



Montgomery County, MD  
Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC)  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
September 16, 2025

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

2. Introductions

Committee: Fred Lechliden, Ellen Gordon, Amanda Cather, Jane Evans, Jeff Dowling, Matt Lechliden, John Brewer, Tim Hussman

Office of Agriculture (OAG) staff: Mike Scheffel, Mike Weyand, Natalia Salazar

Guests: Eleanor Leak, Marcia Kingman, Keren Mir Almaguer, Dale Tibbitts, Sarah Wolf, Nkosi Yearwood, Surea Gainey, Ruben Rosario

3. Approval of the June 17, 2025, AAC minutes

Jane Evans introduced a motion to approve the minutes, Ellen Gordon seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

2. Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) and Building Lot Termination (BLT) Programs

With Zoning Text Amendment 25-05 enacted and the building lot valuation study completed, the necessary next steps for the OAG to establish a public TDR purchasing program are: 1) Executive Orders from the County Executive to set the price the County will pay per TDR and 2) an amendment to Chapter 2B (Agricultural Land Preservation) of the County Code.

Pending approval from the County Executive, the base and maximum prices the County will pay for a BLT easement will likely be \$380,800 and \$435,200, respectively. However, the amount that will be paid for a public TDR easement has not yet been established.

4. Proposed solar projects in the Agricultural Reserve

The Public Services Commission (PSC)'s deadlines to render decisions on the Chaberton Solar [Sugarloaf](#) project (4 MW array proposed for 16 acres on 20507 Darnestown Road, Dickerson) and Chaberton [Ramiere](#) project (3 MW array proposed for 11 acres on 17600 Whites Ferry Road, Poolesville) are August 15 and December 31, 2025, respectively.



However, it appears that the deadline for the Sugarloaf project was postponed to an unknown date. The PSC will hold evidentiary hearings for the Ramiere project on October 2 and 3 in Baltimore

On June 26, the Planning Board voted in favor of the conditional use application for the [Mountain Vale solar project](#) (1.8 MW array proposed for 11 acres on 17700 Barnesville Rd). Because the facility will generate under 2 MW, the project is still required to obtain approval from the Montgomery County Hearing Examiner.

3. [SB0931/HB1036](#), Public Utilities – Generating Stations – Generation and Siting

The County's Department of Permitting Services (DPS) and Planning Department were informed by legal counsel that to meet the requirements of this bill, the County cannot require conditional use approval for solar projects that meet the State's requirements. For solar projects between 1 and 2 MW in size, the applicant will need to apply to the Planning Department for Mandatory Referral (which includes submitting a Forest Conservation Plan if required) and to DPS for technical permits (e.g. electrical, building), erosion and sediment control approval, and stormwater management approval.

When this bill passed, it was the OAG's understanding that projects between 2 and 5 MW in size would need to apply to the MD Public Services Commission (PSC) and projects over 5 MW would need to apply to PJM Interconnection, the regional power grid coordinator. However, counsel confirmed that the bill allows developers to build up to 14 MW on the same or adjacent properties without applying to the PSC or PJM if the project is broken down into projects up to 2 MW in size that do not supply power to the wholesale market. In these cases, the applicant will only need to apply to the County's Planning Department and DPS as described above.

5. Montgomery County urban area boundary for firearm discharge

Chapter 57 of the Montgomery County Code prohibits the discharge of firearms within the area of the county designated as urban in [Section 57-1](#), with some exceptions. The boundaries of the urban area are decided by the County Council based on recommendations from the County Executive. The Executive relies on input from the Firearm Safety Committee but would also like input from the AAC. In consultation with the OAG and County Executive's office, a team from the Montgomery County Police Department mapped a recommended boundary outline for stakeholders to provide comments on. The OAG presented this map to the AAC during the meeting.



#### 4. [Bill 18-25, Forest Conservation – Trees](#)

Introduced on June 17, this bill mainly aims to align Chapter 22A (Forest Conservation) of the County Code with changes in the state regulations that resulted from State Senate Bill 526. However, the bill would also expand the definition of “tree” to equate to:

*“a large, woody plant having one or several self-supporting stems or trunks measuring at least one inch caliper and numerous branches that reach a height of at least 20 feet at maturity”* (underlined text denotes an addition to the Code).

However, the Council’s Transportation and Environment Committee, which the bill was assigned to, recommended that the full Council adopt the bill without the one-inch caliper language in the “tree” definition. The full Council has not scheduled a vote on this bill yet.

Mike Scheffel added that a challenge that farmers face is obtaining an agricultural exemption from the Forest Conservation Law from the county’s Planning Department to clear woody vegetation in and around agricultural fields. Although agricultural land management is exempt from this law, the exemption process is lengthy and requires payment. In other counties, clearing for agricultural land management that is carried out with guidance from the local soil conservation district is automatically exempt from the Forest Conservation Law.

The AAC members agreed to submit a letter to the County Council recommending amendments to the County Code that would enable an outright exemption from the Forest Conservation Law for clearing woody vegetation as part of agricultural land management.

#### 6. County Council briefing on agritourism

On July 28, the County Council’s Economic Development (ECON) Committee held a briefing on agritourism. The MD Department of Agriculture (MDA) presented on its upcoming statewide regulatory analysis document for agritourism and value-added agriculture. The MD Department of Commerce, which was recently charged with undertaking a study of the county’s agritourism economy, gave an update on the initiation of this project. The Montgomery County Planning Department presented a summary of the 2019 agritourism study, which had not yet been formally presented to the Council due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit Montgomery gave an update on its rural branding project. Finally, the OAG presented information on the current agritourism landscape and regulatory processes.

The ECON committee agreed to have a follow-up work session on agritourism in the fall, once MDA has concluded its regulatory analysis document.



7. Visit Montgomery rural branding project

On August 27 and 28, Civic Brand, the consulting company that will be preparing a branding strategy for rural Montgomery County, presented a summary of the feedback they and Visit Montgomery received over the past year and a half from farmers, residents, and advocacy organizations. Some of the takeaways gathered were that agriculture needs to be the focus of agritourism, rural Montgomery County should be known as a working landscape where production agriculture is protected and alive, agritourism should serve farmers and rural residents first and visitors second, and many visitors are drawn to agritourism because they seek authenticity, community, and connection to a simpler way of life. Visit Montgomery is expected to present the branding strategy in the late fall or early winter.

8. Farm tour for MD Secretary of Agriculture Atticks

On September 8, the OAG organized a farm tour and roundtable discussion for Secretary Atticks, MDA staff, State Delegates, and farmers. The group visited Frozen Levels Farm, Jamison Ag & Turf, and Song Dog Distillery, which has its grand opening scheduled for October 12.

9. Incubator farm meeting

On September 17 at 10:00 am, the OAG will host a meeting at the Agricultural History Farm Park with the Montgomery County Food Council's Equitable Land Access Working Group to discuss the possibility of an incubator farm at the park. Several other groups will be represented, such as ECO City Urban Farm Incubator, Future Harvest, Montgomery Countryside Alliance, Sugarloaf Citizen's Association, AfriThrive. AAC members are welcome to attend this meeting and are asked to use this [RSVP form](#) to sign up.

10. Future AAC discussion on farm alcohol production and agritourism

The AAC members agreed to wait until the MDA value-added and agritourism analysis document is published to revisit the AAC's 2023 letter to the County Council recommending amendments to the zoning standards for farm alcohol production.

11. The next meeting of the AAC will be held on October 21, 2025, at 7:00 pm via Microsoft Teams.

12. Upcoming meetings and events:

Montgomery County Farm Bureau Board of Directors meeting: October 7, 2025

Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board meeting: October 10, 2025

Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board meeting: October 14, 2025



Farm-to-Table Symposium, Crossvines: November 10, 2025

5. Adjourn

Tim Hussman introduced a motion to adjourn the meeting, Jeff Dowling seconded the motion, and the motion carried, adjourning the meeting at 7:51 pm.