

Conservation Montgomery

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To: **President Hans Reimer and the Montgomery County Council (PHED Committee and full Council)**

Re: **ZTA 18-03 - Alcohol/event facilities**

Earlier this year CM joined concerned civic and environmental groups in requesting amendments to ZTA 18-03 which seeks to use land set aside for farming. To date the Council has chosen not to work with us. This is a hasty and poorly thought out proposal to replace farming with an industrial use contrary to protecting the Agricultural Reserve. In addition to violating Reserve Master Plan provisions, the proposed ZTA provides no environmental safeguards. Where are the needed protections for soil, streams, forest and wetlands? How will sewer and water be provided? What about SW management and setbacks from legitimate farm uses? In promoting this ZTA, the Council would be treating the land we've reserved for farming as a commodity suitable for a commercial enterprise that violates the very reason we preserved so much of Montgomery County for farming.

Wineries and cideries should be promoted in the Reserve. They constitute farming and utilize products grown on the land. The facilities being proposed under this ZTA have no connection to the land beneath them. This ZTA will do away with the existing provision for wineries and allow for various alcohol processing facilities and commercial event venues on a large scale. They would be allowed on agriculturally tax assessed lots as small as 5 acres. The sole requirement for this tax status is the sale of \$2500 of farm product(s) annually. There are no sensible constraints on what is permitted. Noise, traffic and impacts to narrow rustic roads have not been considered. How can farming be nurtured by not using the land for what it was intended?

It should be noted that the bucolic roadways in the Ag. Reserve are a weekend recreational destination for cyclists. Large scale alcohol distribution facilities with tasting rooms and crowded events are not in keeping with the number of residents out cycling. Shouldn't we also consider the safety factors involved?

We have added our voice to Montgomery Countryside Alliance, Sugarloaf Citizens' Association, Audubon Naturalist Society, West Montgomery Citizens Association and the League of Women Voters and again request discussion of the amendments put forward in previous correspondence for a limited/permitted use. Any larger scale facility than those identified should seek a conditional use approval through the appropriate channels:

Amendments requested to date:

**Require that the facilities be accessory to farming by having either a percentage or acreage requirement of alcohol ingredients grown on the farm*

**Limit tasting room size to maximum at one time occupancy of 85 - does not limit daily turnover and does not count those who are using outside patio space*

**Limit rental events to maximum of 150 attendees (the average size of weddings etc. per the industry) and provide for a reasonable cap on the number of these events annually*

**Provide for lighting and noise (amplified sound) standards/limits - this has been agreed to by bill sponsor*

**Minimum acreage 25 acres (lessor size parcels may seek conditional use approval) with appropriate setbacks to neighboring farms/homes*

**Provide for wetland, forest buffers and avoid frequent parking on prime farm soils*

**Facilities with tasting rooms with occupancy over 50 should have prime or better quality road access (Council staff attorney made this good recommendation.)*

While we support the intention to of the ZTA to improve our agricultural economy, CM cannot endorse a ZTA without amendments considered in an open, transparent public forum. We look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,

Ginny Barnes, Vice-Chair **Conservation Montgomery** www.conservationmontgomery.org