supported the AAC recommendation to change the Rural Density Transfer-RDT Zone to the Agricultural Reserve-AR Zone. This AR zone will help to establish the important linkage between defined terms in the 1980 Functional Master Plan for the Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space and those within the County Zoning Code where the term-Agricultural Reserve will finally be applied to both.

At this time, there are some issues that concern the MCFB that we need to go on record to address and oppose. The MCFB does not support the proposed classifications of farming operations which consist of Crop Farming, Livestock Farming, and Urban Farming. We question how the proposed terms simplify what is currently contained in the Zoning Code surrounding the use of the word farm that relates to the legal definition of agriculture. We believe the Consolidated Draft actually creates a more confusing environment surrounding the different types of farming operations that are not allowed in some residential zones. We support instead continuing to use the words farming and agriculture as already defined in the existing code which uses the legal definition of agriculture. We understand how the Urban Farming will not apply to the proposed AR zone; however we question the application of the Urban farming in the residential zones. Currently agricultural uses are permitted by right in all residential zones. We do not support the proposed Urban Farming that is only applied to some residential zones. We are aware of properties located in the RE-2, RE-2C, RE-1 that are currently being farmed and agriculturally assessed, however under the Consolidated Draft dated July 16, 2012 these farming activities will not be permitted. We cannot accept or support any proposal that would jeopardize the farming activities of these properties.

The MCFB believes it is important to bring to your attention the importance of our 4-H Youth and Development Clubs in Montgomery County. Montgomery County has the highest number of 4-H clubs in the State of Maryland and we are extremely proud of this achievement in light of having the highest population in the State. The 4-H Livestock clubs and children are instrumental in fulfilling the mission of the Annual Montgomery County Agricultural Fair where these clubs compete in the showing of the animals they have raised and benefit from the sales at livestock sales and auctions conducted during the County Fair. Most of the children enrolled in these 4-H Livestock Clubs live with their families in residential zones in the County where agricultural uses are permitted by right. The current language and uses in the Zoning code provides the means for 4-H families living in residential zones to use their properties for the purpose of raising animals for competition and shows at the County Fair and the Consolidated Draft will no longer allow these agricultural uses in some residential zones. The MCFB cannot accept or support any proposal that would negatively impact the 4-H families in Montgomery County.

The MCFB is closely monitoring the recommendations of the Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee-AAC because we understand the focus of the AAC is more broad than the concerns mentioned above in this letter. The MCFB will continue to review the Consolidated Draft and participate in the public process on this Zoning Rewrite Process.

Thank you for taking the time to understand the concerns of the Montgomery County Farm Bureau.

Sincerely,

Lonnie Luther, President