

**Montgomery County ZTA 20-01,
Solar Collection Systems – AR Zone Standards**

Comments on Solar Fields in the Reserve

The Functional Master Plan for the Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space in Montgomery County focuses upon the preservation of farmland, “but it also tries to establish a framework that will contribute to the continuation of farming in the County.”

- The TDR (transfer of development rights) program has been effective in meeting this objective.
- The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County supports policies that ensure the viability of agriculture in the county.

Designating a portion of the Agricultural Reserve for non-agricultural use is counter to this purpose.

In its studies of agricultural policy in the County since 2002, the League has held a position in support of the restrictions on uses permitted in the Agricultural Reserve. One of the benefits described at the inception of the Agricultural Reserve was the preservation of regional food supplies. Furthermore, last month the Planning Department hosted a panel to discuss increasing urban gardens to provide adequate locally grown fresh produce. The regional benefit applies not only to foods produced in the County and utilized by County residents, but also to the relationship of Montgomery County’s agricultural production in supporting the farm activity of surrounding counties. In addition, the vegetation of the Agricultural Reserve produces a “clean air shed” to clean the atmosphere and serves as a mechanism to protect the quantity and quality of water resources.

- We must maintain the crops and trees in the Agricultural Reserve to ensure these benefits.

Recent news articles indicate that the Agricultural Reserve provides opportunity for the County’s multi-ethnic migrants of agricultural background to sustain a productive livelihood there, another benefit of agricultural land to the County’s well-being.

While solar energy can provide important benefits to the County, the Climate Action Workgroups that were established in summer 2019 and are due to report in early 2021 are considering numerous alternatives to installing fields of solar panels in the Agricultural Reserve.

- **These should be explored and fully evaluated before any decision that would place solar panels onto the land of the Reserve.**

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