

## FOREWORD

This Functional Master Plan for the Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space in Montgomery County was prepared by the staff of the Montgomery County Planning Board at the direction of the County Council with the support of the Office of Economic Development and the Montgomery County Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board and Committee.

This Plan represents a synthesis of findings expressed in the Issues and Alternatives Report for the Protection of the Rural Wedge, Poolesville Vicinity Master Plan, Olney Master Plan, Sandy Spring/Ashton Special Study Plan, contributions from individual farmers as well as the Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board and Committee, and suggestions and guidance from the Soil Conservation Service, the Office of Economic Development, and developer groups. There is adequate room for both development and agriculture in Montgomery County and this Plan provides for a comprehensive and cost-effective approach to the preservation of agriculture and rural open space utilizing traditional and innovative planning techniques.

This Plan focuses on the preservation of farmland but it also tries to establish a policy framework that will contribute to the continuation of farming in the County. Local government can control the quantity of land designated for farmland preservation, given its policy power and overall growth policies. However, local government can do little to influence the national or international food pricing policies, to influence the economics of a farm operation, or the commitment of a family to farm. Despite local government limitations to maintain farming, the fact remains that the burden of protecting the land itself falls almost exclusively on local government. However, the proposal to separate development rights from the farmland is intended to be an economic incentive to the continuation of farming.

Some specific elements of this Plan are noteworthy. It is the first comprehensive plan for the preservation of agriculture and rural open space in the County, as well as in the region, that is closely linked to an established countywide growth management program. This Plan also presents a broad range of actions necessary to develop an appropriate combination of incentives and regulations to preserve agriculture and rural open space within an urban fringe area such as Montgomery County. Integral products of the Plan are the Rural Cluster Zone, Rural Density Transfer Zone (Transfer of Development Rights), the Development Rights Bank, and the State Agricultural Land Preservation Program. The Plan, also, has identified an area that contains a "critical mass" of farmland and rural open space worth protecting in the Agricultural Preservation Study Area.

Finally, the Plan is open-ended allowing for revisions and additions as individual area master plans are completed. The open-ended nature of this Plan will help to fine tune the proposed incentives and regulations.



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Royce Hanson, Chairman  
Montgomery County Planning Board