

Agritourism Study Advisory Committee (ASAC) Meeting

Date: Wednesday, June 26, 2019

Time: 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm

Location: Agricultural History Farm Park - Large Multi-Purpose Room

- I. Welcome and Introductions**
- II. Discuss and Confirm Common Themes**
- III. Discuss Draft Agritourism Study Goals**
- IV. Agritourism Study – Preliminary Feedback on Background Sections**
- V. Next Steps**
 - a. July Meeting Date
 - b. Additional Study Sections
- VI. Adjournment**

Overarching Themes from Previous ASAC Meetings:

- Agricultural Reserve should be protected and preserved, but also evolve to enhance economic viability of farming and agricultural land.
- Evolution of the agricultural reserve since its establishment.
 - Traditional farming activities have diversified to maintain economic viability.
 - Education and awareness – how and why do we have the ag reserve
 - Ongoing agritourism activities and events are increasing.
- Challenges to supporting agritourism today, as well as in the future, include:
 - An inconsistent, undocumented process for agritourism businesses.
 - Adequate facilities to accommodate events.
- Competing uses and insufficient maintenance of Rustic Roads.

Potential Goals:

- Protect and preserve farming, farmland and rural open space in the Agricultural Reserve.
- Support existing and future agritourism activities through improved processes for agritourism businesses and promotional tools.
- Create agritourism activities with a direct nexus to agriculture, to facilitate preservation of farming, farmland and rural open space.
- Increase awareness of assets of the Ag Reserve, including education of agricultural practices and better wayfinding.

Agritourism Study – WORKING DRAFT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Study Vision

Abbreviated Purpose and Need

Overview of Considerations and Potential Solutions

INTRODUCTION

Study Background - (History and Context)

The Agricultural Reserve, established in 1980 with the adoption of the *Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan*, is a land conservation policy designed to protect farmland, agriculture and rural open space. The result of decades of planning and policy development, beginning with the 1964 *General Plan (On Wedges and Corridors) for the Physical Development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District in Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties*, the “Ag Reserve” allows preservation of agricultural and rural open space by concentrating growth and development along defined corridors and population centers. It includes 93,000 acres – nearly a third of the county’s land – and extends along the county’s northern, eastern and western borders – from the Patuxent River to the Potomac River.

While the *Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan* enabled preservation of agriculture, farmland and rural open space, it did not anticipate the growing importance of agricultural tourism to the ongoing preservation effort. Increased interest in agricultural education, tourism and entertainment has prompted discussion about opportunities to enhance the economic impact of the Ag Reserve.

Emerging issues in agricultural tourism, including farm-to-table activities, small-scale wineries, breweries, and distilleries, culinary tourism and agricultural education were historically addressed on an individual basis. However, the Zoning Text Amendment Number 18-03 (ZTA No. 18-03) concerning Farm Alcohol Production Standards, adopted and effective in October 2018, sought to promote new wineries, breweries, distilleries and cideries through clarification of regulatory processes and promotion of economic development incentives. Despite the clarity provided by ZTA No. 18-03, ambiguity in agritourism remains. This ambiguity results in conflicts and precludes a comprehensive approach to agricultural tourism.

Relevant Plans and Studies

Existing plans and studies, including the 1980 *Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan* and the 2002 *Montgomery County Heritage Area Management Plan* establish a framework for the preservation of agriculture, rural open space and cultural heritage, and seek to celebrate the county’s farming history. As these plans represent the initiation of agricultural preservation and the recognition of an evolving Ag Reserve, they are foundational resources for the Agritourism Study.

Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan

The 1980 *Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan* established specific agricultural and rural open space preservation recommendations, including incentives and regulations designed to mitigate development pressure and promote the preservation of agriculture and rural open space. The 1980 Plan focused on the preservation of farmland, but also established a policy framework to contribute to the continuation of farming in Montgomery County, through the separation of development rights from farmland.

The Plan identified several tools to preserve agriculture and rural open space, including the Ag Reserve, a zoning district created for the primary agricultural preservation areas, Rural Residential Zones and the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program, a mechanism designed to compensate land owners in the Ag Reserve for transferring residential development potential from the farmland preservation areas into areas of the county better suited for growth.

The TDR program, paired with a sustained commitment to agricultural tourism and preservation of farmland by Montgomery County's Office of Agriculture, has helped retain more than 500 farms which contribute to the county's economy. The retention of 500 farms and their economic contributions to the county, are particularly notable in a metropolitan region where development pressures remain perpetual and intense.

Montgomery County Heritage Area Management Plan

The *Montgomery County Heritage Area Management Plan*, completed in 2002 for the Montgomery County Heritage Area Advisory Committee, sought to elevate the prominence of the county's heritage for residents and visitors and strengthen the connection between the county's history and future. The Plan focused on three themes of the county's heritage: Farming History; Quakers and the Underground Railroad; and Technological Innovation. The Plan recognized the value of tourism and economic development to sustain the county's agricultural and cultural heritage and established a strategic direction, action items and a framework for implementation to celebrate the county's heritage.

Existing Conditions

Add Existing Conditions Data: Description of working farms, agritourism venues, other relevant data/information.

In recent years, as the number of dairy, cattle and crop farms has diminished in the county, specialty farming has to some extent replaced those more traditional farm activities. Interest in locally grown products has prompted the establishment of farms specializing in farm-to-table activities. Small scale farming of food products needed in international cuisines allows the county's increasingly diverse population to grow and serve products ordinarily native to other lands. Wineries and breweries have begun to share farmland, growing some ingredients on their land and including events—wine and beer tasting rooms, for example—that attract increasing numbers of visitors to the Ag Reserve. These activities enable county farmers to enhance their incomes and continue working the land, preserving agriculture while fostering economic development.

The County has also started to link farming and education. A new facility in the Ag Reserve will provide land for grape cultivation and include facilities to convert grapes into wine and will also partner with the local schools and universities to provide training for students in planting, managing and harvesting crops. The facility will be part of an effort develop degree programs in fields that support agriculture and associated economic development.

Relevant Stakeholders

Agritourism involves a range of stakeholders, from business owners, farmers and residents in the Ag Reserve to residents of Montgomery County and the Washington Metropolitan Region. Stakeholders include farmers, land owners, artisans, equestrian operations, farm alcohol producers, event hosts, environmentalists and preservationists. While these stakeholders are most directly affected by agritourism, all County residents benefit from the existence of and the ability to visit the Ag Reserve.

Study Purpose and Need

Increased interest in agricultural education, tourism and entertainment have allowed farmers to diversify their business, while preserving the farmland. Apart from equestrian events and the recently adopted ZTA No. 18-03, governing wineries, breweries, distilleries and cideries, agritourism venues and events have been discussed and addressed individually as these initiatives have emerged. The Agritourism Study seeks to develop a comprehensive, countywide approach to land use and zoning strategies for agricultural tourism.

This study attempts to identify and assess opportunities and constraints for the evolution of the Ag Reserve, including agricultural activities that have expanded beyond traditional farming, to preserve and sustain agriculture in Montgomery County. The study's underlying aim is to encourage activities—agricultural education and agritourism—that increase residents knowledge and understanding of the county's Ag Reserve, enhance its attractiveness as a destination and support its farms and the families that operate them, while preserving the integrity of the agricultural culture and heritage.

STUDY PROCESS / OUTREACH

Agritourism Study Advisory Committee

The Planning Department formed the Agritourism Study Advisory Committee (ASAC) in October 2017 and formally invited members of the agricultural community, industry experts, governmental representatives and community members. The role of the ASAC is to review the progress of the study and provide guidance at key intervals or decision points during the development of the study. The representation on the ASAC is intended to provide a balanced discourse on the current issues, impacts and status of Agritourism in Montgomery County.

Agricultural Reserve Community Outreach and Engagement

Consultant Assistance

DESCRIPTION OF CONSIDERATIONS

MENU OF POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

CONCLUSION

APPENDIX: COMPARATIVE REVIEW AND CODE ANALYSIS

STATE	JURISDICTION	Code defines agritourism or similar term	How agritourism is regulated (e.g., separately, as accessory use to agriculture)	Separate regulations for farm-based craft beverage operations	Specific event criteria for agritourism uses	Minimum requirements for on-farm production and/or local/regional products	Ag. Land Preservation (voluntary vs. mandated; temporary vs. permanent)	Agritourism Promotion/Branding Program (e.g., farm trail, local products brand, etc.)	Jurisdiction Highlights
CA	SAN DIEGO COUNTY	Yes	Accessory to agriculture	Yes	Yes	Yes	Voluntary programs (Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement program; California Williamson Act)	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close-in metropolitan location with significant development pressures No weddings or for-profit events allowed Relatively limited/restrictive definition of agritourism Tiered winery ordinance (four categories with differing requirements) Tiered requirements for on-site production and “locally-grown”
	SONOMA COUNTY	No	Agritourism not called out specifically in code	No	No	Yes	Voluntary preservation programs (California Williamson Act)	Sonoma County Farm Trails www.farmtrails.org/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agritourism not specifically called out in the code; addressed in General Plan Many agritourism events regulated under broader “Special/Cultural Events” category; smaller farms subject to many of the same event requirements as larger operations (e.g., wineries) County has Agricultural Ombudsman position to help agricultural producers navigate permitting and agency review processes Sonoma County Farm Trails initiative to promote agritourism; managed by non-profit organization.
MD	FREDERICK COUNTY	Yes	Separate permitted use	Yes	Yes	Yes	Voluntary programs (CREP Easements, Critical Farms, Installment Purchase Program (IPP), Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation program, Maryland Rural Legacy)	Homegrown Frederick http://www.homegrownfrederick.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently added “Farm-Based Craft Beverages Promotional Events” definition and criteria. Activities that meet definition of “agritourism” allowed by-right in all zoning districts. Streamlined building permit process for tasting rooms.
	HOWARD COUNTY	Yes	Accessory to agriculture	No	Yes	Yes	Voluntary programs, including purchase of agricultural preservation easements, dedication of agricultural preservation parcels, and 75% property tax credit.	HoCo Farms www.HoCoFarms.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses “Special Farm Uses” permit with small, one-time fee to track allowed agritourism uses. “Agritourism enterprises” are an accessory use to farming operations, and must have a tie to education, recreation, or active involvement in the farm operation. Agricultural Ombudsman runs four programs, coordinates between agencies, and assists with legislation; multi-departmental subcommittee coordinates agricultural issues in County Executive’s office.
NY	SUFFOLK COUNTY	Yes	Accessory to agriculture, but varies by town	No (regulated by individual towns)	No	Yes (also regulated by individual towns)	Purchase of Development Rights program	Choose LI www.chooseli.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nation’s first Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program. Recently modified County code to allow certain structures for agritourism uses on agricultural preservation land preserved through PDR program (County won multi-year legal battle over this). Individual towns control zoning and own PDR programs. Criteria regarding allowable agritourism uses defined by towns and individual landowners in covenants to PDR easements. High land costs, but affluent customer base; agritourism revenue more than doubled in a five-year period. Appointed Farmland Committee grants permits and approves events.

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OR	CLACKAMAS COUNTY	No formal definition but term used and defined in ordinance.	Accessory to agriculture	No	Yes (includes state requirements)	Yes	Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) District per state law; urban growth boundary	Oregon Farm Loop https://oregonfarmloop.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Per state law, the County has an “Exclusive Farm Use” District, located on the edge of the Portland Metro urban growth boundary. Agritourism is a permitted commercial use in the Exclusive Farm Use zone, as long as it is connected to agriculture. Agritourism events strictly “incidental and subordinate” to agriculture; can occur to a limited extent without land use approval. “25% Rule” income threshold: incidental and non-farm uses can account for 25% of total income for a range of agritourism uses. Part of Oregon Farm Loop program, managed by a nonprofit organization.
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VA	ALBEMARLE COUNTY	Yes	Separate permitted use	Yes	Yes	Yes	Acquisition of Conservation Easements program; Agricultural and Forestal Districts program	Agritourism travel trails https://www.albemarle.org/departments/visitors&department=visitors&relpage=19046	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2014 zoning revisions to ordinance provided County’s interpretation of “substantial impact,” per Virginia agritourism law. 2017 revisions clarified the requirements that farm wineries, breweries, and distilleries must meet in order to host weddings. Tiered approach to events identifying those that may occur by right and those requiring either a zoning clearance or special use permit. Tiers based on type of activity, the number of vehicle trips generated, number of attendees, site size, and the square footage of structures for farm sales. Zoning clearance process provides option for lower-cost administrative review for events that do not exceed certain thresholds. Ordinance includes requirements for bona fide agricultural production to conduct agritourism events and activities; minimum acreage requirements for farm wineries and breweries.

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VA	LOUDOUN COUNTY	Yes	Separate permitted use	Yes	Yes	Yes	Agricultural and Forestal Districts program	Loudoun Farms https://loudounfarms.org/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad interpretation of Virginia agritourism requirements allows a range of agritourism and “agritainment” events and activities as uses directly related to agriculture. Many events (including weddings) hosted considered usual and customary at wineries and breweries. Ordinance draws a distinction between marketing events to sell a farm’s product and special events, which the County defines as leasing space out to a third party. No limit for the number of marketing events at wineries and breweries, but number of visitors and vehicles limited based on site acreage. County interprets Virginia law as stating that wineries, breweries, and distilleries are agricultural uses and therefore eligible for certain state building code exemptions.
	ROCKINGHAM COUNTY	Yes	Accessory to agriculture	No	Yes	Yes	Voluntary programs (Agricultural and Forestal Districts, land use assessment program)	Fields of Gold https://www.fieldsofgold.org/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County has largest farm receipts of all Virginia counties. Board of Supervisors resolution interpreting state agritourism requirements and terminology serves as guiding document for County’s agritourism policy. County’s key requirement is that on-farm activities “shall be accessory to a bona fide agricultural operation.” A range of agritourism uses, including event centers, are allowed by right as long as a property includes a bona fide agricultural operation. Promotes agritourism through Fields of Gold farm trail program in Shenandoah Valley. Close coordination between zoning and economic development teams on agriculture and agritourism matters.
WA	THURSTON COUNTY	Yes	Separate permitted use (within overlay district)	No	Yes	Yes	Conservation incentive programs mandated by Washington State Growth Management Act	Thurston Bountiful Byway https://www.experiencelympia.com/thurston-bountiful-byway/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopted Agritourism Overlay District (AOD) in 2011 AOD intended to streamline regulations, create economic opportunities, enable farmers to keep farming. AOD includes three tiers of agritourism uses, ranging from by-right uses to other uses requiring either administrative or Hearing Examiner review and approval. Certain agritourism events allowed by right, up to 10 days per year and a maximum of 100 people per event; larger/more frequent events require either staff or Hearing Examiner review. Bountiful Byway agritourism trail, managed and promoted through MOU with local Visitors and Convention Bureau. The County has an appointed Agritourism Advisory Committee that advises the Board of County Commissioners on agritourism issues and helps to market agritourism.