

**Agricultural Advisory Committee
September 17, 2019 Meeting Minutes**

Attendees: Lori Larson, Pete Driscoll, Linda Lewis, Michele Cropp, Eleanor Leak, Ben Allnut, Len Yourman, Jane Evans, Doug Lechluder, Debbie Tropp, Aliza Silver

Staff: Jeremy Criss

Guests: Steve Robinson

Agenda items are in bold and minutes are not bolded.

1. **Call the Meeting to Order and Introductions: 7:05 pm.**
Debbie Tropp is a new non-farmer member of the AAC. She is a member of the Food Economy Working Group of the Food Policy Council and she retired after serving 26 years at the USDA.
2. **Approval of the AAC meeting minutes from August 20, 2019.** Approved as corrected. (Driscoll/Lewis)
3. **Update on the Farm Alcohol Production Facilities-FAPF-The DPS has provided the draft Memorandum of Understanding between the OAG and the Department of Permitting Services to assist with the implementation of Farm Alcohol Production. Jeremy will report on the recommendations from the County Executive to address the challenges for obtaining commercial building permits on farms that offer FAPF and agritourism activities.**
At the last AAC meeting, Jeremy gave the committee the application. Both OAG and DPS will sign off on farm alcohol production applications. The first applicant is Lone Oak Farm Brewery, a small scale cidery outside of Gaithersburg.
4. **Follow up discussion from the Agritourism Study Advisory Committee-ASAC meeting from September 16, 2019. The study and report recommendations will provide a menu of options for the Committee to consider. Jeremy will bring copies of the draft report of the ASAC to the meeting for the Committee to review.**
The AAC has until September 30 to review the draft that Jeremy provided to AAC tonight. The first meeting of the ASAC was November 29, 2017. The report outlines all the potential solutions and mechanisms for achieving them. The planning staff plans to schedule a briefing with the planning board, along with tours of ag tourism venues. They are considering October 24. They would like the briefing to be before the end of October and the remittance of the report to be sent to the Council before the end of 2019.
Linda asked about the difference between entertainment and direct sales. She is listed as entertainment, when she believes she should be direct sales. Jeremy explained that pick-your-own and tasting rooms would qualify your operation to be entertainment. Debbie asked why farms should be limited to just one category. Jeremy explained that the attempt at categorization isn't intended to be used for any sort of map.

Linda asked why not all 558 farms in the county are on the list. Jeremy answered that it's only the farms involved in retail sales. Lori asked why her equestrian farm isn't on the list under education or entertainment.

Jeremy will go through the list again to verify the accuracy of the categorizations. Jane and Michele raised a concern about page 23 of the report. It lists household income, which is misleading depending on how the figures are used. Many people in the ag reserve have nothing to do with farming and are still included in the chart.

- 5. The Sugarland Broadband Pilot Phase I along Partnership Road is completed, and the residents service is activated. The phase II of the project coming down Sugarland Road has started, and completion is scheduled by the end of September. 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>

Jeremy is confident Phases I and II will be completed by the end of this month. So far, there is no progress with the Weitzer' neighbors.

- 6. Update on the River Road Improvements- Jeremy met with the CE, CAO and Fariba Kassiri on September 3, 2019 and the River Road was one of the discussion items. Jeremy asked if the CE knew why gravel roads in the County were tar and chipped during the 1970s. Jeremy explained that it is common for asbestos fibers to be found in certain types of rock that are used for making gravel. The MAP Board of Directors support a second community meeting be sponsored by the AAC, MCFB and MAP at AHFP. The MCFB did not meet on September 3, 2019 and therefore this will be discussed at the October meeting.**

Jeremy was encouraged by the meeting. They listened to his suggestions about raising the standard for what OAG is doing and how they can promote farm alcohol production and ag tourism, and to expand bus tour groups to the ag reserve. Next week they are taking the current class of Leadership Montgomery fellows around the ag reserve.

With regard to the River Road Improvements, the CE said that they're only going to apply magnesium carbonate, which he called a moistening agent. Jeremy recommended adding up the cost of reapplication, staff, fuel, and the annual costs and then comparing that to the cost of tarring and chipping, which is likely more cost effective in the long run. Jeremy explained that Linda is going to be doing testing of her own on the gravel and dust. The CE is going to follow up with DOT. The Montgomery County Farm Bureau of Montgomery Agricultural Producers would like to host a community meeting on the subject, but will wait until after the results of Linda's tests come back.

- 7. The County Council will be hosting an Agricultural Breakfast on Tuesday September 17, 2019 at 8:00am. Following the breakfast, the County Council will present three Proclamations-100th Anniversary of Montgomery County Farm Bureau, Robert Stabler 2018 Agricultural Leadership Award, Ben Allnutt, Montgomery County Agricultural Hall of Fame.**

The event was well attended and well organized. Seven of the nine county councilmembers were present for the breakfast and award ceremony.

Jeremy spoke with the councilmembers about the CE's proposal for "Turning the Corner," the administration's performance based budgeting and zero-based budgeting – so offices have to start at zero and defend their entire budgets including staff. This will make all office directors compete directly for the limited county resources. The councilmembers didn't seem to have heard of the plan, which is concerning to us. Yet, all councilmembers present at the event repeated that they want to make sure that OAG and Jeremy have the resources they need to do their job and to support the county's farmers.

As of now, Jeremy hasn't heard anything more about pending budget cuts.

8. Additional Items

- a.** Evan Glass is interested in increasing composting of food waste and on farm composting, so Jeremy put him in touch with Aliza and Adam Diamond, who was the chair of the on farm composting working group, which Aliza served on. He also connected him to Ben Parry, the new owner of the Compost Crew.
- b.** Linda called Leslie Wilcox about the bag tax and learned that she can give the produce plastic bags for free but must charge five cents for the white "thank you" bags. Jeremy is going to call the Dept. of Finance (Mike Coveyou, the Acting Director) to straighten this out. In the County Code there is an exemption for produce at farmer's markets.

9. Adjournment: (Larson/Cropp)