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July 16, 2024

Public Hearing Testimony for ZTA 24-02 Agricultural Reserve Zone – Campground  
From: Friends of Ten Mile Creek and Little Seneca Reservoir

Dear Council members,

We are a nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect water quality in Ten Mile Creek and other streams flowing to Little Seneca Lake Reservoir. Ten Mile Creek is recognized as among the very few best quality streams remaining in Montgomery County. The Little Seneca Reservoir serves as the D.C. regions critical back up water supply during drought emergencies.

The western half of the Ten Mile Creek watershed originates in, and flows through, the Agricultural Reserve (AR). This area includes three major tributaries. These streams can be harmed by land uses that create an increased demand for groundwater at the expense of stream flow volumes during times of drought. These tributaries can also be harmed by excessive nutrient pollution released into groundwater from septic systems.

Though ZTA 24-02 is an improvement compared to ZTA 23-09, both bills undermine the purpose for which the AR was created – to preserve agriculture. We believe groundwater in the AR should be for farmers to grow crops and to provide residents water for home use. Groundwater is also critically important for maintaining an adequate base flow in streams to support aquatic life.

Due to these concerns, we advise water to be protected as outlined below:

- 1) Prohibit the use of new or old septic systems to serve campgrounds.
- 2) Prohibit shower facilities in campgrounds.
- 3) Require the use of composting toilets and porta-potties.
- 4) Require limited access to water using outdoor faucets as has been traditionally provided for tent campgrounds throughout the region.

Abiding by these four requests will assure that water is available in campgrounds for drinking, cooking and light sanitation while having a minimal demand on groundwater supplies. Prohibiting the use of septic systems will avoid contributing nutrient pollution to groundwater, streams and to the Reservoir.

In our view, ZTA 24-02 does not provide enough protection for water resources. The current drought should be a reminder that groundwater is a precious resource that needs to be protected. Increased demands for groundwater to serve breweries, distilleries and vineyards plus increased demands for water to support non-agricultural uses of groundwater in the AR Zone can outstrip the capacity of the Piedmont Aquifer to meet the needs of farmers and residents and to maintain adequate base flow to streams. The increased use of groundwater for non-agricultural purposes such as the proposed campgrounds, data centers and densification of housing around MARC stations is worrisome. Clearly more study is needed to determine if the aquifer can meet the ever-increasing demands. We urge you to conduct a study to assess the limitations of the aquifer and to follow the four precautions listed above to ensure the demand for water is minimized and water resources are protected to the maximum extent possible if campgrounds are allowed.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Most Sincerely,  
Anne Cinque, President, Friends of Ten Mile Creek and Little Seneca Reservoir