

Dear Council President Riemer, County Council members and County Council Staff:

We request that you defer action on ZTA 18-03—legislation which would modify rules for alcohol production and related events in the Agricultural Reserve—to allow time for a more thorough vetting process. You may recall that in District 1, which includes the Agriculture Reserve, one of the chief discussion points among council candidates was the preservation of the Agriculture Reserve. This does not mean that it cannot have a more robust role in the County's economics, but the safeguards for what is a natural fit should be more fully vetted.

There are many exciting economic and social opportunities to pursue in the Agricultural Reserve, but none should compromise the character and core objectives of the Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space Master Plan. As much care should be taken in modifying the program as went into drafting it to begin with.

Our concerns are the same as those put forward by the Montgomery Countryside Alliance:

- Production of Wine, Cider and Beer can be value added farm products as is the case with a number of current successful operations where the alcohol is an *accessory* to on site farming. The proposed ZTA should stipulate that at least 70% locally sourced ingredients from within the Agricultural Reserve, instead of allowing them to be acquired anywhere at all if "economically competitive."
- As introduced, the ZTA has few provisions for limiting number and size of events such as weddings and festivals. Each facility may have unlimited rental wedding type events for over 200 guests and nine major events annually with no attendance limit. This has the potential to disrupt the area environmental and residential perspective.
- These two provisions pave the way for an unplanned type of use in the Ag Reserve, an alcohol production facility largely outsourcing ingredients and hold non-agriculturally related commercial large scale events. The result: clogged and unsafe rural roads, conflict with use and enjoyment of other rural businesses and communities, and ever higher rural land cost, effectively barring food and fiber producers from establishing business on the very acreage designed for that use. Furthermore, there should be clarification on who bears the cost of resulting infrastructure improvements that may be necessary.
- Bottom Line: Any new use allowed in the Ag Reserve and rural zones should be tethered directly to on site agriculture, and properly scaled to maintain balance, safety and environmental health.

We support the long term goals of bringing thoughtful economic development that aligns well with the nature of the Agricultural Reserve, but not without a comprehensive and transparent vetting process of the ancillary effects in the local community, and the financial impacts on Montgomery County at large. The rush to do this before newly elected officials have a chance to provide input and shape the plan, especially a newly elected District 1 Council member, concerns us; likewise the lack of an opportunity for many stakeholders to testify. Erosion of the Ag Reserve is a very real threat. A little caution now could prevent onerous and expensive remediation down the road.

Respectfully submitted by District 1 Neighbors