

July 16, 2024

Public Hearing Testimony for Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 24-02, Agricultural and Rural Zones –
Campground

To: Montgomery County Council Councilmembers

From: Roberta G Steinman

I would like to see the Agricultural Reserve preserved for the uses for which it was originally intended -- to preserve farms, productive soils, and a way of life and to protect farmland and rural space from residential and commercial development.

The Camel's nose under the tent

We are on a slippery slope when non-agricultural uses are permitted in the agricultural reserve (AR).

ZTA 24-02, in its current form, introduces a non-agricultural use and creates development pressures that would change the entire nature of the uses allowed in the Agricultural Reserve Zone. ZTA 24-02 would lead to **higher land values, more paved infrastructure, and depletion of the AR's ground water resources.**

Higher land values: When non-farming uses of the land make more money than leasing land to farmers for growing food and fiber, there is upward pressure on the price of farmland, and affordable farmland is increasingly out of reach for would-be farmers. If landowners can buy land in the AR for recreational vehicle campsites and 'removable structures,' future farmers will face greater costs to lease or rent farmland in the one part of the county expressly set aside for agriculture.

More paved infrastructure: Accommodating RVs is particularly problematic. RVs require pavement and additional infrastructure – roads and parking spaces, as well as water, sewage, and electrical systems. RVs are an eyesore. They are noisy and they disrupt the peace, serenity, character and scenic value of the AR.

AR's ground water resources: Campgrounds require water for sanitation and showers and potable water for drinking and cooking. Increased demand on the AR's groundwater for non-agricultural uses means less water available to meet the needs of farmers to grow crops and to provide residents water for home use. The AR groundwater is also critically important for maintaining an adequate base flow in streams to support aquatic life. Montgomery County just experienced one of the driest Junes on record over the past 130 years. This is a reminder that, as the climate crisis worsens and frequency and extent of periodic droughts increases, the conservation and protection of groundwater becomes even more critical.

Recommendations: Keep camping rustic.

- Allow tent camping only.
- Prohibit RVs.
- Do not permit the use of septic systems to serve campgrounds. This will avoid campground point source pollution of groundwater, which will also protect streams and the Reservoir.
- Require composting toilets and/or porta-potties for sanitation facilities.
- Prohibit shower facilities in campgrounds.
- Provide access to water using outdoor faucets, as is customary for tent campgrounds in our region. This will limit excessive use of water.

ZTA 24-02 is an improvement over the earlier version (ZTA 23-09) but should not be passed in its current form. However, including the above recommendations would provide campground accessibility while preserving and protecting the agricultural reserve.

Thank you for taking my testimony into consideration.

Most Sincerely, rg Steinman