

**Agricultural Advisory Committee
October 15, 2019 Meeting Minutes**

Attendees: Peter Driscoll, Linda Lewis, Michele Cropp, Angie McNally, Deborah Tropp, Eleanor Leak, Ben Butler, Chuck Schuster, Doug Lechluder, Aliza Silver

Staff: Jeremy Criss

Agenda items are in bold and minutes are not bolded.

1. **Call the Meeting to Order and Introductions: 7:06 pm.**
2. **Approval of the AAC meeting minutes from September 19, 2019.** Approved as corrected. (Cropp/Driscoll)
3. **Update on the Farm Alcohol Production Facilities-FAPF-The DPS, OAG and the MSCD are currently working together on the Lone Oak Farm Brewery (Former Sam Riggs Property). This operation will be the first FAPF to be reviewed and approved in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the OAG and the Department of Permitting Services to assist with the implementation of Farm Alcohol Production. The County Executive recommends an amendment to the Subdivision Regulations to exempt commercial buildings on farms that offer FAPF and agritourism activities.**

DPS is having difficulty with applicants changing their plans in the middle of the review and approval process. There is a true need to create flexibility for changes to plans because of high costs. This is a learning process in collaboration for all parties involved. Lone Oak's plan was to tear down their existing building and build a new one with a tasting room. They have decided to just keep the existing barn and they will build a new ag building beside the existing building with the tasting room. OAG is trying to help DPS understand the basis for the changes to plans and the need for flexibility.

There are a number of people that are getting together to figure out how we can promote more barley production in the County. There is a lot of demand, but not enough supply to meet the demand.

All new commercial buildings built after 2016 are required to meet green building certification.

4. **The Agritourism Study Advisory Committee-ASAC met on Monday September 16, 2019 and reviewed the DRAFT report recommending a menu of options for the Committee to consider. The Committee was asked to provide final comments back to MNCPPC staff by October 4, 2019. An Interagency Work Group is recommended to determine how to implement agritourism venues in the County. On October 24, 2019 the Planning Board will tour several farms in the Agricultural Reserve. The ASAC will conduct another meeting before the end of October 2019.**

Since the meeting on the 16th, they finalized the Oct. 24th ag tour for the planning board. They will be touring Billy Willard's shop, Homestead Farm, Windridge Winery, and Butler's Orchard. Members of AAC are invited. This is an opportunity for the planning board to gain awareness to the challenge's farmers are having with a number of issues including the agritourism permitting process.

Montgomery Ag Producers met with the planning board over lunch on July 8th. During that meeting the MAP board asked if the planning board would be interested in going to commodity farms, learning about equipment, and driving down rural roads in farm equipment so they can see what it is like to navigate those roads with overhanging trees. This is why Billy Willard's shop is the first stop. We're hoping they will support trimming trees on rural roads.

Jeremy is encouraged by the primary author of the ag tourism committee report, Jessica McVary. She has gotten input from open space folks and farmers. She is looking to finish the report and get it to the Council soon. Hopefully, using the Farm Alcohol Production MOU between DPS and OAG as a model will be helpful in creating a formal relationship for ag tourism with the county government.

There will be one more meeting of the ASAC committee on Oct. 29th.

- 5. The Sugarland Broadband Pilot Phase I along Partnership Road is completed, and the residents service is activated. Please note that we are finally making progress with Barbara Weitzer's neighbor to obtain signed easements to extend the Comcast service for her family. The phase II of the project coming down Sugarland Road has started, and completion has been delayed due to the ride on agreements for Comcast to connect their service to Pepco poles. We are hopeful this Phase II will be completed by the end of October. The phase III of the pilot will not be built due to several residents that are not willing to sign the Comcast Easements. <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/cable/Sugarland/sugarland-comcast.html>**

Phase II has finally started, and it will include Rockland's Farm, which has signed a commercial lease with Comcast for their winery, farm, and residence. There is an incentive for Comcast to pick up all the folks on the way to Rockland's. We are expecting that Phase II will be completed by the end of October.

- 6. Update on the River Road Improvements-Linda Lewis has everything she needs to begin testing the dust along River Road. Once the tests results are determined the OAG will coordinate with the agricultural groups on the next steps. A second community meeting is being planned by the Board of Directors of MAP and the MCFB including the AAC.**

Linda said that the gravel testing for asbestos should be done either tomorrow or the next day. This is a separate collection from Chuck's collection with the extension. Linda also has a ticket from Rockville Stone and Gravel that the gravel may have harmful material in it. Linda will provide that to Jeremy to keep as evidence.

OAG will be taking Andrew Friedson on a tour of Homestead farms, Lewis Orchards, the Casey properties which the Jamison's lease, as well as Windridge Winery where the gravel road is. This will take place on Oct. 30th.

7. Follow up from the October 9, 2019 meeting between the County Executive, Special Assistant Dale Tibbitts, Bob Cissel and Michele Cropp where they discuss several agricultural issues.

Rustic and rural roads: OAG provided the CE with a copy of the executive regulations. They discussed the 17 ft. clearings, not just from the center of the roadway, but all parts of the roadway. He agreed to a three year trimming plan to have all the roads be 17 ft. clear from the surface. He asked for a list of roads that need this emergency work done.

Michele thought that DOT had a list of the 100+ rural and rustic roads. Michele pointed out that foliage has different weights depending on the season and that there may be roads that you would trim in one season over another.

Gravel Road/River Rd.: CE was resistant to discussing and he suggested that mature evergreens be planted along River R. Michele had not heard of this idea before. CE said that perhaps he had only suggested such to the Director of Department of Transportation. But Michele is not sure that mature evergreens would be effective. They might be a dust barrier if they live, but the gravel road also poses a safety issue for the people who have to drive along it, as they breathe the dust into their lungs. Bicyclists are struggling with it as well. If the dust turns out to contain hazardous materials, this could be even more serious. When the CE asked if tarring and chipping would be helpful Michele replied that it's better, but that full paving is ideal.

During AAC meeting, Chuck said that he's used evergreens for poultry farms on the Eastern Shore, but only because they act as a filter when the air is forced at the trees. The River Rd. scenario is different because the dust goes everywhere and poses risks to table food and people's lungs.

Funding for Ag Preservation: CE said he would be open to looking at two other sources of funding, the bag tax and the rain tax. Currently both funding sources are allocated to the Storm Water Management Capital Improvement Program. Farmland preservation provides higher quality air, water, and soil, from farming practices and these benefits could help justify the use of these funds. The water quality protection charge can be directly related to ag preservation due to the requirements for implemented Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans.

By the way: Delegate Eric Luedtke notified OAG that he intends to introduce a bill during the session in January that would make the county ag transfer tax be diverted to ag preservation funding rather than the general fund. It can generate up to \$1 million annually. The CE will have to decide if he supports the bill. The CE has told OAG that he's not fond of dedicating sources of funding.

8. The University of Maryland Extension conducted interviews on September 18, 2019 for the applicants that applied for David Gordon's 4-H Livestock position.

Jeremy will update the AAC as he learns more. *Please note that the new person will be starting in December.*

9. Comments from the Office of Agriculture on the MARC Rail Communities Sector Plan Sectional Map Amendment. See attached letter to the County Council.

OAG wrote this letter to the County Council. There was a public hearing today at 1:30, which is why the letter was submitted by OAG instead of AAC. The issue is that there are several overlay zones in the county, one being the Germantown transit mixed use overlay zone. It has the highest requirements for building lot termination easements of all the other overlay zones. Craig Rice has been complaining that it's not fair for the Germantown zone to absorb the majority of the BLTs of all the overlay zones, which Jeremy agrees with. There are down county commercial/residential zones that are the underlying Euclidian zones. Developers can choose the standard method of development to achieve their projects (square footage and densities, etc.). If developers choose an optional method of development, then the requirement of the overlay zones must apply and the requirements in the underlying commercial/residential zones are forgotten. All of the overlay zones in the county, with the exception of the Germantown overlay zone, don't have the 50% BLTs requirement. We don't want to reduce BLT densities in the county because this would negatively impact the farmers, but there is an equity issue that needs to be addressed. We need to create more opportunities and more demand for TDRs and BLTs in the overlay zones. The primary reason that we're not seeing demand for TDRs and BLTs is due to a statement in the zoning code about when there are ambiguities in requirements of overlay and underlying zones, the overlay zone rules. The Germantown overly zone is the only zone where there are ambiguities between the overlay zone and commercial/residential zone, which means that Germantown must absorb more BLTs than any other overlay zone in the county.

10. Additional Items

- This is chuck's last meeting in his official capacity. We'll miss you, Chuck!! Thank you for your service!

Jeremy is currently working with folks to explore bringing Chuck back on contract to build capacity for things we must have like pesticide certification. OAG relies on Chuck for farmer certification, the equipment share program, the beginning farmers program, and many other things. Extension is going to be replacing his position with a faculty tenured position, but Chuck has been so helpful and supportive in the past and has served as an agronomist and a horticulturist.

- Close Encounters with Ag is coming up!

11. Adjournment: 8:22 PM (Driscoll/Cropp)