

Montgomery Countryside Alliance 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Roger Berliner

City: Bethesda

Office Sought: Montgomery County Council, District 1

More Info:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/berliner/index.html

If you were asked to describe the County's Agricultural Reserve to someone, what would you say?

The County's Agricultural Reserve is one of the crowning achievements of our County, an extraordinary legacy created by forward looking people who recognized the inherent value of farm land and farm life, of natural resources, and of the need to contain sprawl and promote smarter growth.

It was, in a sense, the logical outgrowth of the county's principal planning paradigm -- wedges and corridors -- that points development towards our best transportation networks. And it has become a place where an increasingly urbanized community can experience fundamental aspects of life --the land, crops, animals, and the ethic and community life surrounding agriculture.

What makes it work is the trade-off at the heart of the zoning regime. Landowners are limited to one home for every 25 acres. To compensate for this zone, the county employs TDRs, a critical market mechanism that must work fairly.

What is your vision for the future of the County's Agricultural Reserve?

I see a future in which our farmers and our natural resources thrive, and where those of us who live in the downcounty have much more interaction with the Agricultural Reserve.

As one who has the privilege of representing both the downcounty and the Agricultural Reserve, I don't think that our downcounty residents have enough appreciation of the value of the Agricultural Reserve. It exists, for many, in the abstract. That needs to change. Particularly for our young people. I envision a future in which our schools make it a part of their curriculum to allow our children to appreciate first-hand where our food comes from and how it is grown; to see how animals are raised and cared for; to gain an appreciation for the value of open spaces and the fabric of community life that is organically linked to the land. And I see a future in which t

What more should the County be providing in terms of legislation and/or services to realize that vision?

Our County can do more to realize that vision broadly. In this space, I want to focus on ways we can ensure that our farmers thrive and our land is protected. I am proud of my work in that regard. Here are just three examples: (1) Our farmers are good environmental stewards, and yet they have had precious little help from our government in meeting exacting storm water and other environmental imperatives. In this budget, I championed finding the resources our farmers have been asking for, including but not limited to technical assistance; (2) Our community appreciates farm markets, and farmers appreciate the marketing opportunity. I sponsored a change to our rules that make it easier for markets to locate throughout the county; and (3) Composting is a good thing. A very good thing. Yet, without a central composting facility, our county hasn't fully embraced it. I sponsored a change to our rules that will now allow appropriate composting in our a

What challenges exist to ensuring that your vision for the Reserve is realized?

There are several challenges to the vision I have of the future of the Reserve:(1) An essential component of our arrangement with our farmers is to ensure a strong and efficient market for TDRs, and fair compensation under our BLTs. For the TDR program to work, there needs to be enough "receiving areas", places where development rights will be realized. Clarksburg was one of the places the farming community looked to in that regard, and when our Council wisely (in my opinion) limited development there, we eliminated it as a receiving area. We need to take steps to make sure that there are adequate receiving areas so that our farmers receive fair value for their property. (2)The school system represents a challenge to that vision. It has its hands full trying to close the achievement gap and has not embraced my vision. See my response to the next question; and (3) land prices.

What role do the County's schools play in the support of our local food system and success of local agriculture?

I think our school system can play, if it chooses, a very important role in supporting local agriculture and healthier eating. Indeed, I would still prefer for our school system to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the organic farm on Brickyard and make it a model for the nation, a view that has not been well received. Nor, given the manner in which food is made and delivered in our school system, has MCPS found an effective way to partner with our farmers in the growing food to table movement. I get that given the demands on their budgets, and the pressing need to close the achievement gap, these issues present real challenges. That notwithstanding, I still believe more progress can be made.

Our County Council has no authority over the school system when it comes to almost any issue. Your elected school board is the instrument you have available to achieve these results. I have conveyed my views on these issues and I would urge you to do the same.

The County has undertaken a comprehensive zoning code re-write. What are your thoughts about the County's zoning code enforcement? Does that division have adequate resources and is it properly functioning?

We hear from lots of residents that they do not believe that our zoning codes are enforced adequately. I believe we need to have a thorough review of precisely this question, and we haven't to my satisfaction. I don't know if it is a function of resources or something else. But we do hear this a lot. I will ask the Chair of the PHED Committee that has jurisdiction over this issue to consider holding an oversight hearing on just this topic.

Do you support an additional Potomac bridge and highway in the Reserve or adjacent rural zones?

I don't need 1,000 characters to answer this question. NO. No way. No how. End of story.

