

Montgomery Countryside Alliance 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Craig Rice

City: Germantown

Office Sought: County Council, District 2

More Info: www.craigrice.org

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

The Agricultural reserve is a gem that must be protected. In order to protect it from the pressures of development, we need to ensure our agricultural reserve and all it has to offer, lives up to its full potential. This means implementing many of the recommendations listed in the Farming At Metro's Edge or F.A.M.E report including but not limited to the creation of a farming business navigator position and a pilot farming magnet program within MCPS. The ultimate goal being to secure the future sustainability and profit of farming as well as the availability of fresh foods for our region. We should never see the ag reserve developed.

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

See answer above

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

I think the current laws are adequate in protecting the ag reserve. But I am always open to more stringent requirements that ensure that we don't let fringe businesses like haunted forests and soccer tournaments cloud the true purpose of our ag reserve.

Our farming pilot program has been a success and we need to expand it so that we can increase the number of new farmers that can work the land in our ag reserve.

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

If we do not support the industry of farming, we lose its stronghold on the ag reserve and development pressure will creep in. That is why I proposed to add a farming business navigator in our budget to help farmers more easily navigate through the myriad of new requirements and regulations and also assist in their growth and survival.

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

Our schools need to feature healthy foods and educate our children about sustainable agriculture. We also need to be sure we are "growing our future crop" of farmers.

This means creating a farming magnet or pilot program but also incorporating farming and agriculture into our curriculum. In our current budget we just funded an additional 3 gardens to go to schools in food desert areas around the county and we recently held an HHS/ED worksession to discuss ways in which we can make our food healthier (with fresh fruit and vegetables from our ag reserve) in our school cafeterias.

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?

In our current budget cycle, we have asked if resources under this FY 15 budget are adequate to provide the oversight necessary. The response we received from Department heads (DHCA and DPS) was yes. My office continues to make requests and reports to both offices and have seen dramatic improvements recently. I expect that to continue but if problems arise, I commit to adding the additional resources necessary to ensure we are adequately and timely enforcing our laws.

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

No. Under no circumstances do I support either.