



June 27, 2024

Letter to the Montgomery County Council

Re: ZTA 24-02, Agricultural and Rural Zones – Campground

Dear Council Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on ZTA 24-02. The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC) has studied the Agricultural Reserve since its establishment, and we continue to follow its sustainability efforts and commercial activity. The preservation of productive farmland is a central design consideration for any development in the Reserve. Prime agricultural soil in the Reserve should be set aside for agricultural use.

Similar to its predecessor, ZTA 23-09, this bill would open up the Agricultural Reserve to overnight visitor stays not related to agricultural activities. Our position [then and now](#) is that such activities within the Reserve need to be carefully regulated. One reason **we were opposed to the previous ZTA's proposed zoning change for overnight facility development was that it was likely to increase the pressure for other non-agricultural uses in the reserve.**

Unfortunately, this new bill does not quell those concerns and so we must also oppose ZTA 24-02 as written. Even if minimal camping were to occur, the bill would allow removable structures to be installed, which could then be left up for months at a time. This would be a distraction from agriculture. The bill also does not account for the potentially negative impact on water and sewer systems in the Reserve as the result of increased camping activity. The need to rely upon wells and septic systems must be carefully considered.

The LWVMC is still waiting to see the county develop a comprehensive agritourism plan. This was expected after the Park and Planning Commission completed its [2019 Agritourism Study](#) several years ago. We still maintain that such a comprehensive plan should be developed **before** allowing tourists to stay overnight in the Reserve.

Once again, we appreciate the council's listening to community organizations and residents when it comes to the Agricultural Reserve. We hope we can all work together to responsibly preserve this precious resource for the future.

Susan Albertine
President,
League of Women Voters of Montgomery County