

Agritourism Study Advisory Committee (ASAC) Meeting

Tuesday, October 29, 2019
Agricultural History Farm Park

MEETING ATTENDEES

Mark Beall	Sarah Rogers
Wade Butler	Mike Scheffel
Bob Cissel	Jane Seigler
James Clifford	Jessica Snyder
Jeremy Criss	Caroline Taylor
Michele Cropp	Bob Tworkoski
John Fendrick	Cory Van Horn
Janis Glenn	Trish Schechtman, Tusculum Farm
Ellen Gordon	Robert Kronenberg, M-NCPPC
Thomas Hartsock	Carrie Sanders, M-NCPPC
Paula Linthicum	Patrick Butler, M-NCPPC
Keith Miller	Jessica McVary, M-NCPPC
Phil Muth	

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.

Ms. McVary thanked the Committee members for their feedback on the draft study. She acknowledged that the study is a starting point for agritourism and stated that the Committee has made significant progress in developing common themes, goals and the menu of potential solutions.

Ms. McVary noted that the purpose of the meeting was to focus on the substantive revisions to the study themes, goals and potential solutions suggested by ASAC members in their written comments on the draft study. To facilitate discussion on the suggested revisions and ultimately receive clear direction, Ms. McVary indicated that the Committee members would vote on the revised themes, goals and potential solutions.

II. Draft Agritourism Study – Key Issues for Discussion and Action

a. Suggested Edits to Study Themes – Discussion and Vote

The Committee discussed recommendations from ASAC members to include two additional challenges to supporting agritourism today, as well as in the future, in the study themes. These recommendations, as well as the decision by the ASAC are noted below.

- Challenges to supporting agritourism today, as well as in the future, include:
 - Providing a clear definition of what is allowed under the agritourism definition.
 - A strong bias against preserving and stewarding historic and heritage assets which provide the context and fabric for the visitor experience.

The Committee voted to include “providing a clear definition of what is allow under the agritourism definition” as a challenge in the study themes. (82 percent of the Committee members voted to include this as a study theme.) The Committee voted not to include “a strong bias against preserving and stewarding historic and heritage assets which provide the context and fabric for the visitor experience.” (67 percent of the Committee members voted not to include this as a study theme.) Several Committee members expressed their support for preservation and stewardship of historic and heritage assets and acknowledged that these assets can provide a context for agritourism, but strongly opposed including themes, goals and potential solutions in the Agritourism Study to address these assets. Rather, several Committee members suggested a study specifically focused on heritage tourism.

b. Suggested Edits to Study Goals – Discussion and Vote

The Committee discussed recommendations from ASAC members to include two additional goals in the study. The goals, as well as the decision by the ASAC are noted below.

- Provide protection and support to existing heritage communities and sites.
- Anticipate and seek to avoid possible harms of agritourism.

The Committee voted not to include the additional goals in the study. (78 percent of the Committee members voted not to include “provide protection and support to existing heritage communities and sites” as a goal and 72 percent of the Committee voted not to include “anticipate and seek to avoid possible harms of agritourism as a goal.)

c. Suggested Edits to Potential Solutions – Discussion and Vote

The Committee discussed recommendations from ASAC members to edit the menu of potential solutions. These recommendations, as well as the decision by the ASAC are noted below.

- Establish a monitoring and enforcement program for agritourism initiatives to ensure that agritourism activities are permitted and accessory to agriculture.

The Committee voted not to include a monitoring and enforcement program as a potential solution. (67 percent of the Committee members voted not to include this as a potential solution.)

- Develop and promote a Montgomery County Agritourism website to provide resources and information for visitors.

The Committee voted to include this as a potential solution. (94 percent of the Committee members voted to include this as a potential solution.)

- Establish criteria to define the required relationship to agriculture for agritourism activities.

The Committee voted to include this as a potential solution. (76 percent of the Committee members voted to include this as a potential solution.)

- Establishment of an overlay zone for the Agricultural Reserve Zone to identify permitted uses, establish standards and a tiered approach for new agritourism venues.

The Committee voted not to include this as a potential solution. (76 percent of the Committee members voted not to include this as a potential solution.)

- Identify opportunities for “pre-event” ticketing of agritourism events to maintain appropriate event sizes.

The Committee voted not to include this as a potential solution. (71 percent of the Committee members voted not to include this as a potential solution.)

- Expand Land Link Montgomery to connect beginner agritourism entrepreneurs with experienced agritourism operators, available land, farms and resources.

The Committee voted to include this as a potential solution. (58 percent of the Committee members voted to include this as a potential solution.)

- Provide resources for Montgomery County Public Schools to provide more on-farm field trips and in-class agricultural science related curriculum for all schools.

The Committee voted to include this as a potential solution. (88 percent of the Committee members voted to include this as a potential solution.)

The Committee also discussed and voted on (by a show of hands) edits to the following potential solutions, represented by underline (added text) and ~~strike through~~ (deleted text).

- Complete a feasibility study to identify appropriate county-owned land to accommodate visitor serving uses ~~and facilities, including limited to~~ restrooms, and parking and other supporting facilities in the Agricultural Reserve which support agricultural education and tourism activities as well as historic and cultural resources.
- Define agritourism in the definitions section of the Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance (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 but are not limited to corn mazes, hay rides, 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.

~~Establish standards and a tiered approach for agricultural education and tourism activities, similar to the standards established for Equestrian Events in the Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance (Section 3.2.4), that distinguishes those that can occur as a matter of right from those that require discretionary approval (including limited or conditional use).~~

The Committee recognized that this potential solution would require a zoning text amendment and discussed that the limited uses and the limitation to the footprint of structures to 10 percent is problematic and requires revision through the zoning text amendment process.

- Periodically review evolving agritourism activities, ~~the tiered classification system, if adopted,~~ and assess cumulative impacts (positive and negative) of agritourism.
- Develop a series of agritourism and heritage tourism “trails” (e.g. winery, brewery or ice cream “trails”) to connect various agritourism and heritage tourism activities. The “trails” could be grouped by type of activity, area of the Agricultural Reserve, or means of transportation, among other categories.

III. Next Steps

Ms. McVary stated that the draft Agritourism Study would be edited to incorporate the revisions determined in the meeting. A Committee member inquired if the draft study could be reviewed by another member of the ASAC to confirm all edits were incorporated as discussed. The Committee voted that the Committee Chair, Jane Seigler, would review the document to confirm edits were incorporated.

Ms. McVary then described the Planning Department’s process for reviewing, editing and publishing the draft Agritourism Study. Through this process, images will be added to the content of the study and the content will be edited for grammatical errors. The final draft of the study will then be published for the Planning Board’s review in December, with a Planning Board hearing anticipated on December 12. *

The staff team welcomed the participation of Committee members during the Planning Board briefing. Committee members suggested that Committee representatives could be nominated to participate in the briefing. Staff accepted this suggestion.

****ASAC members requested that the study be presented on December 19 during the meeting and in subsequent email correspondence due to a previously scheduled Agricultural Legislative Luncheon on December 12. Based on this feedback, the study will now be presented to the Planning Board on December 19.***

IV. Acknowledgements

The staff team thanked the Committee members for their commitment and dedication to the Agritourism Study Advisory Committee.

V. Adjournment