

An Opportunity for Ag Reserve Farmers

By Liza Wilson Durant, Ph.D.
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As part of the "green wedge," Potomac has served the Agricultural Reserve well by accepting TDRs (Transfer of Development Rights) and their associated increased density, by protecting the sewer envelop, and by pushing back on the march of highways and techways. As a result, we have 90,000 acres of farm and conserved lands at our back door with the capacity to not only dampen the environmental impact of our urban lifestyle, but to serve as the breadbasket for our community and perhaps the entire county. But where is the local food for our tables, and why are there so few farmers at Potomac's farmers market?

I think part of the answer lies in the age old economic theory of supply and demand and as it stands at present, there is more demand for commodities such as hay and soy beans than there is for locally grown table crops.

Many of us understand the benefit of locally grown food in terms of sustainability. Imagine the journey of Chilean grapes by plane and then by truck or train to our supermarket, the pesticides permitted by a foreign government, and the incredible impact on the environment from the transport of that single commodity. Then imagine the journey of grapes grown near Sugarloaf Mountain. There must be some real cost savings in terms of the environment, resources and sustainability that should be factored into the cost of the grapes so that we will choose grapes grown here in our backyard. But that is not the case.

What barriers exist that limit our access to what is available? What policy changes must be made to foster the local food movement? I read the following in the Washington Post: "Montgomery County Schools Superintendent Jerry Weast believes they are a magnet for pests. ... In a Feb. 26 memo, Weast all but banned schools from planting fruits and vegetables: 'Because vegetable gardens are a food source for pests, create liabilities for children with food allergies and have other associated concerns, the Department of Facilities Management staff has not approved gardens designed to produce food,' he wrote." Perhaps our own county leaders are among the obstacles.

Join me at our next General Meeting where we will meet with leaders in the local food movement to discuss what we can do as a community to create opportunities for our local farmers. Potomac has a 300-year history of growing and bringing food to market via horse and wagon along our rustic roads or by barge along the canal. While our farms have disappeared, we can still serve as the agents for the movement of goods to market and work towards the vision of an Agricultural Reserve that can provide food for all of us.

PLANNING AND ZONING REPORT

Hanson Farm: On March 4, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to support re-zoning the Hanson Farm on Travilah and Quince Orchard Road. It next goes to the Hearing Examiner. The Hunting Hill Homeowners Association is working to include binding conditions that will insure dispersal within the development of the MPDUs (Moderately Priced Dwelling Units). They also seek to prevent future driveways from lining Travilah Road. WMCCA promoted and achieved the same restriction on the Clagett Farm, keeping driveway access contained so Glen Road presents a white farm fence and landscaping rather than a series of driveways.

Norwood School Petition to Modify Special Exception No. S-285: Norwood School on River Road is seeking to expand again and will go to the Hearing Examiner in June. Their newest proposal includes construction of three additional buildings, the largest a 350-seat, 52,600 square foot performing arts center. Norwood's previous expansion 10 years ago caused destruction of onsite wetlands and added pavement on River Road to accommodate increased traffic. This modification will bring more intense use of the site, especially in summer. The Potomac Subregion Master Plan recommends limiting the impacts of existing special exceptions in established neighborhoods.

With four Special Exceptions in close proximity to one another, (Congressional Country Club, the German School and Connolly School), all expanding in size, where are the limits?