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ZTA 20-01

Public Hearing before the Montgomery County Council – 3/3/20 Testimony presented by Caroline Taylor for Montgomery Countryside Alliance

We reject the assertion that the Reserve is not doing its part toward climate change adaptation and mitigation. The stated premise that our protected farmland and open space must give way right now to an industrial use because of urgency and in the absence of a comprehensive plan is deeply flawed. The record holds strong evidence from stakeholders, including members of the County's Climate Change Working Group, that provide basis for our assertion. I am not here to argue against the advancement of renewable energy. I am here to fend for the Reserve, in this its 40th year, and the integral role it will play in the resilience of our region. We are keen on working collaboratively and bravely as we meet this our greatest challenge.

As we debate this issue, here are some facts to keep in mind:

- The US is losing 3 acres of productive farmland every minute of every day.
- Maryland has been losing 100 acres of farmland to salt marsh conversion annually.
- The greatest barrier for farmers, both new and expanding, is access to affordable farm acreage.
- Those farm acres that have historically fed our country, the mid-west, south and west will continue to be hit hard by the effects of climate change, shifting the burden of production to other regions including ours.
- To meet the needs of the projected US population growth farmers will need to produce 35% more food in the decades to come.

A number of those who have submitted comments have detailed the specific deficiencies of the ZTA including that it: does not properly address loss of prime farm soils, forest/habitat loss, conflict with preservation easements, water resource protection, lack of compliance with the master plan. The ZTA and the previous provision for utility scale solar elsewhere in the county, despite promotional material, does not expressly advance Community Solar projects. This matters greatly as Community Solar is geared to achieving carbon neutral goals here (not sold elsewhere to the grid) and advancing access to affordable energy. Moreover, there has been no analysis as to how the provision for utility grade solar facilities in the Reserve will affect our rural/agricultural economy. Providing no strong rationale for the protection of the Reserve from fragmentation from industrial uses, the ZTA throws the doors open for the PSC to view even larger facilities as acceptable within the Reserve.

The ZTA, at minimum, preempts the work of the County's climate planning process that officially commenced in July 2019 and whose findings have now been released. It preempts the creation of a collaboratively established framework within which policies will be crafted and deployed. (over)

Smart policies should wisely heed the guidance of the United Nation's Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change's report, released last year, by providing the overarching plan guided by food/fiber security purpose, basing its provisions and implementation on a science based framework that uplifts rural America – both its economic and ecological resilience into the future.

Montgomery Countryside Alliance and partners, including Sugarloaf Citizens' Association, are doing our part with programs such as Re Leaf, Land Link, educational outreach and resources for new and expanding producers seeking to engage in regenerative and sustainable farming and landscape practices. Our producers and knowledgeable stakeholders have much to offer in understanding how we best advantage the Reserve. Please listen. Collaborate.

The daunting task before us is a marathon and not a sprint. And for our region we have heightened hope in the form of a plan, a national model, that preserves a vital landscape for food and fiber production and the protection of the natural world which sustains us.

Thank you.