

**Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee-July 21, 2020**  
**Revised Agenda**  
Office of Agriculture- Jeremy Criss

**1. Call the Meeting to Order-Introductions: 7:02 PM**

**Attendees:** Aliza Silver, Ben Butler, Debra Tropp, Doug Lechluder, Eleanor Leak, Lori Larson, Patrick Jamison, Pete Driscoll, Linda Lewis, Jane Evans

**Guest:** Tim McGrath

**Staff:** Cathy Matthews from the Upcounty Regional Services Center; Cindy Gibson, Chief of Staff to Councilmember Andrew Friedson

**2. Approval of the May 19, 2020 AAC meeting minutes. *There was no meeting in June 2020.***

Motion to approve as corrected (Evans/Driscoll)

**3. The Office of Agriculture continues to update our COVID-19 Agricultural Business Resources page published on the OAG website.**

**<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/agservices/boards-committees/guidance-for-ag-business.html>**

**The following farmers have received financial assistance.**

**Michael Protas-\$6,000 Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation Local Production Fund**

**Montgomery County was awarded a total of \$140,709 and ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the State for the MARBIDCO COVID-19 Assistance Grant assisting 8 farmers.**

**Waredaca**

**Amaranth Acres**

**Lewis Orchard**

**Rock Hill orchard**

**Savage Acres Farm**

**Golden Acres Lawncare (Savage Acres son separate entity – forestry)**

**Butlers Orchard-\$20,000**

**One Acre Farm-\$32,250**

Montgomery County ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the state in the number of farmers who received COVID-19 assistance, grant funding assistance. Jeremy does not

know what the individual amounts are unless the recipients told him the amounts.

**A total of 39 Agricultural business owners applied to the Public Health Emergency Grant Program-PHEG**

**14 Agricultural businesses received grant funding totaling \$113,526 PHEG**

**Butlers Orchard-\$ 10,000- PHEG Grant**

Jeremy said the grant funds averaged about \$10,000 per applicant and he only knows that Butler's Orchard received \$10k.

4. **The Telework Assistance Program has received an additional appropriation \$1,250,000 from the County Council and MCEDC is administering the program. You can find all the necessary information here:**  
<https://thinkmoco.com/telework-assistance-fund>

**Linda Lewis received a \$2,500 grant and Tim McGrath received a \$1,323 Grant from MCEDC Telework Assistance Program**  
*Please note that Nancy Warfield-MCFB has inquired about this program.*

Some are still getting their paperwork together.

5. **The Pick Your Own Operations are open for the 2020 season-Butlers Orchard, Homestead Farm, Rock Hill Orchard, Farm at Home. All employees and customers are required to wear cloth face coverings including all customers age nine and above.**  
[https://mda.maryland.gov/maryland\\_products/Documents/Maryland-Pick-Your-Own-Operations-During-COVID-19-State-of-Emergency-FAQs.pdf](https://mda.maryland.gov/maryland_products/Documents/Maryland-Pick-Your-Own-Operations-During-COVID-19-State-of-Emergency-FAQs.pdf)  
**The Waredaca Equestrian Competition June 13-14, 2020 was approved by the County Health Officer Dr. Travis Gayles. This event involved between 80-100 people being spread out over the 198-acre farm. The County Health Officer is using this event including the social distancing instructions that Gretchen Butts provided as an example for other outdoor events under consideration.**

Blueberry pick your own season has begun. OAG is instructing farmers to make sure that employees and customers are wearing masks. Farms have been having some issues with customers not wearing them. OAG is hearing that fewer folks are coming out for pick your own this season. The guidelines for COVID-19 distancing document for agricultural businesses is on the OAG website resource page.

A large equestrian competition occurred in June at Waredaca with 80-100 participants, not spectators. There may be a similar competition in September.

- 6. Update on MC 6-20 Deer Hunting-Rifles used with Deer Management Permits. Delegate Eric Luedtke's office scheduled a summer committee meeting on June 10, 2020 to discuss this legislation that was assigned to summer study. The DNR Representatives announced they are proposing a new straight walled-25 caliber cartridge will be allowed for the all counties that allow rifles and this may include Montgomery County. This cartridge has a range of 250 yards, and it is more accurate than a shot gun. The second meeting of the Summer Committee is July 20, 2020.**

MC 6-20 would have allowed rifles in Montgomery county used in conjunction with the deer management permits. The DNR representatives have announced that they have changed the 2020-2021 hunting regulations to allow the straight walled 25 caliber cartridge. It has great accuracy and is better than a shotgun for hunting. They are hoping this new tool will be effective.

They had a second meeting on Monday and there is a Deer Management survey that will be coming out from the delegation office. Delegates Eric Luedtke, David Fraser Hidalgo, Marc Korman, Lori Charkoudian. Staff representatives from DNR and MNCPPC also participated. The survey will be sent out to all email addresses for the various agricultural groups in the county. OAG hopes this survey and results can update info from the 2014-2015 Deer Damage survey. The survey will be anonymous, and all information will be confidential.

Jeremy does not believe we will go back to the general assembly on another rifle bill because we need to see how the straight walled cartridge works. It is cheaper than a shotgun so hopefully more famers will use it.

- 7. The Office of Agriculture is continuing to work with the Montgomery County Food Council and Food Security Task Force to develop plans for expanding local food production. Approximately 8 farmers are willing to participate in this new Pilot Program with Food Assistance Providers like Manna Food Center and the Capital Area Food Bank to produce and distribute food to people in need. The Manna Food Center will be developing MOU's with the farmers on July 22, 2020 for the 2020 growing season.**

Tomorrow there are two meetings, one at 8:30 am and another at 3 pm with the farmers who have agreed to grow more food this year for expanding the farm to food bank program. The farmers will learn how the MOUs between the Manna Food Center and the farmers will work. They

will discuss how the food being sold to Manna would be at competitive prices. This is additional food a farmer would be producing and selling beyond their previous market capacity. This pilot program will help farmers get more value for their production. This is the first year and we are trying to respond to the number of food insecure people in the county. The money for the program will come through the Department of Health and Human Services, with help from the Food Council.

8. **The Council is scheduling a joint PHED/ T&E Committee Work Session on July 9 and 16, 2020 to discuss the Solar ZTA 20-01. A third Committee Work Session is scheduled for July 22, 2020 and here is the Council Staff packet.**  
[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/cm/2020/20200722/20200722\\_PHEDE1.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/cm/2020/20200722/20200722_PHEDE1.pdf)

**All agricultural groups reaffirmed their opposition to the Solar ZTA as introduced. Amendments to the ZTA are pending- prohibit solar on prime and productive soils, prohibit the removal of topsoil. *Please see the attached letter from the OAG, AAC and MCFB to the County Council.***

Tomorrow's work session will be the third one. The letter attached to the packet that we sent last week, with OAG letterhead, signed by Jeremy, our chair Doug Lechliden, and Lonnie Luther as first Vice President of the Farm Bureau. They are trying to slow this solar policy down.

So many people are upset that they cannot participate in the normal public process. We should not be moving forward with such a contentious policy like this during this difficult environment and pandemic. Jeremy heard the two committees intend to send the solar ZTA 20-01 to the Full Council after the August recess. The amendments under consideration now are still pending. Since the ZTA will not be presented to the council until September, this will give us time to digest the amendments being considered. The farm community unanimously opposed, and no amendments will change this position.

It is unclear why this is being pushed so aggressively while there is so much opposition. Sierra Club is pushing this very hard and Jeremy said the Sierra Club representative told the Council that the economics of farming will never compete with the economics of putting solar fields on farms. The total of 1,800 acres in solar fields has been estimated to generate enough electricity to power 50,000 + homes and this figure is closer to 30,000 homes due to the average annual KWH that a residence uses.

The position of the League of Women Voters is that the Executive's report recommendations on Climate Change need to be finalized before moving forward on the solar ZTA. The climate change report will not be ready until November. It is unclear if the Council will wait until November. OAG is supporting the League of Women Voters' position.

OAG has pointed out some errors in the Council staff packet document. There are incorrect capability classifications referenced. Jeremy compiled a list of all the current solar fields on farms where electricity is generated for their farming operations. Farmers are not opposed to solar energy! They use it. But these commercial operations will endanger farming.

No one cannot participate in these County Council meetings unless they are invited. Jeff Zyontz and the Council control who can participate because they send the link out for the Zoom meeting. Only certain Council staff can speak. Councilmember Friedson has been advocating to allow Jeremy to speak at the meeting. Andrew has not taken a position but wants to learn as much as he can to understand the issue. DEP also has updated GIS mapping. The MNCPPC have different expertise, they look at soils for construction purposes, not for optimizing crops and pasture like OAG.

Cindy Gibson agrees that this has been a difficult process and very technical. The first public meeting was before COVID-19. You can watch the Council meetings on cable, on the website, and you can call in. The chairmen choose the agendas. Friedson is trying to prevent use of solar on so much ag land. Since Hans Riemer serves on both the T&E and PHED committees, there are a total of five members and two (Hans Riemer and Tom Hucker) are cosponsors of the solar ZTA 20-01. Andrew Friedson recommends limiting solar on class 1 and 2 soil capability classes. Cindy said they hope Jawando and Glass will support Friedson to move forward with these limitations to get the solar ZTA out of committee. If this solar ZTA passes, Friedson wants any personal property taxes paid for solar to be deposited directly into ag preservation fund. Please call/email Glass/Jawando before tomorrow morning; that would be helpful.

Cindy said that Andrew Friedson is also spearheading another grant program for small businesses, called Reopen Montgomery, to help cover costs of reopening. Applicants are eligible up to \$5k. You must be a local business and provide receipts for your expenses; it is a reimbursement grant program. It can cover PPE, signage, new equipment including expenses to comply with the COVID-19 health regulations for reopening businesses. Those applications will open on July 27<sup>th</sup>. There is a sample application and FAQ on the county executive's website now.

Ben Butler Question for Cindy: if we received funding for PHEG program or other county funds, are we ineligible for these new funds? Cindy: no,

you are only ineligible if you have gotten prior funding for re-opening.  
The PHED program was about losses in March, not for re-opening costs.

- 9. The County executed the Agriculture and Horticulture Contract with Chuck Schuster. The UM-Extension announced they will move forward to replace Chuck's UME full time faculty tenured position and there are three candidates (two internal to UME and one external) that will be scheduled for presentations the first week of August.**

OAG got the contract executed for Chuck Schuster. It only took eight months to get procurement to get everything approved. UM is filling his full-time faculty tenured position. Of the three people who have applied, two are internal from UM extension and one is external. Presentations are scheduled for August 5<sup>th</sup>. Jeremy will listen to the presentations, which will be recorded in case you want to see them. The timing of the contract and the faculty tenured position will enable the new candidate to work with Chuck.

- 10. The Agricultural Advisory Committee needs new farmer and non-farmer representatives. Michele Cropp, Ben Allnutt-3<sup>rd</sup> term-Ben has asked his son Russ to apply, Linda Lewis-3<sup>rd</sup> term- Doug Lechluder-2<sup>nd</sup> term-Doug is eligible for waiver for 3<sup>rd</sup> term, Aliza Silver is interested in another 1 year term, Debra Tropp is interested another 1 year term, Leonard Yourman.**

Jeremy is working with the executive staff to fill positions on AAC. We need new farmer positions. All three of the non-farmers are eligible. Jeremy recommends we replace Leonard due to his attendance record. Deadline to apply was July 6<sup>th</sup>. Russ Allnutt may have applied. Linda's term expired and she is not eligible for re-appointment. Talked to Jordan Cissel, Bob Cissel's grandson, who works with Jamison's Ag and Turf. Jordan does not own a farm, but we have more than enough people with financial interest in a farm. Jeremy reached out to Keith Kohler who is the brew master at Waredaca.

- 11. The Rustic Roads Advisory Committee needs a new farmer representative to replace Todd Greenstone-2<sup>nd</sup> term-This is a very important farmer representative that we need to identify. *Please note the OAG reached out to the County Executive Staff and learned that some farmers applied before the June 24, 2020 deadline.***

There are only three farmer members on the seven-member committee. Tom Linthicum said he was interested in throwing his hat in the ring. Elrich's staff said that some farmers applied.

- 12. 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 need to review this report and provide comments back to MNCPPC in July. *Please see the attached message from MNCPPC staff back to the OAG.*

Preliminary draft of the 2050 report. This is update of 1964 general plan. Jeremy developed a document and sent it to us, entitled the Profitability and Viability of the Ag Reserve in Montgomery County. They outlined things Park and Planning staff need to consider in this report. Jeremy has a meeting scheduled with them next week to go over it. If anyone has any comments before next week, please send those over.

- 13. The APAB, AAC and MAP have provided recommendations to the County DOT to replace the single lane bridge along Schaeffer Road with a two-lane bridge that will qualify for State and Federal matching funds. The RRAC provided recommendations to retain the single lane bridge and only repair it.**

The Rustic Roads Advisory Committee recommended that the bridge needs to be retained as single lane bridge and just be repaired, even though we had recommended from AAC that it be made a two-lane bridge. Therefore, the farmer position on the rustic roads committee is so important.

- 14. The County has announced a 6% savings plan for FY21. This equates to \$ 60,000 for the Office of Agriculture. The proposed savings will come from a reduction in the MAEF Food Fiber and You- Mobile Science Lab and General Fund savings from the retirement of Melissa Steed who worked with me for the past 30 years. The PHED Committee approved the CE recommended savings of \$34,200 MAEF and there was no discussion on the savings from Melissa's position.**

After the fiscal year started, OAG was told to come up with a 6% savings plan. That equates to \$60k from OAG. MCPS will not be in session for at least the first two grading periods, which takes us to December 18. The Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation-MAEF-Mobile Science lab costs \$360/day. We could save \$34k with the reductions since the schools are not in session.

Jeremy had to look at Melissa Steed's position which is part time, spent half between the capital improvement program and the general fund. She retired after thirty years at end of June.

The County Executive did not accept the elimination of this part time position. This is fine because Jeremy wants to reclassify it and make it full time. Melissa was an administrative aid, which can be turned into a professional level position to build capacity at OAG. OAG savings will be 3.45%. The savings plan is a one-time cut, whereas a reduction would be permanent.

- 15. The OAG is working with the County Executive to amend Chapter 50 Subdivisions that will exempt commercial buildings used for agritourism,**

**farm alcohol production and on-site farm markets. We are also recommending amendments to Chapter 52 Taxation to exempt these uses from the Development Impact taxes like Biotechnology businesses.**

The OAG proposed to exempt a commercial building from platting requirement of subdivision Chapter 50. The OAG believes it does not make sense that owners of commercial buildings must go through the subdivision process when they are not changing the property boundaries. Jeremy is going to ask the Executive what is going on since it's been a month since Jeremy submitted the proposal.

An owner that applies for a commercial building under Chapter 52 taxation is required to pay the Development Impact Tax prior to issuing the Use and Occupancy permit. The biotech businesses do not have to pay development impact taxes, and Jeremy is arguing that farm alcohol production and commercial buildings associated with that use should be exempt from development impact tax because they're promoting tourism, similar to biotech's benefit. Farmers should not have to pay additional taxes that can total over \$100K.

**Additional Item:**

- The OAG sent a Grant application to USDA to expand composting opportunities in the county. It is a two-year grant, total of \$95k. Michael Protas has partnered with the Compost Crew. The money will be used to promote the compost operation on One Acre Farm, to show how food scraps can be composted to improve soil fertility and crop production. Four other properties are going to monitor the pilot and then if successful they could emulate it too. We will know in September the outcome of the application.
- Ben Butler has a meeting with Ben Perry next week. Ben Perry acquired the Compost Crew and has started dialogue with DEP to look at a bigger project with public/private partnership where more food scraps could be composted at a larger facility, to replicate the production of LeafGro Gold in Dickerson.
  - o Ben: why can't we compost food scraps at Dickerson?
  - o Aliza: judicial consent decree to prohibit that – SCA sued to prevent that. historical opposition to food waste composting due to belief will attract pests and contaminate groundwater.
  - o SCA may be changing their position on composting food scraps at the Dickerson facility because they really hate the incinerator. To achieve the zero-waste goal, food scrap recycling will be necessary.
  - o Tim McGrath – why can't we replace it with a biodigester? Jeremy: WSSC is doing that, they have excess capacity there. It would cost millions of dollars to build that.
- AAC will have an August meeting. The Ag fair was canceled so the annual Ag Leaders Luncheon is therefore canceled. Jeremy wants us prepared to hit the ground running in September.

**Adjournment:** (Allnutt/Driscoll) at 8:13 PM

**Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

**Agricultural Advisory Committee-July 21, 2020**

**PHED/T&E Committee Work Session-Solar ZTA 20-01-July 22, 2020**

**Montgomery County Farm Bureau Board of Directors- August 4, 2020**



**MCPS STEM Teachers Virtual Training-August 6, 2020**  
**Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board-August 11, 2020**  
**Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors-August 14,**  
**2020**