

Montgomery Countryside Alliance 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Phil Andrews

City: Gaithersburg

Office Sought: County Executive

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

Our County's Agricultural Reserve is a historic achievement and, given development pressures in the region and the influence of developers in County elections and policy, a most remarkable one. The Reserve is the foundation for sustaining and growing agriculture as an indispensable part of a diverse local economy through zoning that establishes it as the primary land use.

As a member of the County Council, I consider protecting the Ag Reserve one of my most important duties. That is why I have strongly supported all measures to protect the Reserve during my 16 years on the County Council, including playing a very active role in working with community leaders to protect the Ten Mile Creek Watershed from overdevelopment. As County Executive, I will do everything in my power to see that we make substantial progress in protecting farmland in perpetuity for future generations.

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

The future of the Reserve is as a home for a growing number of successful agricultural, horticultural and equestrian operations, alongside existing farms and very low density housing, contributing substantially to the overall health of the County's economy and environment. The Reserve is also a place of recreation for bicyclists and hikers, and a refuge from the hurly-burly of life.

I am very interested in supporting efforts to better market and get to market products from the Ag Reserve. As County Executive, I will work closely with all stakeholders to develop viable ways to help farmers sell their products and get a fair price for them.

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

It is important to instill greater awareness throughout County Government about how government decisions impact farming, including the administration of the zoning ordinance, the processing of permits, and the maintenance of the County's right-of-way near farms. Adequate resources for agricultural specific services, such as the County's DED's Ag Services Division, and the Soil Conservation District, is also important. As County Executive, I will propose

sufficient funding and staff to assist in providing technical assistance to farmers – and if necessary emergency aid in droughts -- to keep farming viable in our County.

With regard to legislation, it must be clear, specific and adequate regarding what uses are allowed and what are not in the Ag Reserve. I have strongly supported legislation, such as the Public Institutional Facilities (PIFs) legislation in 2005 that protects the Ag Reserve.

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

The most significant challenge is educating the general public as to how the Reserve's success as the home of a viable agricultural industry benefits the entire County. Without this appreciation, residents outside the Reserve are more likely to press for more development there to avoid increased density elsewhere.

Another major challenge is to stop continued efforts to build inappropriate structures or bring inappropriate uses into the Reserve. As County Executive, I will work closely with other County Government leaders, state officials, and community leaders to prevent encroachment into the Reserve.

A third challenge is permanently protecting farmland in the Reserve, whether through Transferable Development Rights or other mechanisms. As County Executive, I will champion renewed efforts to permanently protect farmland from development.

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

MCPS has a critical role to play in helping its students (and through them, their parents) appreciate the economic, environmental and public health benefits of local agriculture, along with the challenges farmers contend with in growing and maintaining a successful business given the wide variety of challenges farmers must contend with. MCPS should explore ways to incorporate agriculture-related lessons throughout its curriculum, and should take maximum advantage of the ability to buy fresh locally produced food from farms in the Reserve. As County Executive, I will help champion this.

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?

The Department of Permitting Services has recently reorganized, creating a new division dedicated to zoning (and site plan) enforcement (which was once part of another division). They are still in the process of filling vacancies in their existing complement. Evaluating a staff increase is appropriate after there is sufficient time to evaluate how the

new division (fully staffed) performs. As County Executive, I will propose sufficient funding and staff to adequately enforce the zoning code.

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

Absolutely not. I have been an outspoken opponent of a second crossing in Montgomery County throughout my 16 years on the County Council. As County Executive, I will continue to do so.