

Good afternoon.

We, at Chicken of the Woods Permaculture Farm steadfastly oppose ZTA 24-02.

This ETA was introduced as an alternative to ZTA 23-09 with edits that would supposedly allow motels in the Ag Reserve. It would be nothing short of structural miracle for a motel to meet the following criteria, [Quote]“easily removable without permanent foundations and maximum square footage of 400 sqft” [End quote].

Secondly, ZTA 24-02 requires at least 25 acres for 2 or more campsites on farms in the AR, R, and RC zones.

If you Council fails to add a stipulation allowing one campsite on farms under 25 acres in the abovementioned zones, you will be impeding the county’s effort to support the state’s lead in ratifying Senate Bill 296 which amended the state’s definition of agritourism to allow Camping and Incidental Outdoor Stays on farms, all farms. Maryland offers ag status to any farm 3 acres or more as long as they meet the \$2,500 minimum income per year.

In addition, if MC zoning states that “the intent of the RC zone is to “promote agriculture” how can disqualifying farms of less than 25 acres in the RC zone be justified of which exist only two that produce table food.

One of them, our organic farm, the reclaimed derelict Higgin’s homestead in the heart of Darnestown sits on 4.75 acres. Last year, we contributed to 3% of Manna Food Bank’s locally purchased produce with 1 full time employee, 30 volunteers and students, 20 gallons of fuel and zero gallons of city water. This is the kind of model that will sustain our Food Security Plan, our 2023 Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger and our Climate Action Plan. In addition, statistics show non-commodity food producers have smaller acreage, lower income and rely more heavily on the supplemental income from agritourism. Our single campsite profits comprised 20% of our gross income.

ZTA 24-02 clearly discriminates against the struggling eco-conscious food farmer demographic. It instead seeks to ensure minimal disruption of the pastoral views on wealthy homeowners' sprawling properties.

My concern is, at what cost.

Back in 2022, Carroll County proposed a simple and elegant ZTA. quote "Camping and incidental stays - provided that they are limited to no more than one campsite" end quote. Should a farmer offer more than one campsite or place their own structure or other facilities, they must apply for a commercial campground permit and go through the appropriate permitting channels.

Councilmembers, Senate Bill 296 can and should be fairly integrated into MC's current definition of farming and agritourism. Its equitable introduction will include far-reaching positive economic impacts for all agritourism-worthy farmers, a greater diversity and richness of farm immersion opportunities for residents and yet another checkmark on our "Greenest County in the Nation" scorecard.

Thank you for your consideration.

Bridgette Downer

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