

Anne Arundel County Agriculture, Farming and Agritourism Commission

Annual Report 2019

Commission Purpose: The mission of the Agriculture Farming and Agritourism Commission is the promotion, coordination, development, furtherance and establishment of agriculture, farming and agritourism in Anne Arundel County. The Commission consists of 13 voting members and 11 non-voting/ex officio members.

The Agriculture Farming and Agritourism Commission met quarterly in 2019 on the following dates: January 17, April 18, July 18 and December 19th. The Commission, as a practice, develops Committees to focus on various action items the Commission feels should be further researched and discussed. The current and active Committees include: Education, On-Farm Weddings, Alcohol, Upper Limits, and Farm Stays.

The following outlines the committee activities of 2019:

Upper Limits Committee, Chair: Brian Riddle

At the January 17th, 2019 Commission meeting, the Commission discussed an Upper Limits Committee recommendation to separate primary agriculture processing from value-added processing and distinguish between the two definitions. Over the course of the year the Upper limits committee and the full Ag Commission have been discussing conditions that should be associated with legislation to allow alcohol production facilities, on-farm weddings and farm stays. This committee has also been involved in discussions as to what changes could be made to the current requirements with respect to the Site Development Plan process for agricultural businesses. As a result Planning & Zoning has drafted legislation, the committee has had several meetings with P&Z and other agencies, and hope to discuss and make a recommendation at our March 11, 2020 Commission meeting. (The March 11 meeting was postponed due to the pandemic and will take place Thursday April 30th, 2020).

Education Committee, Co-Chairs: Deana Tice/Dave Myers

At the April 18th meeting the Education Committee presented research to determine if an agriculture education center would be a viable option in AA County. [A copy of that report with more detailed information can be found here.](#) The concept included a plan to locate all county agricultural resource and service agencies in one complex. At the December 19th meeting the Education Committee presented a recommendation to create an Agricultural Education Center at the Naval Academy Dairy Farm.

At the October 17th meeting Dan Tootle presented on “Solving the Food Dessert Crisis in Anne Arundel County through Aquaponics”. The Commission voted to do further research into this topic and work with Mr. Tootle to determine if this could be a viable option in AA County. The Commission didn’t feel this would solve A.A. County’s Food Crisis, but it could be one tool in the toolbox. This task was assigned to the Education Committee.

Farm Stays Committee, Chair Julia Howes

This committee met approximately 6 times in 2019. In conjunction with Planning and Zoning, the committee created a recommendation to allow farm stays on farms with conditions. Planning & Zoning prepared draft legislation for our review and feedback. We plan to discuss and make a recommendation on this draft legislation at our March 11th Commission meeting. (The March 11 meeting was postponed due to the pandemic and will take place Thursday April 30th, 2020).

Alcohol Committee, Chair: Kayla Griffith

This committee met twice in 2019. At the July 18 meeting, the discussion resulted in a recommendation to draft an alcohol producer bill that would seek to better manage and regulate all on-farm alcohol production facilities in Anne Arundel County. The intention of this bill would be to provide guidance and to be inclusive of the following on-farm operations; wineries, breweries, distilleries, and facilities producing mead and/or cider. Draft legislation has been prepared by Planning & Zoning and the intent is to discuss and make a recommendation at the March 11 Commission meeting. (The March 11 meeting was postponed due to the pandemic and will take place Thursday April 30th, 2020).

On-Farm Wedding Committee, Chair: Lisa Barge

At the July 18 meeting, the Commission recommended that on-farm weddings be added to the agritourism definition in the County Code. The On-Farm Wedding Committee presented a recommendation to include a definition of farm wedding and conditions, to the full Commission. Farm weddings are now specifically allowed by state law and as per the purpose of the commission, it has been noted that farm weddings will offer a diversification option that other counties and states are successfully using as a way to improve farm sustainability and therefore to “keep working farms in farming.” The Commission members cast a unanimous vote in favor of recommending that farm weddings be added to the Code as an allowed activity in the agritourism definition as previously passed and codified per Bill 67-17. This committee is currently reviewing draft legislation prepared by P&Z for on-farm weddings in AA County. It is hoped that this will be discussed and approved at our March 11, 2020 Commission Meeting, and a recommendation be made to the County Executive. (The March 11 meeting was postponed due to the pandemic and will take place Thursday April 30th, 2020).

Miscellaneous Action:

At the December 19th meeting, James Kitchen presented a Deer pilot program involving sharp shooters on a handful of Anne Arundel County farms. The Commission voted to support the Deer Control Pilot Program as presented by Mr. Kitchen.