

**Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee  
Minutes March 15, 2022**

**Attendance:** Pete Driscoll, Jane Evans, Doug Lechluder, Lori Larson, Debbie Tropp, Amanda Cather, Patrick Jamison, Ben Butler, John Brewer

**Staff:** Jeremy Criss, Greg Wims

**Guests:** Dr. Adam Darkins, Tim McGrath, Ellen Gordon, Victoria Grace Assokom-Siakam,

1. **Call the meeting to order and introductions.**
2. **Approval of the February 15, 2022, AAC minutes.** Evans/ Driscoll Approved as Corrected.
3. **Bill 40-21- Individual Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Systems - Amendments (McCartney-Green)**

**All Agricultural Groups opposed the Bill 40-21 during the November 30, 2021, Public Hearing. The Transportation and Environment- T&E Committee work session is still pending. The Council is working on the CIP and Operating Budgets through March.** Doug Lechluder asked if the Montgomery Countryside Alliance-MCA and Sugarloaf Citizens Association-SCA were aware of this Bill 40-21. Jeremy said that he was not sure if these groups were following this Septic Tank bill, but Ellen Gordon was on the call so she could speak for SCA.

4. **ZTA 21-07 Height and Density Allocations for MPDUs-Affordable Housing-**

**As a follow up from Council Member Reimer request to the Office of Legislative Oversight-OLO for a status on the use of both TDRs and BLTs, the OAG met with the staff of the OLO and MNCPPC to begin discussions on the data sets that are kept for TDRs. This includes the Development Rights Fund that was created as a safety net if developers did not purchase TDRs. The Development Rights Fund was sunset in 1995 because developers purchased TDRs. The last TDR status report was done in 2008.** Jeremy reported that OAG will be meeting with representatives from the Executive staff and the OLO on March 30, 2022. The OAG has several questions surrounding the preliminary findings of MNCPPC on the remaining properties in the Agricultural Reserve that have no encumbrance recorded meaning that all of the TDRs are still retained with these properties. The MNCPPC estimates that 513 TDRs are remaining and the OAG believes this figure is much higher over 1,600 TDRs.

5. **Follow up on Bill 16-21-Environmental Sustainability- Building Energy Use Benchmarking and Performance Standards**

**There have been two T&E Committee work sessions on Bill 16-21 and a third is scheduled for March 14, 2022. The letter from the AAC to the County Council recommended that Bill 16-21 should be amended, and Montgomery County should follow the lead of**

**Washington State and exempt all existing and new agricultural buildings.** There was no mention of an amendment to exempt agricultural buildings from Bill 16-21 during the third and final T&E Committee meeting. Doug Lechluder said this new requirement will generate new paperwork requirements for certain farmers. Lori Larson said she is concerned because there are no energy standards to apply since her property was identified on the list of 10 equestrian facilities with buildings at the 25,000 square foot threshold. Lori said she has already installed new LED lights and other electric equipment to reduce her energy costs. Amanda Cather said that the American Farmland Trust staff encourages smart solar on farms as a way to reduce energy costs and promote more accessory solar installations.

6. **Beginning Farmer Course-** The Beginning Farmer Course will start Thursday, February 10, and run for a total of 9 weeks. For more information, visit the registration website. The local in-person classes will be held at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds. Topics will include soils, crop planning, financing, equipment, permits and licenses, and pest management. The OAG will participate on April 7, 2022, to review the County permitting and licensing requirements. No update was needed.

7. **Rustic Roads Master Plan Update-**

**Mike Scheffel and Jeremy Criss are preparing a power point presentation that will feature pictures of Rustic Roads along with testimonials from farmers regarding their views of the Rustic Roads program and MDCOT maintenance and improvements. The APAB has prepared a very informative letter outlining the concerns the Board has with the Rustic Roads. Please see the attached message and guidelines on foliage and tree maintenance along Rustic Roads.**

<https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/RusticRoadsFunctionalMasterPlan1996ocr300.pdf>

<https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/transportation/highway-planning/rustic-roads/rustic-roads-master-plans/>

Jeremy reported on the RR Master Plan Update Briefing Draft that will be presented to the Planning Board to begin the Rustic Roads Master Plan Update. The OAG is developing a power point presentation titled- Rustic Roads through the eyes of the farmer. The presentation includes pictures of RR that farmers have provided along with testimonials from the farmers explaining their challenges with the RR. Jeremy encouraged everyone to provide pictures and testimonials that will be included in the presentation. Tim McGrath asked if MCDOT has funding for RR improvements and infrastructure. Jeremy said that MCDOT does not have sufficient funding to address improvements and infrastructure on down county roads as well as RR that are primarily up county. Jeremy provided an example of when Eric Spates was moving his equipment on a RR, and he could not pull off to let the traffic behind him go by due to the vegetation growing along the sides of the Road. When Eric was finally able to pull over, a Montgomery County Police officer stopped him and verbally reprimanded him that he should not be on the public roads with his farm equipment. Ben Butler apologized for missing the assignment and said he has some good pictures of school buses trying to navigate the sharp turn at Davis Mill Road and Wildcat Road that he can provide.

8. **Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation-**

The MALPF will accept easement applications on July 1, 2022, and there are some limited opportunities for funding in Round Two which require matching funds from the County. Anyone interested in exploring this opportunity please contact Mike Scheffel in the OAG to understand the requirements and the deadlines. No update was needed.

9. **PHED Committee Recommendation on the FY23 Ag Land Preservation CIP On March 7, 2022, PHED recommended an increase of \$500K in Current Revenue for FY23 to cover the on-going Planning, Design and Supervision-PDS expenses that are not related to CIP that we have been trying to migrate back to the Operating Budget since 2010. The PHED Committee recommended these PDS expenses should be removed from the CIP in FY24.** Jeremy said he was encouraged by the PHED Committee member Andrew Friedson recommendation to help address the Planning Design and Supervision Expenses charged to the Ag Land Preservation CIP for that past 12 years that are not related to the project- Montgomery Weed Control, Inc. Deer Donation Program, One FTE for Administrative Specialist assigned to UM-Extension, UM-Extension state payment.

10. **National Agricultural Day and County Council Proclamation- Council members Rice, Navarro, and Friedson will sponsor a Proclamation for National Agricultural Day on March 22, 2022, at the beginning of the County Council Work Session. Leaders of the agricultural groups are invited along with the farmers that participate with the Farm to Food Bank Program.** Jeremy said that on Monday March 21, 2022, County Council President Gabe Alborno will be meeting with the leaders of the agricultural community at Butlers Orchard to conduct an Agricultural Community Conversation. On Tuesday March 22, 2022, Jeremy encouraged anyone that is interested in listening to the discussion on the National Agricultural Day Proclamation to tune into the County Council online forum at 9:00 am. These are two good opportunities to showcase the agricultural community in the County including the great work our farmers are doing.

11. **County Executive FY 23 Operating Budget Recommendations will be released on March 15, 2022.**

**OAG and the MSCD Operating Budget-Status of requested new positions.** Jeremy reviewed the Business Development Specialist position (previously held by Kristin Fisher) that he has been trying to reinstate since 2010. The second Engineering Position is proposed for the MSCD to help provide technical assistance on small ponds and stormwater management facilities that the NRCS will no longer provide.

**County Staff updates-Cathy Yingling UM-Extension resigning March 31, 2022**

**Alga Piechocinski-UM-Extension 4H retiring April 30, 2022**

**Rick Walter, UM-Extension Director retiring October 2022**

12. **The next meeting of the Agricultural Advisory Committee is April 19, 2022, at 7:00 pm. We should discuss conducting this meeting in person and held at the Up County Regional Services Center in Germantown.**

**Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

**Agricultural Advisory Committee-March 15, 2022**

**Sherwood High School Farm Tours-March 16, 2022**

**National Agriculture Day with the County Council-March 22, 2022**

**Community Solar Webinar-OAG, MCA, MC Green Bank-March 24, 2022**

**Annual Montgomery Weed Control Board of Directors-March 25, 2022**

**Montgomery County Farm Bureau Board of Directors- April 5, 2022**

**Montgomery Soil Conservation District-April 8, 2022**

**Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board-April 12, 2022**