

Montgomery Countryside Alliance 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Ryan Spiegel

City: Gaithersburg

Office Sought: Montgomery County Council, District 3

More Info: www.RyanSpiegel.com

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

The Agricultural Reserve is an absolute treasure that protects rural landscape, resources, and ways of life in perpetuity -- for all the people of our county and region to enjoy. It is an unparalleled educational, recreational, environmental, and agricultural resource. I bring my children to the Reserve regularly to enjoy its many gifts.

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

My vision is that the Agricultural Reserve will remain strong and viable for the foreseeable future and beyond, and that it will continue to be a great resource to current and future generations, existing in harmony with the surrounding areas as much as possible. I am a strong supporter of protecting and preserving the Reserve in perpetuity.

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

We should be making sure that those seeking to build in the Agricultural Reserve cannot take advantage of loopholes that would allow them to engage in development that threatens the fundamental character of the Reserve. We also need to be engaging in economic development programs that support our farms, our agritourism, and other types of businesses that ensure the financial viability of the Reserve.

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

Pressures from a growing population in our region, development, transportation, and the difficulty of maintaining a viable agricultural industry in light of small margins and larger competitors are all serious challenges.

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

Building connections between locally grown foods and the foods served in our schools is a win-win. It allows us to encourage healthier eating among students and help fight obesity, while also supporting more environmentally friendly production through a CSA-style approach,

and it allows us to take advantage of economies of scale, since MCPS and other entities must purchase large volumes of food. We can support our farmers, our kids, and our planet at the same time.

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 code enforcement function of the County does not have adequate resources, in my opinion. The inspectors do the best they can but our large and complex county cannot rely on a small staff and self-reporting from residents and businesses, particularly given the significant transformation that has happened and is continuing to happen in many parts of the county. I am a supporter of Smart Growth and I believe that, if properly implemented, it can contribute to the preservation of the Agricultural Reserve. I also believe that regulations, while necessary to protect our existing neighborhoods, schools, roads, and environment, should not be so overly burdensome to the point of preventing a healthy economy. But I also believe that we need to do better with code enforcement. There are simply too many recent examples where lax enforcement has led to major problems.

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

I would not support that at this time.