

Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes

September 9, 2025

7:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm.

1. Introduction

Board Members: Randy Stabler, Nick Magliato, Wade Butler, Tom Hoffmann.

Staff: Mike Weyand

Guests: Jake Adler, Don Burrows, Kelly Groff, Mikey Stotz

2. Approval of Minutes

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

3. Board Requests

None

4. Visit Montgomery Study

a. Agritourism & Rural Branding Study

Staff Weyand introduced Kelly Groff, President and CEO of Visit Montgomery, who presented the Rural Branding Strategy. Visit Montgomery, the county's official destination marketing organization, is spearheading this initiative to support the long-term vitality of Montgomery County's rural communities, particularly the Agricultural Reserve. The strategy aims to create a cohesive identity for the region that honors its agricultural heritage, promotes responsible agritourism, and supports rural economics.

Weyand provided background on the data collection process, which included:

- A 2024 focus group with creameries, pick-your-own operations, and farm alcohol producers.
- A 2024 survey distributed to all farms working with the County's Office of Agriculture, yielding 260 responses.
- A 2025 focus group was completed with several farmers.
- A June 2025 survey targeting table food producers and farm alcohol producers, with 23 responses.

Following the presentation, board members engaged in a discussion about the scope and direction of the branding strategy. Board members expressed concerns that the study may disproportionately reflect the interests and perspectives of agritourism-oriented operations, potentially overlooking the needs and challenges of production agriculture businesses that do not engage in tourism.

Additional concerns raised by the board included:

- The feedback collected from the agricultural community may not have adequately captured the voices of commodity crop producers, livestock operations, and other non-tourism-based farms, leading to an unbalanced portrayal of the agricultural community.
- Increased promotion of agritourism could lead to higher volumes of visitor traffic on rural roads. These roads are often used by large farm equipment, such as combines and tractors, and are not designed to accommodate high volumes of passenger vehicles. This could create safety hazards and logistical challenges for farmers during peak planting and harvest seasons.
- A branding strategy that emphasizes tourism may inadvertently encourage land use changes or development pressures that conflict with the preservation of productive agricultural land.
- There is concern that future funding, zoning, or regulatory decisions could favor agritourism operations at the expense of traditional farms, especially if the branding strategy becomes a central driver of rural economic policy.

Board members emphasized the importance of ensuring that agriculture—not tourism—remains the central focus of the rural branding effort. They requested access to the survey data and encouraged Visit Montgomery to continue engaging with a broad cross-section of the farming community to ensure the strategy reflects the full diversity of agricultural operations in the county.

5. AEP/BLT/TDR Easements

a. Update – FY25 AEP Easement Acquisition

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

b. Update - BLT Executive Order

An executive order is being drafted to update the pricing structure for BLT and AEP easements. The County Attorney is reviewing the draft, and the Office of Agriculture will keep the board informed of developments.

c. Chapter 2B Regulation Update

The Office of Agriculture is working on updates to Chapter 2B regulations. These updates will modernize terminology, incorporate a new program for TDR purchasers, and potentially revise requirements related to FLHU acreage, tenant houses, and child lot provisions (possibly extending to grandchildren). Staff will continue to update the board as this process evolves.

6. Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) Easements

a. Update - FY25/FY26 MALPF Easement Acquisition

The Office of Agriculture is proceeding with FY25 MALPF easement acquisitions.

7. Rural Legacy Program (RLP) Easements

No update.

8. Easement Monitoring & Inspections

a. Inspection & Reporting Monthly Update

All easement inspections conducted during the reporting period were found to be compliant. No violations were found, and reports were submitted to the state to fulfill monitoring requirements.

b. DPS Policy Memo 25-300

No update.

9. Legislative activities

a. [MC 15-25 – Dept. Commerce – Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve Study](#)

The Maryland General Assembly passed House Bill 1228, requiring the Department of Commerce to study economic development and the visitor economy in the Agricultural Reserve. The study, due by June 30, 2026, will:

- Assess the impact of tourism and visitor activity in the Reserve.
- Recommend policies to support small businesses, recreation, and historic sites.
- Promote and preserve the Agricultural Reserve's economic and cultural vitality.

10. Solar/Energy

a. Solar Projects in the Agricultural Reserve

- Chaberton Sugarloaf Project (20507 Darnestown Rd, Dickerson): 4 MW array; PSC decision due August 15, 2025 (delayed).
- Chaberton Ramiere Project (17600 Whites Ferry Rd, Poolesville): 3 MW array; PSC decision due December 31, 2025.
- Mountain Vale Solar Project (17700 Barnesville Rd): 1.8 MW array; approved by Planning Board. Requires Hearing Examiner approval. The Office of Agriculture submitted a letter of support.

11. Other Business

a. Ag Land CIP – Budget Submission FY27-FY32

Mike Weyand informed the board that the Office of Agriculture submitted its initial FY27–FY32 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget request, focusing on continued funding for agricultural easement programs and land preservation efforts.

b. Recap - MD Secretary of Agriculture Kevin Atticks Farm Tour – September 8

Attendees included Secretary Kevin Atticks and Delegates Linda Foley, Greg Wims, and Lily Qi.

Tour stops included:

- Frozen Levels Farm
- Jamison Ag & Turf
- Song Dog Distillery

Discussions focused on multi-generational farming and the need for programmatic flexibility for farms under state easements.

c. Upcoming Meetings and Events

- September 12 – MSCD Board of Supervisors Meeting
- September 18 - SCD Cooperators Dinner @ Izaak Walton League

The meeting went into closed session at 8:35