

Anne Arundel County Agriculture Commission

Annual Report 2022

The mission of the Anne Arundel County Agriculture Commission is the promotion, coordination, establishment, furtherance, protection, and community impacts of proposed and actual agriculture, farming, agritourism, and land preservation uses within the County.

The Commission is tasked with studying relevant and pertinent agriculturally related topics as presented by the County Executive and the agriculture community of Anne Arundel County and to report back to the County Executive with information and recommendations. The Commission serves at the pleasure of the County Executive in a format to review and make recommendations to the County Executive regarding the needs of the agriculture community.

The Commission consists of 13 voting members and 9 non-voting/ex-officio members. The Agriculture Commission met bi-monthly in 2022 on the following dates: January 13, April 21, June 16, August 18, October 13, and December 8. The Commission, as a practice, develops Committees to focus on various agricultural topics deemed relevant to the full Commission to allow for a focused group to research, discuss, and present information and recommendations to the full Commission. The current and active Committees of 2022 included: Administrative, Ag Education, Legislative and Research (Agriculture, Land and Future Research and Analysis Committee).

OVERVIEW

In 2022, The Commission discussed topics including but not limited to agriculture education programs at public schools, agriculture summer camps, dual uses on farms, farmers markets and farm stores, and urban farming. The above mentioned committees collaborated with county agencies and studied these activities extensively. On October 12, 2022, a letter was sent to County Executive Stuart Pittman with the attached recommendations for legislation.

The Legislative Committee remained in contact with county agencies and continued to discuss the proposed legislation.

Below is a brief summary of each committee's activities and accomplishments in 2022.

1. **Administrative:** The Administrative Committee communicates electronically prior to each meeting to discuss action items and agenda topics.
2. **Ag Education:** The Ag Education Committee met on a monthly basis and worked on the following things in 2022 to promote Ag Education in our county.
 - a. Presented to the Board of Education to promote and ask to expand the CASE Agriculture Curriculum at Southern High School, which led to the addition of AgXplore classes at Southern Middle School.
 - b. Collaborated with Recreation & Parks to develop two agriculture summer camp programs in 2023; one in plant science and one in animal science.
 - c. Continued discussion to expand urban agriculture programs in the county.

- d. Supported Friends of Rockhold Creek Barn to obtain money from Recreation & Parks to build more animal pens at Rock Hold Creek Barn for Ag Education internships.
- e. Advocated for Ag Education at several events.
- f. Participated in the Legislative Day in Annapolis, Maryland Taste of Agriculture celebration, AA Budget town hall meetings and many more.

3. **Research:** The newly established Research Committee will examine the critical issues facing the future of agriculture in Anne Arundel County. Over the past 50 years, the county's demographics have shifted from rural to urban in the northern part and to exurban in its southern region. During this period, the explosive growth of the county significantly changed the land use as large tracts of formerly agricultural land were converted into subdivisions. Agriculture also responded to this change by shifting from a tobacco-dominated economy to one that is dominated by horticulture, aquaculture, and commodity crops.

The change in zoning to require a minimum lot size of twenty acres in an RA zone has slowed the subdivision of larger parcels in the southern part. Yet, the risk of agricultural land loss to further subdivision still exists. On the other hand, this shift to smaller acreages creates risks and opportunities for small-acreage agriculture. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) considers these farm operations the most at risk and in most need of support. The County's large farm operations are also facing the risks of land loss to development, as well as the loss of basic infrastructure to support current operations.

Currently, small farms with fewer than fifty (50) acres constitute more than two-thirds of the farms in the County, while larger farms still dominate the total amount of land. Of all the types of agricultural activities, horticulture represents the largest economic contributor. In the past decades, the rate of loss of agricultural land has exceeded the loss of forests. However, forests should not be overlooked as an agricultural activity. Maintaining their health is also critical to the County's environmental health.

The Committee will analyze existing trends on the County's:

- a. Agricultural markets
 - b. Development of sustainable agriculture
 - c. Soil and forest health
 - d. Farm profitability
 - e. Land-use changes due to development, regulations, and environmental policies.
4. **Legislation:** The Legislative Committee was re-established at the June 16, 2022 Ag Commission Meeting. Members include: Anna Chaney (Chair), Shelley Garrett (Vice Chair), Gary Palmer, Gerardo Martinez, Amy Crone, non-voting members include Greg Swain, with some additional participation from various agency representatives including Lynn Miller. The committee met a minimum of twice per month from June to November, 2022 to discuss the topics presented to the legislative committee and the following actions were taken.

Topics addressed:

1. Article 18. Edits and Amendments were presented and reviewed at the August 18, 2022 and the October 13, 2022 Ag Commission Meetings, to include the topics of:
 1. Definitions specific to farms, aggregation, farm stands and markets.
 2. Dual Uses with conditions
 3. Agricultural Uses
 4. Farm Vehicle Storage on Farms

Legislative Committee continued to meet and make edits with office of law and agencies Draft legislation is ready for any further discussion, to be voted on at the February 2023 meeting.

2. Article 15. Amendments were drafted by the legislative committee during committee meetings in June, July, and August 2022, presented and voted on August 18, 2022 and passed unanimously.
 1. Amendments to the Construction Code on behalf of Agriculture included exemption from building permits for structures for primary agricultural and value added processing, as well as buildings used for agritourism purposes for up to 200 guests with Fire Marshall approval
 2. Letter of recommendation was sent to the County Executive in October 2022 supporting this legislation.