

Jeff and members of T & E Committee,

I watched the July 6 briefing of the T & E committee given by the County's Climate Change Task Force and DEP staff. [Report with recommendations here:](#)

[T & E Briefing:](#)

There was specific reference made by committee members during the briefing to the proposed change to zoning, ZTA 20-01. During the question and answer period (approx at 1:30) the presenter, David Blockstein, for the Clean Energy Work Group was asked why the group did not address a State mandate for MD counties to site tens of thousands of acres of commercial scale solar facilities on farmland throughout MD. The answer from Mr. Blockstein was direct - they were relying on science in developing their recommendations.

Notwithstanding this answer, the committee member's assertion that the State is requiring farmland be converted to industrial solar and that Montgomery County would be required to change AR zoning caused me to do a little research.

As most know, there is a State mandate for counties to achieve a 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030. However, I have not found any citation to a requirement to achieve those reductions through development of farmland or greenfields specifically. [To the contrary, it seems clear that the State directs counties to incentivize siting these facilities on most desirable locations vs non-desirable location such as prime farmland wetlands and forests -](#)

Reads in part:

The Governor's Task Force on Renewable Energy Development and Siting was created by the Governor in August 2019 (Executive Order 01.01.2019.09).

To encourage the responsible siting of clean and renewable energy projects in Maryland, the Task Force will study and make consensus-based recommendations to accelerate the siting of clean and renewable energy projects in commercial, developed, industrial and public settings, including but not limited to brownfields, closed mines, landfills, parking lots, rights-of-ways, and rooftops; and minimize the impact of such projects on agriculturally or ecologically important, sensitive or valuable areas by considering design, mapping, operation, size, technology, and other parameters. Moreover, Task Force recommendations are to avoid locations that harm, inhibit, or otherwise adversely impact agricultural, conservation or preservation areas or easements; fertile, prime or productive farms and fields; forest and park lands; sensitive ecological areas, shorelines, wetlands, or waterways; or State cultural heritage, economy, environment, natural resources, or "view-sheds".

[Governors Task Force on Renewable Energy Development and Siting - Interim report December 2019](#)

(see page 17)

Further, I did read with interest a correction to the 20-01 staff report that was sent in today to the record by Clean Energy Working Group Chair David Blockstein. It reads in part:

*I am concerned that it mis-represents the position of the Montgomery County Clean Energy Working Group, of which I am a member. The working group is not in favor of commercial solar development in the agricultural reserve.*

The statement on page 7 – “The strategies most relevant to ZTA 20-01 drafted by the Clean Energy

Workgroup supported some use of the Agricultural Reserve for solar facilities.5” is a gross overrepresentation and misinterpretation.

You may not have seen our introductory statement, which is very clear:

“However, it would be counterproductive for the County to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by turning forests, farmlands and wetlands into industrial facilities for energy capture. These vegetated lands and the soil beneath are important in capturing carbon from the atmosphere, reducing the urban heat island and providing clean water, clean air, biodiversity and other ecosystem services. Preservation and protection of the environment should be an essential component of the County’s shift to net zero.”

Our group proposed a strategy that began with research and ranking of potential sites.

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The proposed ZTA represents a significant change in policy with regard to land use in the Agricultural Reserve and presents conflict with long-standing environmental and economic goals. Confronting climate change is an urgent matter that demands a comprehensive, collaborative, fact and science-based approach.

On behalf of our board and members, I renew our request that this ZTA be denied. We look forward to timely advancing the various task force initiatives.

Respectfully,

C

Caroline Taylor, Executive Director

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