

## Agritourism Study Advisory Committee (ASAC) Meeting

Monday, September 16, 2019

Agricultural History Farm Park

### MEETING ATTENDEES

Mark Beall  
Wade Butler  
Bob Cissel  
James Clifford  
Jeremy Criss  
John Fendrick  
Ellen Gordon  
Kelly Groff  
Thomas Hartsock  
Keith Miller  
Sarah Miller

Mike Scheffel  
Jane Seigler  
Jessica Snyder  
Caroline Taylor  
Bob Tworkoski  
Steve Robinson, Madison Fields  
Kristin Fisher, Office of Agriculture  
Carrie Sanders, M-NCPPC  
Atul Sharma, M-NCPPC  
Patrick Butler, M-NCPPC  
Jessica McVary, M-NCPPC

#### I. Welcome and Introductions

Jessica McVary, project manager, welcomed the Agritourism Study Advisory Committee (ASAC) to the meeting. The meeting began with introductions of Committee members, guests and staff. Ms. McVary then provided an overview of the meeting agenda and meeting materials.

#### II. ASAC Feedback and Staff Response

Ms. McVary thanked the Committee members for the feedback provided over the summer and indicated that the staff has attempted to incorporate the feedback into the draft report, the menu of potential solutions and the study appendices.

Ms. McVary requested that the Committee members notify staff – either during the meeting or in follow-up communication - if the study materials do not accurately reflect the issues, challenges, or opportunities or if additional data or content is needed. Ms. McVary noted, for example, that additional content on heritage tourism could be incorporated.

Ms. McVary then stated that a Committee member requested that the group review the “study themes,” which were a topic of conversation at the June meeting. The Committee discussed the themes and agreed on the following amendments, represented by underline (added text) and ~~strike through~~ (deleted text).

- The Ag Reserve and its natural resources should be protected and preserved, but also evolve to enhance economic viability of farming and agricultural land, including agricultural economic development through tourism.
  - As agritourism evolves, the Ag Reserve’s unique ability to produce agricultural products ~~for the region~~ must be preserved.

- The Ag Reserve has evolved since its establishment.
  - ~~Traditional Farming activities have evolved~~ continue to evolve to ~~maintain~~ improve economic viability and to reflect diverse interests.
  - Increased education and awareness are necessary to convey how and why we have the Ag Reserve.
  - Ongoing agritourism activities and events are increasing and evolving, with an increased interest in and demand for access to the Ag Reserve countywide.
  
- Challenges to supporting agritourism today, as well as in the future, include:
  - An inconsistent, undocumented process for agritourism businesses.
  - Adequate facilities and infrastructure to accommodate events.
  - Balancing the need for flexibility ~~with~~ while applying clear regulations.
  - Inconsistent enforcement.

### III. Discuss Draft Agritourism Study – Document Organization

Ms. McVary then described the format of the draft agritourism study. She stated that the format largely aligns with the outline circulated during the May meeting but has evolved to respond to the Committee’s feedback. The draft study now includes an executive summary (including a study purpose and need) as well as relevant resources, existing conditions data, themes and goals. The draft study references the comparative review of agritourism in other jurisdictions as well as the code assessment prepared by the consultant team. The draft study also includes a menu of potential solutions, organized by the study goals. Each potential solution includes a potential mechanism or resources needed to implement the solution and prospective partners.

### IV. Discuss Draft Menu of Potential Solutions

The Committee then discussed the draft menu of potential solutions. The staff team asked the Committee to identify potential solutions that are concerning and also requested that the Committee identify any programs, partners, agencies and organizations that are absent from the prospective partners. The Committee agreed on the following amendments to the potential solutions, represented by underline (added text) and strike through (deleted text).

Potential Solution 1b: Continue to provide funding and support, including staff resources and marketing, to sustain and grow ~~the Office of Agriculture’s New Farmer Project to provide~~ mentoring and specialized business training to ~~new~~ farmers interested in agritourism.

Potential Solution 1c: Provide funding and staff resources to support the expedited review of new ~~farms and farming operations~~ and evolving agritourism businesses.

Potential Solution 1d: Relocate potential solution to Goal 5 – Provide inclusive and equitable access to the Agricultural Reserve. In addition, include Montgomery Agricultural Producers as a prospective partner.

Potential Solution 2d: A committee member suggested that potential solution 2d may require clarification, but no language was suggested during the meeting.

Potential Solution 2l: Revise potential mechanism to “enforcement” rather than “study.”

Potential Solutions 3b and 3c: ~~Revise “define agritourism as an accessory use to farming”~~ to “define agritourism in the definitions section of the Zoning Code (Article 59-1, Section 1.4.2) as: “Agritourism” includes: Accessory agricultural education and tourism activities conducted as a part of a farm's regular operations, with emphasis on hands-on experiences and events that foster increased knowledge of agriculture, including cultivation methods, animal care, water conservation, Maryland's farming history, the importance of eating healthy, and locally grown foods. Allowed activities include corn mazes, hayrides, and educational tours, classes, and workshops. The maximum footprint for any structure and the total footprint of all structures primarily used for education or tourism is limited to 10% of the total footprint square footage of all structures on the site used for agriculture. The property must have DPS approved sanitation facilities for this accessory use.”

Some Committee members expressed concern with the idea of a “tiered approach” to agritourism, as suggested in potential solutions 3b and 3c – and other Committee members supported the idea of a “tiered approach.” The Committee discussed that the tiers could be defined as the committee deems appropriate and the overlay zones, referenced in potential solution 3c could be either more or less restrictive than the base zone. It was noted that the tiered model appears to work well for equestrian events.

Potential solution 4e: The Committee discussed adding the Montgomery Agricultural Producers and the Montgomery County Farm Bureau as Prospective Partners.

Potential solution 4f: The Committee discussed adding Montgomery County Department of Transportation and Maryland State Highway Administration as Prospective Partners.

Potential solution 5d: The Committee discussed if the promotion and marketing of celebrations and festivals would result in events becoming too large.

In the context of the menu of potential solutions, the Committee also discussed:

- The need to include additional potential solutions – or strengthen the existing potential solutions – to support and promote agritourism and provide additional opportunities for agritourism.
- The need to promote the county’s high-quality products through identification of local and regional partners able to promote and market the Ag Reserve, agritourism and heritage tourism.
- Amending Goal 3 as follows: Support agritourism activities with a direct ~~nexus~~ relationship to agriculture, to facilitate preservation of farming, farmland and rural open space.
- Provide clarity on weddings and events for agritourism venues, consistent with the process currently being implemented by the Office of Agriculture and the Department of Permitting Services.
- The importance of wayfinding, especially on small and rustic roads. Committee members noted that off-site signage should be permitted on both big and small roads.
- In the potential solutions under Goal 5, add a potential solution about expanding food security programs, including WIC and SNAP to on-farm markets.

## V. Next Steps

At the conclusion of the meeting, Ms. McVary requested that the Committee provide feedback on the content of the draft study and the menu of potential solutions, as discussed below, either in track changes or by referencing the applicable page number and text.

- Is additional context or detail necessary in the study? Does the draft study accurately reflect the issues, challenges and opportunities adequately? Is anything missing?
- Are any of the potential solutions concerning? If so, which solution and why? Are any programs, partners, agencies or organizations missing? Are there potential solutions that are missing?
- Ms. McVary requested that the Committee provide feedback to her by Monday, September 30. ***(NOTE: Feedback is now requested by Friday, October 4 due to the delay in distribution of meeting notes.)***

Ms. McVary indicated that the staff will begin to develop the sections “under development” including the implementation, conclusion and resources appendix. These materials, along with comments received on the draft study and the menu of potential solutions will be shared with the Committee in advance of the October ASAC Meeting. A redlined version of the draft study will be provided to clearly see the changes that were made since the September meeting.

Ms. McVary stated that the current draft of the study really reflects progress on the content but is lacking personal stories and imagery. The staff team is interested in integrating stories and photos of existing agritourism and heritage tourism venues.

Ms. McVary stated that if Committee members are interested in sharing their story –in writing, in person or on video – as well as your photos, please contact her.

Finally, Ms. McVary mentioned that the staff team is planning a tour of agritourism sites for the Planning Board on October 24. She asked if members of the Committee are interested in hosting the Planning Board at your farm or venue, to please contact her.

## VI. Adjournment