

Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes

August 12, 2025

7:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm.

1. Introduction

Board Members: Randy Stabler, Nick Magliato, & Tom Hoffmann.

Staff: Mike Weyand

Guests: Don Burrows

2. Approval of Minutes

Hoffman motioned to accept the minutes; Magliato seconded, and the motion carried.

3. Board Requests

None

4. AEP/BLT/TDR Easements

a. Update – FY25 AEP Easement Acquisition

The Office of Agriculture is moving forward with the acquisition of FY25 AEP easements.

b. Update - BLT Executive Order

The Office of Agriculture is drafting an executive order to update the pricing of BLT and AEP easements. The County attorney will be reviewing the executive order and advising the Office of Agriculture on the next steps. Weyand will be sure to keep the board informed as things move forward.

5. Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) Easements

a. Update - FY25/FY26 MALPF Easement Acquisition

The Office of Agriculture is moving forward with the acquisition of FY25 MALPF easements.

6. Rural Legacy Program (RLP) Easements

None

7. Easement Monitoring & Inspections

a. Inspection & Reporting Monthly Update

All easement inspections conducted during this period were compliant, and no violations were noted. Inception reports were sent to the state, fulfilling state monitoring requirements.

8. Legislative activities

a. July 28 – Agritourism Work Session Recap - Economic Development Committee

On July 28, the County's Economic Development (ECON) Committee, which includes members Fani-Gonzalez, Balcombe, Glass, and Laurie-Anne Sayles, convened an agritourism work session. During the meeting, several important topics were discussed.

One of the key points addressed was the Maryland Department of Agriculture's report on 'Value-Added Agriculture & Agritourism.' This report is expected to outline various opportunities and challenges related to value-added agriculture. Additionally, the committee reviewed the context surrounding the Maryland Department of Commerce's upcoming Agritourism Study, which will build on a 2019 Montgomery Planning Study on Agritourism. Notably, the Office of Agriculture (OAG) was mentioned in this agritourism study, which focuses on the economic development and the tourist and visitor economy within the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve. Although the study was authorized, it lacked dedicated funding, and staff from Commerce mentioned that it would primarily rely on existing research, readily available data for the agricultural reserve.

Furthermore, an update was provided on a wayfinding grant from the Office of Agriculture. As part of the State of Maryland's FY25 Budget Bill, specifically SB 360, the Office of Agriculture will receive a \$25,000 grant from the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). This funding will be used to create roadside signage for agritourism businesses within the county.

Lastly, the committee discussed Visit Montgomery's efforts related to agritourism work and the Rural Branding Strategy. A follow-up community meeting is planned for this fall to take place after the completion of the MDA Value-Added Report, ensuring that stakeholders remain engaged and informed as these initiatives progress.

b. MC 15-25 – Dept. Commerce – Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve Study

During the 2025 Legislative Session, the Maryland General Assembly passed House Bill 1228 "Requiring the Department of Commerce, in coordination with certain county agencies and organizations, to study economic development in and the tourist and visitor economy of the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve and, on or before June 30, 2026." The study aims to develop a deeper understanding of the impact that the tourist and visitor sectors have on the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve.

c. ZTA 25-05 Development Standards - Optional Method Public Benefits

ZTA 25-05 passed the Council on July 29. The effective date was moved to January 1, 2026, but you can start preparing for the changes to the TDR/BLT programs

d. Bill 18-25, Forest Conservation – Trees

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

This coincides with the State’s definition except for the one-inch caliper threshold. This County Bill would also exempt photovoltaic arrays from the afforestation requirements specified in this chapter, in accordance with State Senate Bill 526. The OAG remitted the ABAP’s written testimony to the County Council. The public hearing was held on July 8, and the Transportation and Environment Committee recommended removing the 1-inch caliper.

9. Solar/Energy

a. Update - Solar Project

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.

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. Given that the proposed project conforms to the county’s zoning standards for community solar projects in the AR zone, the OAG submitted a letter of support to the Planning Department, as required for the application to be approved.

10. Other Business

a. Recap - July 26 & 27 Annual Farm Tour & Harvest Sale

Over 27 farms from around the county participated in the 2025 Farm Tour & Harvest Sale. The weekend was very successful, with great weather and many farmers reporting large participation from county residents.

a. Upcoming Meetings and Events

- August 8-16 – MOCO Agricultural Fair
- September 1 – Labor Day (County Closed)
- September 12 – MSCD Board of Supervisors Meeting
- September 18 – SCD Cooperators Dinner

The meeting went into closed session at 8:05 pm.