

SCA Newsletter June 2009

This summer we are in the middle of a crucial planning process undertaken by the Montgomery County to determine the future of our region. The stakes are high for all present and future residents.

The county's Planning Board is conducting a study of how growth should be pushed in the next two years. It is preparing a recommendation to the County Council that will adopt a version of the growth policies for 2009-11 in November. Since the Planning Board staff members have already proposed some radical changes, an acceptance of this policy will alter Montgomery County for years.

Advocates for the protection and preservation of the Agriculture Reserve should be pleased with most of the staff recommendations. The new plans call for incentives to developers to increase housing, services and retail outlets closer to Metro stops. If you look at the maps presented on the Planning Board website, it follows the early thinking that created the corridors along major roadways for development and left the in between areas rural.

The staff points out that more dense development near the Metro stops and the development of services including schools within walking distance of residential area will reduce the need for automobile transportation in the future. The Agriculture Reserve is sited as a place for natural habitat that will sequester carbon in face of the threats from global warming.

The Planning Board is considering incentives such as providing tax credits to builders who construct near Metro stops. It also directs spending to deal with initial traffic congestion from the increased population in already crowded urban areas.

While the staff research points to fact that the Reserve now maintains boundaries that stipulate where development can occur, we know there are always exceptions. There needs to be a stronger justification for the Agriculture Reserve than just confining development to the corridors or sequestering carbon.

The Reserve should be a place where we produce food for our growing population. We propose that the Planning Board provide incentives to food producers who locate in the Agriculture Reserve and market their goods to the expanded residential base that is anticipated for Montgomery County in the coming years.

The planning process for a new growth policy is taking place this summer. Watch for announcements of public meetings or visit www.montgomeryplanningboard.org. SCA will monitor the development of the plan and keep you posted.