



*“The Voice of Organized Agriculture”*

September 15, 2024

County Executive Fitzwater & County Council Members:

We are writing to you in response to the County workgroup “Investing in Workers & Workplaces”. As the Farm Bureau representative and the only member of the agriculture industry and as president we are deeply disappointed with the efforts made by the county and the workgroup members.

The initial concern with the construction of the workgroup was the potential conflict of interest that existed with committee members. Initially the agricultural industry, which is the largest industry in Frederick County, was ignored and left out of the workgroup.

There was no effort to discuss workforce development or education. The need for training in skilled trades was ignored as well as funding or prioritizing education at the high schools, career and tech center or community college.

There was a lack of public participation including hearing from any “workers” in the county. By limiting public comments, we lost the opportunity to hear from this target group that is in the title of the workgroup. The meetings were not recorded or broadcast to the public which removes any accountability and promotes an overall lack of transparency.

Another major concern was the “clean slate” mapping exercises that were encouraged by staff disregarded current county policy, land use designations, environmental concerns and previous planning efforts. It also ignored small area planning efforts which are community focused thereby diminishing citizens participation.

Every meeting focused on upzoning land and identifying possible locations where large tracts could be obtained. However, the need for this mass land grab was never discussed or any reasoning to why drastic changes were necessary. The assumption from county staff that the industrial tax base needed to increase did not take into account the build out of the former Eastalco property and its influence on county income, which coincidentally was the only positive that the data center workgroup could attribute to the CDI industry. The push for large industrial growth would negatively impact local resources, increasing consumption and exacerbating the ongoing controversy surrounding transmission lines.

The group discussed the destruction of agricultural preservation programs. It promoted actions that would diminish the value and integrity of the programs as well as risking the availability to farmers and greatly impacting future generation’s ability to farm. There was a complete lack of concern that agriculture in Frederick County would continue to thrive or even survive in the near future, showing an ignorance to the importance of our industry to the county and its citizens.

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