

ZTA 20-01: Why it needs to be put “on hold”
September 9, 2020
For the Montgomery County Council

Here is why the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County strongly urges you to oppose ZTA 20-01 at this time:

The county needs first to **complete the homework** proposed in the Feb. 2020 draft of the Climate Action Plan (CAP) concerning the Agricultural Reserve. **ZTA 20-01 is premature.**

The specific CAP references are the following:

1. Clean Energy Workgroup, Strategy 2.2: Assess feasible public and private locations for solar and wind installations of various scales in Montgomery County and adjacent jurisdictions.
 - A. It will be important to ensure exclusion in the Ag Reserve of land protecting stream headwaters, slopes, forests, etc., as well as the most productive farm land.
 - B. We recognize that much of the Ag Reserve farm land is rented by farmers. This land needs to be preserved for farms, not turned to solar power use by the landowners.
2. Clean Energy Workgroup, Strategy 2.5: Support expansion of community solar
 - A. Action 2.5.1: Evaluate environmental and ecological impact of using land in the agricultural reserve for solar
3. Clean Energy Workgroup, Strategy 2.9: Strategy 2.9 – Establish demonstration projects to co-locate PV solar with agricultural production (such as grazing) and pollinator meadows.

An additional reason is that we need to give high priority to having nearby food production available because climate change is already starting to affect food supplies globally.

Therefore, the ZTA 20-01 proposal and amendments should be dropped until consideration of the analyzed strategies of the Climate Action Workgroups and consideration of the near-future need for nearby food supplies.

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. We are not opposed to solar power – **only to too-hasty passage of this ZTA** as written without first implementing the workgroup recommendations in the draft Climate Action Plan.

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

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P.S. For those county council members who have not yet seen our mid-July 2020 testimony sent to two of your committees, here are the detailed reasons we presented then:

- 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.