

Re: Zoning Text Amendment to Section 59-C-18.182
April 21, 2009

My name is David Hartge. I live at 136 Haviland Mill Road. My family has lived on our farm for seven generations. We have lived in the Sandy Spring area since the arrival of James Brooke in 1728.

I am here today to encourage the County Council to adopt the Zoning Text Amendment to the Rural Overlay Zone included in the Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan. One of the central tenants of the Sandy Spring/Ashton Master plan is the emphasis placed on preserving the area's "rural character." The rural character that was identified in 1980, when the master plan was first adopted, continues to be in great evidence today.

I would like to point out two measures of rural character that are significant: The first is the amount of open space in the Sandy Spring/Ashton area. When traveling by car from Ashton, particularly east and north, one is immediately surrounded by open fields and farmland. Before the Ashton traffic light disappears from the rearview mirror, one can see fields dotted with bales of hay every spring; across the road are grazing horses.

Our farm is about a mile north of Ashton. In 1994 we placed our 70 acres in a conservation easement in cooperation with the Maryland Environmental Trust. In keeping with our belief in the value of preserving the rural character of Sandy Spring and Ashton, we have guaranteed that our farm will remain open space for perpetuity. Other families in the area have taken similar measures.

Another measure of rural character is evident in the people who live in the Sandy Spring/Ashton area. The Sandy Spring farmers prospered in the early 19th century because of their innovative farming techniques. These methods were so effective that the farmland remained productive for generations. As the crops in the fields flourished, so did the families that raised them. That is why I am sitting here today. This is one of the truly unique aspects of the Sandy Spring/Ashton area. You can read about it in the Sandy Spring Museum. While you are there you can also learn about two of Sandy Spring's most enduring institutions: The Sharp Street Church, the first African-American Church in Montgomery County, and the Sandy Spring Friends Meeting House, which celebrated its 250th anniversary a few years ago.

My family tree is populated with names that have been here for many generations. We treasure the character of our community .. Many of those who have settled here more recently have been drawn to our area by exactly that quality of rural character.

We who live in Sandy Spring are proud of our community, our history, and the land that surrounds us, and we've taken great care to preserve each of these things in a number of ways, among them: by supporting the SS Museum, helping to shape the Sandy Spring/Ashton Master plan, participating in conservation easements, keeping the family down on the farm. Please help us continue in this worthy effort by adopting the Zoning Text Amendment. Thank you.