

Montgomery Countryside Alliance 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Hans Riemer

City: Takoma Park

Office Sought: Council At-Large

More Info: Hansriemer.com

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

The Agricultural Reserve is a priceless treasure. Its creation was probably the best planning decision ever made in Montgomery County. The notion that a county bordering the District of Columbia facing intense development pressure could set aside 40% of its land for farming and preservation is revolutionary. That decision prevented the kind of sprawl development in Upcounty that we see in Northern Virginia's exurbs while simultaneously channeling new housing and jobs towards urban areas and transit stations, where it belongs.

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

The Agricultural Reserve must be preserved for future generations. That means limiting non-agricultural development within its borders as well as encouraging sustainable and economically viable agricultural activities, including educational activities that open new opportunities for our county residents to participate in what our farm-land has to offer.

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

The key to preserving the Ag Reserve is to make sure that farming activities are economically viable. That means encouraging farmers markets and CSAs (I have organized a CSA for One Acre Farm at the Council Office Building), encouraging new agricultural activities (like wineries), helping to provide a market for locally grown food (like in MCPS) and investing in agricultural services such as those provided by our county's Department of Economic Development. It also means protecting our watersheds and limiting non-agricultural development, as I successfully pushed to do in the Ten Mile Creek plan amendment. Finally, we must adequately fund Legacy Open Space, the county's program for protecting open space, watershed lands, and historic properties through the purchase of land or easements.

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

Our principal challenge is to elect people who understand the importance of the Reserve and are devoted to protecting it. I demonstrated that by working with Council Members Roger Berliner and Marc Elrich on a plan to protect Ten Mile Creek, which successfully passed the council. If we have a critical mass of Council Members who prioritize the Reserve, we can work

out the economic, budgetary and land use challenges to ensure that the Reserve remains in place for future generations.

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

They could play a much bigger role than they do now. Currently, MCPS requests that vendors purchase locally-grown food, when available, serves Maryland produce during Homegrown School Lunch week and has gardens in some schools. MCPS should consider adopting the approach used by D.C. Public Schools, which purchases 20% of its produce from farms in the Mid-Atlantic Region. This would create a market that might enable more farmers to switch from commodity products that support meat production to vegetables for the family table.

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 (DPS), which enforces our building and zoning codes, has more than 200 full-time equivalent employees, has taken in more than \$40 million in fee revenues in each of the last two fiscal years and is projected to finish the current fiscal year with a \$28 million fund balance. They are adequately funded. I do have concerns about duplication and coordination issues between DPS and M-NCPPC and I would like to see them do a better job of working together.

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

No. A new highway and bridge would be unaffordable and environmentally destructive. We should explore running transit (perhaps BRT) across the American Legion Bridge before considering a new highway.