

## Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee-Minutes August 18, 2020

Attendance: Doug Lechliden, Pete Driscoll, Debra Tropp, Ben Butler, Tim McGrath, Eleanor Leak, Patrick Jamison, Jane Evans, Chuck Schuster

1. **Call the Meeting to Order-Introductions:** Meeting called to order 7:05
2. **Approval of the July 21, 2020 AAC meeting minutes.** Evans/Leak
3. **Follow up from the July 28, 2020 meeting with Representative David Trone. Youth and Development Grants for 4H Children and FFA Students-Marty Srvcek participated and explained the MC Ag Fair lost \$950,000 this year.**

Jeremy said that Representative David Trone was very interested in knowing how the farmers in the counties he represents have been impacted by the Pandemic. Representatives from Western MD counties began the discussion and Marty Srvcek and Jeremy followed with comments on Montgomery County. With all the County Ag Fairs cancelled, there are several suggestions on how to conduct virtual livestock auctions for the 4H children to sell the animals that they have raised this year.

4. **Follow up with meeting on July 31, 2020 with Senator Ben Cardin  
Unemployment enhancement \$600 per week  
How COVID-19 is impacting livestock producers and processing animals  
How “ “ is impacting The Bay WIP Goals resources and funding  
High Speed Internet should be a required utility by US Government-PSC  
Heroes/Heals Acts and the Grant Funding for farmers.**

The farmers and staff representatives participated in the discussion and explained their views on how the unemployment enhancement of \$600 per week created a disincentive for people to work because the unemployment benefits exceeded the level of work pay. Randy Stabler explained how livestock producers are having difficulty scheduling their animals for processing because workers in these facilities are either sick or they are not coming to work. Jeremy explained how the State has several licensed deer meat cut and wrap facilities that we should explore whether these facilities can be used to reduce the pressure on the Federal USDA meat processing plants. The State Farm Bureau, Robert Butz and John Zawitoski explained how the USDA-NRCS provides cost share assistance-funding for farmers to implement conservation and best management practices on their farms. Robert Butz said that cost share funding for these conservation and best management practices are needed to help farmers and the urban areas to reduce sediment and nutrients that enter the Chesapeake Bay.

- 5. The County has provided a total of \$264,058 in COVID-19 financial assistance to 25 agricultural producers in the County. Average Grant Payment = \$10,000.**

Jeremy said there was nothing further to report on this item and he would answer any questions.

- 6. The DHHS is inspecting restaurants, bars, and farm operations due to complaints of large gatherings of people above the 50-person limit. Lone Oak Farm Brewery was visited, and they submitted a waiver based on providing 400 feet per person on the 29-acre farm and this compares to retail level of 200 feet per person. The waiver was originally declined but then approved once they obtained the Moderate Level food license.**

Jeremy said that some farm businesses have been visited by the Health Department due to requests for events and complaints of large gatherings and people not wearing masks. The Health Department implemented an enforcement program that starts with education and cooperation with the hope the citations and fines can be avoided.

- 7. Update on MC 6-20 Deer Hunting-Rifles used with Deer Management Permits. Delegate Eric Luedtke's office scheduled summer committee meetings on June 10, July 20, 2020. The Montgomery County Delegation developed an online Deer Management Survey that you should have received ???**

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdtK529rOH6iiw8O49oSBqCb9O7tCgTIC3VR3jXEHLf6HY\\_VQ/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdtK529rOH6iiw8O49oSBqCb9O7tCgTIC3VR3jXEHLf6HY_VQ/viewform) This is a confidential-anonymous survey with no personal information. Here is some good news- The DNR has released the Hunting Regulations for 2020-2021 season that includes a new straight walled- cartridge for all counties that allow rifles, and this will include Montgomery and Frederick Counties. This cartridge has a range of 250 yards, and it is more accurate than a shot gun and cheaper than shot gun shells.

Jeremy encouraged anyone that has not completed the deer management survey to please take a few minutes and complete the questions. The Montgomery County Delegation is trying to provide additional tools to farmers and hunters to reduce deer herds. The summer committee will consider possible legislative solutions that may be introduced during the 2020 MD Legislative Session.

- 8. July 31, 2020, eight Montgomery County farmers signed Memorandums of Understanding to produce local food for the Manna Food Center as part of an expanded Farm to Food Bank Program. This program will provide higher prices to farmers that grow food for Food Assistance Providers. This**

**is another example of the Office of Agriculture continuing to partner with the Montgomery County Food Council, the Food Security Task Force and Manna Food Center to expand local food production due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.**

Jeremy announced that the farmers participating with the Farm to Food Bank Program are pleased with the program and that everything is going good so far. The farmers are encouraged with the prices they are receiving for the products that they are delivering to the Manna Food Center. There has been at least 18,000 pounds of food that the farmers have provided so far this season. The Montgomery County Food Council, Manna Food Center and OAG are beginning the process to recruit additional farmers for the phase II of the program for the 2021 growing season. Ben Butler said Butlers Orchard is happy with the program and it is working well for them.

9. **Here is some challenging news-The Council conducted joint PHED/ T&E Committee Work Sessions on July 9, 16, and 22, 2020 to discuss the Solar ZTA 20-01. Here is the Council Staff packet for the July 22, 2020 Work Session**  
[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/cm/2020/20200722/20200722\\_PHEDETE1.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/cm/2020/20200722/20200722_PHEDETE1.pdf)

**All agricultural groups reaffirmed their opposition to the Solar ZTA as introduced and no amendments will change their position. Amendments to the ZTA are pending- prohibit solar on Class I prime and soils, minimize the removal of topsoil, and encourage Agri-voltaic farming. The OAG is working on a communication proposal for each farmer (See Attached) to send to the County Council before this Solar ZTA 20-01 is scheduled the second week of September 2020. Here are some messages from Hans Riemer.**



Jeremy explained that he is concerned that Council member Riemer referenced above that political bodies including the Agricultural Advisory Committee oppose farm solar and this is not the case. In July, the OAG staff presented to the PHED/T&E Committee members four specific examples of farms in the County where accessory solar fields have been installed. Jeremy explained that farmers support and embrace accessory solar that helps to offset their onsite energy consumption. The farmers are opposed to large 2 MW solar fields being installed in the Agricultural Reserve. Tim McGrath said that he is concerned with the absentee landowner that rents their farm for agricultural production and once the ZTA is approved, they will terminate the farm lease and replace it with a solar lease for much more money. Debra Tropp said she is concerned with the comments from the Council members on this solar ZTA. Pete Driscoll said that California is experiencing rolling brown outs because their demand for electricity exceeds the amount of energy they generate from alternative sources. Pete said that California is a sunny state and they are still having problems. Patrick Jamison asked if more amendments are possible. Jeremy said that amendments will be needed if we see the County Council is going to approve the Solar ZTA. Tim McGrath said that solar panels are very close to infrastructure like a house and they will result in the loss of farmland.

10. **The County-OAG executed the Ag and Hort. Contract with Chuck Schuster. The UM-Extension is filling Chuck's UME full time faculty tenured position and there were two candidates that provided presentations on August 5, 2020. Kelly Nichols was one of the candidates and she did an excellent job demonstrating her understanding of Montgomery County Agriculture and the needs of the farmers.**

Jeremy said there was nothing further to report on this item and he would answer any questions.

11. **Preliminary Draft Report Thrive 2050-  
<https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Final-staff-report-vision-goals-policies-and-actions-for-6-11-20-PB-.pdf> The agricultural groups OAG, APAB, MAP provided comments back to the CE and MNCPPC last week.**

Jeremy said there was nothing further to report on this item and he would answer any questions.

12. **The County Council approved a 3.45% savings plan for FY21 Office of Agriculture budget. This equates to \$ 34,200 for the OAG. The proposed savings will come from a reduction in the MAEF Food Fiber and You-Mobile Science Lab. Jeremy asked if there were any questions on this item.**
13. **The County Executive has formally requested the County Attorney to amend Chapter 50 Subdivisions that will exempt commercial buildings used for agritourism, farm alcohol production and on-site farm markets. The County Executive has also formally requested amendments to Chapter 52 Taxation to exempt these uses from the Development Impact taxes like how **Biotechnology businesses are treated**. Jeremy said he was encouraged by the communications between the County Attorney Office and the Executive Staff on the proposed amendments to Chapters 50 Subdivisions and 52 Taxation to provide relief when commercial buildings are proposed for uses that are allowed under farming. The OAG reports that there are several Farm Alcohol Production prospects that are working with the DPS on their projects. The amendments would need to be adopted if they are going to provide any relief from the excessive requirements of the County Code.**
14. **The OAG has partnered with the Montgomery Food Council, The US Compost Council, the Compost Crew, and the County Department of Environment Protection on a USDA-NRCS Grant for \$95,000 covering two years for a food scrap-on-farm composting pilot operation. We hope to learn in mid-September whether our application will be approved and funded. Jeremy said this item was being presented to the AAC as information only and that he would answer any questions.**

15. **The Office of Agriculture has been included in a Commerce Cabinet that conducted the first meeting on July 31, 2020. The Cabinet is supposed to meet quarterly, and they are charged with recommending how to expand the County's economy.** The OAG attended the Commerce Cabinet meeting and suggested that Montgomery County is just beginning to see the economic returns of Farm Alcohol Production facilities that are creating jobs and generating income. The potential for generating additional revenue from Agricultural Tourism venues also represents an opportunity to promote the Agricultural Reserve including all the agricultural and farming businesses.

16. **On August 4, 2020 (The last day before the summer recess) the County Council scheduled Introduction/Action on Resolutions-Proposed Charter Amendments Regarding Composition of the County Council: Proposed Amendment to County Charter – County Council – Alter Council Composition to 9 District Members and No At-Large Members-THIS RESOLUTION DID NOT PASS**

[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2020/20200804/20200804\\_2.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2020/20200804/20200804_2.pdf)

**Expand Council to 7 District Members and 4 At-Large Members, Sponsor-Evan Glass-THIS RESOLUTION DID PASS**

[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2020/20200804/20200804\\_3.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2020/20200804/20200804_3.pdf)

Jeremy said the voice of farmer at the table of County Government may be negatively impacted by the passage of this Resolution which would add two more County Council Districts.

17. **The Chief Administrative Officer Andrew Kleine resigned this week due to the comments from the County Council on the Ethics Report and Investigation. Richard Madaleno will become Acting CAO until he can be appointed by the County Council. Jennifer Bryant will become the Acting Director of the Office of Management and Budget.**

Jeremy said the next meeting of the Agricultural Advisory Committee is September 15, 2020 at 7:00pm. Hearing no additional agenda items, the meeting was adjourned at 7:59 pm Butler/Driscoll.

#### **Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

**Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee-August 18, 2020**

**Montgomery County Farm Bureau Board of Directors- September 1, 2020**

**Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board-September 8, 2020**

**Montgomery Soil Conservation District-Rescheduled to September 18, 2020**