



AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

April 11, 2023

Evan Glass, President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Council President Glass: Rustic Roads Master Plan Update

The Agricultural Advisory Committee has carefully followed and appreciates the significant amount of time that the planning staff and board have put into the new Rustic Roads Advisory Functional Master Plan. As an important source of food products and other economic benefits to Montgomery County, our farmers can be dramatically impacted by this Plan. Therefore, we think it is important that the new plan is precise and clear. Doing so ensures that its execution follows its intent. Accordingly, the Agricultural Advisory Committee recommends that, during its review of the draft, the Montgomery County Council update the Plan as follows.

Rustic Roads Advisory Committee membership

We support the increase in the number of committee members from seven to nine. We are also encouraged to see the addition of one member with an understanding of roadway engineering, as unburdened access to roads is crucial to moving farm products and customers safely and efficiently.

We recommend the following changes to facilitate a crystal-clear understanding of each appointment type and ensure equitable representation among the various constituencies. (Updated language is in italics with an explanation following in regular type.)

(Item 1) *Three members who earn no less than 50 percent of their income from direct involvement in the operation of commercial farms and who own or lease one or more of the following equipment: combine harvesters, no-till drill planters, self-propelled and other large sprayers, or turf and sod harvesters.*

By way of explanation, it's the larger farmers needing to move expensive farm equipment between locations that are most impacted by rustic roads so they should have a significant representation.



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(Item 5.) We recommend two changes.

First, change the first sentence to “*two at-large members who frequently use rustic roads*”

To simply state “other users of rustic roads” is much broader than the examples that are given thereafter. The Planning Board implied that the operative term here is regularity as they included such wording in their last sentence. This change better institutionalizes that intent by bringing that language to the first sentence.

Second, add an item number six

(6) which reads “*One member actively engaged in either table crop farming or agritourism*”.

Both table crop farming and agritourism businesses offer strong economic development opportunities and will draw more people into and expand awareness of both the importance of agriculture and the beauty of rustic roads in Montgomery County. Economic development is an important consideration in any comprehensive plan. Also, this also is a grouping which can serve the county’s goals of equity and inclusion as it has no income specifications. By removing these classifications from the at-large category into a separate line item, the committee will better reflect the growing diversification of economic development in the County and changing users of our more rural roadways.

AAC does not support the Planning Board’s recommendation to add 19 additional roads to the RR Master Plan Update. The process by which roads are currently added should be reviewed and revised as needed before any additional roads are designated as “rustic”. Otherwise, the value of being named a “rustic” road will be diluted by the addition of roads where the perceived rustic character of the road is only in the eyes of a few. The criteria in Chapter 49, Article 8, which are already too broad, are not being followed with selected roads proposed for inclusion. For example, designating a wide, higher volume State Road that is a snow emergency route with a speed limit of 40 miles per hour its entire length because of “long views” or “horse fields” does not rise to the extraordinary rural character that people would expect to find if they ventured out to enjoy our “rustic roads”. Furthermore, such broad selection criteria could apply to a substantial number of roads in the Agricultural Reserve creating an unwieldy list of roads (there are already 99 rustic roads) which could overwhelm those seeking to visit and enjoy the truly exceptional rustic roads that we have in Montgomery County.

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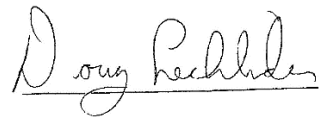
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The AAC believes Rustic Roads Program, unless carefully administered, can conflict with the legislative intent of the Agricultural Reserve-AR zone where agricultural operations are permitted at all times. The lack of maintenance on the rustic roads ultimately results in our farmers not being able to safely move their large farm equipment down the rustic roads to access their farm fields.

To help demonstrate the current environment of Rustic Roads, the AAC developed a PowerPoint presentation of pictures and farmer testimonials titled *The Rustic Roads Through the Eyes of the Farmer*. We hope the County Council will find the time necessary to show this presentation during one of the work sessions scheduled for the Rustic Roads Master Plan Update.

To ensure successful farming in Montgomery County, we must create an environment where the farmers' concerns are addressed, and the rural and rustic roads are safe for the movement of large farm equipment as well as the many users who come to enjoy their beauty. The changes that we are referring to above will serve to promote such an environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doug Lechliden". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Doug Lechliden, Chairman

Cc: Marc Elrich, County Executive