

Montgomery Countryside Alliance 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Sidney Katz

City: Gaithersburg

Office Sought: Montgomery County Council, District 3

More Info: www.sidneykatz.com

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

The Agricultural Reserve is this County's last, best hope to preserve the rural legacy and agricultural heritage that formed the basis of this County's character from its inception. The Ag Preservation efforts of the County are a source of pride for me and many I know. It is unprecedented in my experience that a County, so close to an urban center, set aside nearly 1/3 of its total land mass to support and protect their agricultural and open space resources.

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

As I have watched the agricultural underpinning of Gaithersburg, where I was born and raised, erode over time and yield to a more urban environment, I knew that we must, as a County, be diligent in our preservation efforts in the Ag Reserve. Gaithersburg High School serviced the agricultural community where I grew up and I have remained friends with many of the legacy farm families. I realize that we need to listen to them and to counsel with them in order to understand, going forward, how to protect their land and their farm operations.

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

As more and more pressure is placed on the Ag Reserve as a landing place for otherwise unwanted uses throughout the County, the Council must be diligent in protecting the use limitations in the zoning code and realize that even small, seemingly insignificant changes to the zoning code can render unrecognizable consequences with major impacts on agricultural and open space resources. We must provide our ag producers and land owners in the Ag Reserve with the services and support necessary to continue their operations, preserve their land and adjust to changing economic conditions effecting their farm operations.

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

As mentioned earlier, the continued pressure to expand permitted uses and develop the Ag Reserve is based on the lack of available open land within the County. As pressure builds among down county voters to seek limitations on development in their areas to stop overcrowding, politicians will be pressured to provide other opportunities in the only place available, the Ag

Reserve. We must resist the easy answers and seek a way to absorb our population growth and still provide our citizens the ag resources and open space necessary for a quality of life.

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

The most obvious role that schools play in support of the ag Reserve is the education of our youth as to the source and process of the creation of our food. A program like First Encounters is a perfect example of how to expose children to the importance of food production and the benefits of local produce and other farm products. Additionally, the school's buying power could be directed towards local producers to provide fresh, locally grown food to our school's 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?

As we all know, for the most part zoning code enforcement is the result of complaints from local citizens. Out in the Ag Reserve, because of the size of most parcels of land, it's often difficult to view or discover illegal acts. Both Park and Planning and the Department of Permitting Services do the best they can to discover zoning violations. Technological advances such as satellite imagine have been helpful but in the future additional inspectors who are both diligent and reasonable are needed to keep zoning violators and detrimental uses out of the Ag Reserve.

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

No.