

August 2010 Newsletter

Suburbia moves into the Agricultural Reserve

At the July 22 Planning Commission hearing, the Board approved the construction of Barnesville Oaks, a 24 house subdivision (“clustering”) on Peach Tree Road close to two other large suburban-style developments. Adding the new subdivision to existing homes in the area, there will be approximately 50 homes along a narrow, winding rustic road in the middle of the Reserve. Few of the inhabitants of these homes will have any direct relationship to farming. While a significant number of residents and community activists spoke against the proposal, the commissioners felt that the clustering of 24 new homes did not violate the current laws that govern construction in the Agriculture Reserve.

Here are facts about clustering in the RDT zone (as expressed by Royce Hanson, the former Chairman of the Planning Board), **“The RDT zone as it now reads, does not contain a regular clustering provision. De Facto clustering has occurred ... by bunching smaller lots together on relatively smaller acreage in order to preserve as much farmland as possible. An artifact of the way the zone was written ... has allowed this sort of clustering to occur.”**

Whatever we feel about this subdivision, there are crucial questions that need to be answered:

1. Do large suburban style clusters with no relationship to farming undermine the purpose of the Ag Reserve?
2. Who will pay for the impact on traffic, road maintenance, and sewer and water resources?
3. Since suburban lifestyles and farming generally do not mix what will be the future of our food and fiber production?

Part of the answers to these questions lie in proposed text amendments to the RDT zone which have been sent to the County Council. **One of these addresses the problem of subdividing RDT land for “estate” homes which have little relationship to preserving agricultural land and farming.**

Two other future measures considered by Park and Planning staff might be even more to the point. In the current revision of the zoning code a change in title to the RDT zone to Agriculture-Conservation is sought which would allow residences as an accessory use to agriculture. Guidelines will also be developed for keeping new residences in character with their communities.