

To: The Honorable Members of the Montgomery County Council
County Executive Marc Elrich

From: Donna McDowell



**Revised
Testimony Regarding ZTA 24-02**

My name is Donna McDowell, a resident of the Ag Reserve for almost four decades.

We all know that ZTA 24-02 is a compromise, and that it is likely it will pass given the number of Council members supporting it. But how did we get here? Perhaps an investor who wanted to monetize his purchase of acreage in the Ag Reserve got the ear of a Council Member. Maybe that investor wanted to create a private club where rich folks could hobnob in fancy cabins while paying a hefty fee to join the club. And then maybe some residents - like myself and others in the Ag Reserve - became alarmed. We've been down this road before. We know that some are eager to break the Reserve. So opponents and proponents hammered out this compromise. Thank you to the agricultural groups who participated.

However, even this ZTA violates the Master Plan of 1980, the visionary plan created by Royce Hanson and his associates. Transforming land from farming to campgrounds with RV's, Yurts, and permanent bathroom structures will do the following:

- * Decrease the acreage in farming, raising prices for farmland, and making farming more difficult;
- * Make farmers feel that the County does not support farming;
- * Pressure farmers to add camping to the many duties they already perform;
- * Spur farmers to expend monies on campgrounds and build outdoor bathroom facilities for campers;
- * Endanger sensitive headwaters; causing stream and ground water debasement; and potentially fouling wells and septic fields; and,

* Disseminate the message that farming is not important.

If beauty is a value - and to me it is - these campgrounds will be unsightly marring the landscapes of the Ag Reserve.

None of this will matter, though, because the Council will pass this zoning change. It will pass it even though it is hard to envision people sitting in Yurts looking at the corn grow; or people in RV's watching the soybeans curl. It will be just another incursion into the Reserve - a death by a thousand cuts.

It's sad because there are some perfect places in the State for camping, many nearby. Those places have camping infrastructure and contain different terrains with hills, streams, rivers, historic buildings, trails, barbecue grills, and staff who provide safety, clean-up, guidance, and educational activities. Those places are the State and local parks. (Some thirty State Parks provide camping as does Little Bennett in Montgomery County.)

So here we are going through a charade. I'll take the compromise over the other, but I wish the Council had taken a stronger stand to protect the Agricultural Reserve.