



## **Agricultural Resources Advisory Committee (ARAC) Annual Report**

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### **Summary**

The ARAC legislation and bylaws state that “the Committee shall advise the County Executive and County Council on issues of interest to the agricultural and rural populace, both on the Committee’s own initiative and upon the request of either branch of County government. The Committee shall submit an annual report to the County Executive and County Council summarizing its activities during the preceding year together with any recommendations or requests it deems appropriate to further the public purpose of the Committee.”

ARAC began meeting on October 17, 2018 after a monumental effort from the Prince George’s County Food Equity Council to get the Committee established. The first complete year of 2019 would have warranted an annual report completed during 2020. However, because of the pause in the conduct of ARAC meetings in 2020 due to the pandemic, the report was not completed and meetings were paused after the April 22, 2020 meeting. A total of eight meetings were held during this period, quarterly or every other month. Guests and members of the public were often present, including Council Member (CM) Thomas Dernoga, District 1; Council staff members from CM Dernoga’s Office and CM Monique Anderson-Walker’s Office, and County Council senior policy staff.

The Committee resumed meeting on July 27, 2022. This annual report shall cover the period up to the pause in 2020. Topics covered include purpose of ARAC, accomplishments, membership, briefings and presentations, recommendations, and requests.

### **Purpose of ARAC**

ARAC was enacted by [CB-07-2012](#), establishing the Committee to serve as a link between the farming community and local government. The powers and duties of ARAC are as follows:

1. Serve as the central point of information for the farming community regarding governmental programs affecting agricultural operations;
2. Advise County government regarding the effect on agricultural operations of existing laws, policies, rules and regulations;

Wednesday) to afternoons, to evening meetings were considered. The ideal arrangement for meat processing were identified as 1-slaughterhouse in the region (best), using a mobile unit located nearby (better), and on-farm meat processing on your farm (Ok or marginal).

- **Key changes to the ARAC bylaws were approved, including:**

- Changing the ARAC annual meeting to November instead of October, which would be more convenient for the agricultural community. It was unanimously approved.
- Adding that a draft annual report would be on the agenda for the August ARAC meeting, to be finalized at the annual November meeting.
- Clarifying a key function of the Agricultural Reconciliation Subcommittee (ARS) "to serve as a link to the farming community and local government." ARAC members see the ARS as a forum to help resolve conflicts regarding the agricultural community that could not be resolved within the SCD, or the Department of Permitting, Inspections and Enforcement (DPIE). The typical process of a conflict would be from either DPIE or SCD, which would refer the complaint to ARAC/ARS if further conflict resolution were required. ARS members could visit the farmer/landowner/resident to understand the nature of the conflict and report back at an ARS meeting, then provide a summary at an ARAC meeting.
- Regarding Article X, Revisions, suggested revisions to revise the Committee or Subcommittee structure would be reported to the County Council and Liaison to the County Executive for consideration to be approved but would not necessarily change the bill (CB-7-2012). Recommended and approved changes would be reflected in the ARAC bylaws, and it would be up to the County Council to decide on making any changes to the bill.

- **ARAC sent correspondence to the County Council** conveying opposition to [CB-63-2018](#), CB-64-2018, CB-75-2018, CB-87-2018, CB-88-2018, CB-89-2018. These bills presented issues near Brandywine Crossing and other areas in terms of large, mixed-use development in agricultural use zones. ARAC members agreed on stating that these bills do not follow the policies in the County's General Plan, as well as the Resource Conservation Plan in terms of rural character, and development in or affecting the Rural and Agricultural Areas.
- **Public comment period was established:** (10-16-19): ARAC began providing a public comment period at the beginning of the meeting to allow members of the public to speak for 3-5 minutes.

## **Membership**

- Chair and Co-Chair during this time period were Jo-Ann Romano, Romano Vineyard and Winery; and Brad Miller, Miller Farms.
- Discussions of membership composition and vacancies were a regular agenda item due to ongoing efforts to fill the vacant Committee positions. The ARAC legislation requires representation of the Farm Bureau, University of MD Extension, Prince George's County Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board, Soil Conservation District, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), a Non-Farming Interest, Prince George's County Association of

- MD General Assembly: [Farm Bureau Newsletter \(4-24-19\)](#)
- [CB-4-2019](#), An Ordinance Concerning Farmer's Markets Operations (4-24-19)
- [CB-13-2019](#) Permitting Eating or Drinking Establishments, with drive-through service, in the C-O (Commercial Office) Zone (6-19-19)
- [CB-14-2019](#) Amending the Definition of Urban Farming (6-19-19)
- Discussion of solar projects on farmland (6-19-19)
- James Pinkney, Agriculture student and Wallace Carver Fellow at USDA, Agricultural Research Service (invited by Paul Lovelace) shared with the Committee some of his experiences as a celebrated agriculture and environmental science major at the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore (UMES). He was accepted into the 1890 Tennessee State University Environmental Justice Academy and worked on a project to highlight the value of bringing more exposure to environmental science and agriculture within Prince George's County Schools. He was investigating why a predominantly Black county doesn't have more opportunities in the agricultural industries. He gave credit to Paul Lovelace for enriching his experiences as a summer intern at the Accokeek Foundation and the Colonial Farm, and to Donald Belle at Gwynn Park High School. (8-21-19)
- Jim Baird, Consultant, shared a grant opportunity from the Agro Ecology Center: Learning Circles for Women Farmers/ Landowners. He spoke on the initial project in Prince George's County in the fall of 2018, which was a success. The American Farmland Trust adapted from the Iowa-based Women and Food Agricultural Network, a model that identified women landowners, and especially "Non-Operating" landowners, as a demographic in great need of information and training in order to access financial and technical assistance, and establish relationships with the conservation agencies. A key component was to bring women together in "Learning Circles" for peer-to-peer training and network building. Typically, women have had to run farms after their spouses have died. (8-21-19)
- [Governor's Task Force on Renewable Energy Development and Siting, Summary](#): ARAC noted its importance for Maryland's communities, economies, and ecosystems which are feeling the effects of climate change. The Task Force goals ranged from encouraging the responsible siting of clean and renewable energy projects in appropriate places, to developing appropriate procedures for evaluating, reviewing and approving proposed solar and wind energy projects. The Task Force sought to give careful consideration to the effects of local comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances on the siting of renewable energy projects. (10-16-19)
- [CB-61-2019](#), An Ordinance Concerning Aquaponics, for the purpose of defining a new use, "Aquaponics" and including this use for golf course sites. (10-16-19)
- [CB-46-2019](#), an act concerning Prince George's County Animal Control Ordinance, for the purpose of amending provisions of the County Code regulating animal care and control, amending certain definitions; and generally relating to the requirements for comprehensive animal management. Jennifer Cross, Farm Bureau, gave a briefing on this

and movement. They encouraged the audience to food security careers, from helping to establish community and church gardens to growing oysters, to youth who can simultaneously reduce food insecurity, enhance their physical and mental fitness, and help the environment, accessing every aspect of STEM careers (science, technology, etc.) through farming. (4-22-20)

## **Recommendations**

- To have as a perk for the ARAC Chair could be their farm being pictured on the ARAC logo.
- To make Dpie and DoE aware of the meeting schedule.
- To invite Ms. Erica Bannerman, Energy Manager of the County's Sustainable Energy Program, to speak at a meeting.
- To plan a County Council briefing on agriculture in the County: Planning for a briefing began in 2019 when ARAC discussed having an in-depth briefing for the Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy, and Environment Committee, and then a briefing for the entire County Council, either at a Council hearing or a Council retreat. It would include some urban agriculture success stories, and showcasing successes in other counties and states. The timeframe discussed was in early 2020, and staff and ARAC members might elect to give brief overviews of their area of interest (i.e., forestry, livestock, equine, urban agriculture, wine industry or others). Topics might include establishing a policy on backyard chickens, drilling wells, logging, food recalls, and having more teachers who are versed in Future Farmers of America (FFA) as a subject matter in Prince George's County schools.

## **Requests**

- To allow ARAC members to recommend persons to fill vacancies.
- To allow the representatives of the USDA or PGCAR to be a non-resident as long as their area of responsibility includes Prince George's County. All farmer/citizen positions would need to be residents.
- To add a position on ARAC for a representative of the Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation.
- To complete the process of appointing two ex-officio members, to be appointed by the County Council and the County Executive.
- To have a report on the state of agriculture in Prince George's County.
- To conduct an ARAC farm tour during the spring or summer season in an upcoming year.
- To explore the possibility of encouraging or incentivizing the construction of solar arrays on rooftops, covered parking lots, or on PEPCO rights-of-way where a solar company can maintain it, and not on farmland. This was suggested through county legislation or other means.
- To include ARAC in the Department of Parks and Recreation decision-making process on making more M-NCPCC/DPR land available for farming.