

SCA July 2010 Newsletter

The problem of Spot Zoning

Calleva's proposed circulation of a draft Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) requesting special permission for the organization to operate outside the rules governing the Agricultural Reserve raises an important policy issue. Special exemptions create areas of Spot Zoning that chip away at the foundation of laws and regulations that were established to preserve the Agricultural Reserve.

The establishment of the Reserve was a bold and far-sighted move back in the 1970's and 1980's when it was not obvious how important it is to produce food close to our homes. Montgomery County today is a far different place than it was then. Development has transformed Germantown into a major city and Clarksburg is not far behind. With housing and retail outlets across the river in Virginia and similar construction moving south from Frederick County, the Reserve today appears to be an island in a sea of buildings and roads. This trend is likely to continue.

The rules that were adopted to protect the Reserve were fragile and had too much wiggle room allowing land use which does not support agriculture. Since governance is often driven by politics, there were compromises that eroded the needed protection for farming. Still, Montgomery County can be proud that it is one of the few governing bodies in the country that has attempted to protect its food production capabilities.

Spot zoning is a threat to our agricultural legacy. If current or future politicians are allowed to chip away at the already imperfect laws that protect our food producing resources, we will slowly lose what so many have worked hard to achieve. Some call it the death of the Agricultural Reserve by a thousand cuts.

Whether by ZTA, Special Benefit Permits, broad interpretations of Child Lots, or other attempts to circumvent existing regulations, we could lose our farm land, including its water resources. The Department of Permitting Services has authority to enforce the Zoning Ordinance but a lack of enforcement has become a serious threat. SCA and many other like-minded organizations will continue to raise objections to all attempts to erode our farm production. **We appeal to all citizens in our area to join us in this effort.**