

**ZTA 20-01: Why it needs to be put “on hold”
July 15, 2020**

For the PHED and T&E Committees and Councilman Rice

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County is writing to register its opposition to the current proposal for commercial solar production in the Agricultural Reserve. Please note that (1) while the League of Women Voters certainly is supportive of solar energy production, (2) a rush for fast development of solar energy in the Agricultural Reserve fails to take into account numerous factors that affect climate.

The county is in the process now of working toward a well-reasoned climate action plan, and the Agricultural Reserve should be in that plan.

Therefore, the county council -- for the greater good of the county -- should postpone any further consideration of this ZTA until a well-thought-out climate action plan is completed.

Below are some more detailed reasons:

- The Agricultural Reserve has already been a bastion of climate protection for 40 years. It has contributed to clean air and energy conservation through a compact form of growth, protected the quantity and quality of water resources -- particularly in sensitive headwater areas, and reduced urban flooding because of farmland's water-absorbing capability.
- The Climate Action Workgroups have produced 850 strategies for addressing climate action reconfirms the multifaceted nature of the problem.

Consider an analysis of the impact of the numerous strategies suggested to deal with the problem.

- Rapid progress is being made in solar technology that may shortly provide more economical means for solar power generation and storage.
- While not every crop is equally efficient at carbon sequestration, significant climate protection is offered through carbon sequestration, and the trend is toward more table crops reducing the need for climate-impacting shipping of foods.
- The suggestion that opening the door to commercial solar production in the Agricultural Reserve will provide farmers with economic benefits fails to take into account that more than half of the land devoted to major crops in the county is leased, not owned by farmers.

- Landowners seeking to maximize returns would likely seek solar utilization of the land, negatively impacting farmers by reducing the land available for crop production – and thereby contradicting the purpose of the agricultural reserve.
- The opportunity for solar generation as an accessory use to farming already exists and could be emphasized if the desire is truly to support farming as well as to increase the supply of solar-generated energy.

Therefore, before any further consideration of whether the ZTA 20-01 opening of the Agricultural Reserve to commercial solar production is undertaken, the ZTA 20-01 proposal and amendments should first be considered in the light of the recommendations of the **analyzed** strategies of the Climate Action Workgroups.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our thoughts on this important matter. The issues are complex and deserve thoughtful consideration by a wide range of citizens.

Diane Hibino and Kathy McGuire, Co-Presidents
Margaret Chasson, chair, Agricultural Committee
Linda Silversmith, chair, Environmental Committee