

AUDREY ANNE CREIGHTON

July 15, 2024

Dear Councilmembers,

I am vehemently opposed to ZTA 24-02.

Over the past twenty-two years that I have owned my home in Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve, the Ag Reserve has been aggressively eroded by greedy developers who seek to further their economic gain and care nothing about preservation of farmland. The man behind ZTA 24-02 is another enemy of the Ag Reserve- a greedy businessman trying to make money under the guise of furthering farmers' interests. I urge the Montgomery County Council to vote against the Campground.

The proposed zoning change does not support the original intent of the Agricultural Reserve. I think it is sad that now that the original founders who created the Ag Reserve are dead, their hard work and careful stewardship is being disrespected by this proposal that has nothing to do with farming. The landowner behind the proposed amendment bought the farm from a real farmer. The real farmer bought it from Alan Belt who was also a real farmer. They were my neighbors across the street. These farmers rode tractors, farmed corn, wheat, soybean, hay, and the like. They grew real food. Raised livestock. It was beautiful to watch. That type of farming is what the founding fathers of the Ag Reserve sought to protect.

The new owner is a businessman. He doesn't even live in the Ag Reserve. He has built a distillery. He's not a farmer. He doesn't care about protecting farms and agriculture. He's just trying to make money. Although I understand that the distillery may fall within the definition of farming, it shouldn't. Also, I understand the concept of agri-business, but this is not the kind of business we want up county. On the site where the proposed campground will be, there will be no crops grown for the residents of Montgomery County to eat. Children will not and

should not go there on field trips to observe how booze is made. Rather, there will be the sale of alcohol for campers to get drunk on. Under the current law, a very small percentage of the land even has to be farmed in conjunction with the distillery.

Allowing ZTA 24-02 is short sighted. It proposes to enable distillery customers to drink to excess and pass out for days on end. Distillery patrons can drink vodka and bourbon whiskey all day and night, drink beyond what is responsible drinking and stagger to their camp sites. This only minimally benefits the distillery and does not benefit Montgomery County. This is not what the creators of the Agricultural Reserve had in mind when they designated farmland for protection. The level of drunkenness it encourages will bring an increase in noise, traffic, trash, and sewage issues. It will be dangerous-creating risk of fires from drunkards who have passed out and not properly extinguished their campfires. It will bring crime to the ag reserve because where there are drunks there is crime.

A campground might bring minimal revenue to the distillery owner/businessman, but the peace, serenity, and beauty of the reserve will be destroyed. There will be no buying of locally farmed food involved. No children learning about livestock. It is not the type of agri-business we want.

The Agricultural Reserve is the Gem of Montgomery County and has been an example to counties all over the State of Maryland that we have been proud of. It would be a terrible loss to allow this zoning change to erode the existing protections of our beautiful farmland. Vote against ZTA 24-02.

Sincerely,

Audrey A. Creighton, Esquire