



Statement of Stephen Marley
On behalf of the Advocates for Herring Bay¹
Regarding Bill 69-20, Zoning-Farm or Agritourism Heritage Site Stays or Special Events
October 19, 2020

The Advocates for Herring Bay strongly support initiatives that provide economic opportunity in the rural parts of County while ensuring adequate protections for the environment. As noted in our October 1, 2020 letter to the Council, we are concerned that enacting Bill 69-20 in its current form could have unintended adverse impacts on the environment.² Today, we want to call your attention to what is, in our opinion, the bill's weak oversight of Special Events that will leave the program vulnerable to potential abuse by bad actors.

First, although Planning and Zoning officers would be required to determine whether an event may have a localized adverse impact, there are no enforceable performance standards for public health and environmental impacts to consider in making that determination. In addition, many of these events will occur on weekends, which will make it difficult to effectively police any except the most egregious failures to abide by the terms of the permit.

However, our most significant concern is inadequate legal protection for farmers and consumers. As currently written, there are no licensing requirements for Special Events. Without a licensing framework, it is unclear who will be liable for complying with the conditions for events—is it the farmers who lease out their land for events or is it the operator of the event? This lack of accountability leaves not only the consumer and the farmer exposed, but also denies the County a legal mechanism for assuring the health, safety, and quality of agritourism events.

We urge the Council to amend Bill 69-20 to put in place the performance standards and licensing controls necessary to ensure a vibrant and high-quality agritourism industry for which its residents can be proud.

¹ The Advocates for Herring Bay, Inc. is a community-based environmental group in southern Anne Arundel County.

² That letter outlines concerns about the absence of limits on forest loss and impervious surfaces, the risk of potential degradation of streams and wetlands, and the need to address wastewater management issues in Tier 4 areas served by septic systems. See <http://herringbay.org/pdfs/AHB-Bill-69-20-October-1-2020.pdf>