

March 7, 2011

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Montgomery Countryside Alliance Testimony
Montgomery County Board of Education Hearing March 8, 2011

Good Morning members of the BOE, I am Kristina Bostick and I represent Montgomery Countryside Alliance, we promote and protect farms in Montgomery County. We are here today to request that the board not terminate the lease to Nick's Organic Farm in order to build ball fields in Potomac. While outlets for public recreation are important, a proper public process is needed to balance public uses in our dwindling open spaces.

Nick Maravell is too humble to admit it, but he is a nationally recognized authority on organic farming, he was recently appointed to the National Organic Standards Board by the Secretary of Agriculture. For the past 30 years Mr. Maravell has been living in our community and providing a singularly important resource for area farmers and all people who eat food. The site of his farm is uniquely suited to the production of the non-genetically modified (GMO), organic seed he grows, which cannot be certified if exposed to contamination from the GMO seed and chemical applications common in the more rural areas of the County. Many local farmers depend on seed from this farm. Organic Farms take a minimum of three years to establish, by suddenly terminating Mr. Maravell's lease, the Board is effectively forcing an important small business and critical agriculture resource out of the County for good.

Montgomery Countryside Alliance has been working with the County on their stated goal of strengthening our local food system and getting more new farmers started on the ground. Current and future farmers are watching the proceedings today very closely. When land leases can be unilaterally rescinded with no notice, new farmers would be crazy to start a farm in Montgomery County, they will move elsewhere and take the health, economic, and environmental benefits of farms with them. MCPS recognizes the importance of local farms each year with the popular Farm to School program, but support for local farms needs to take place more than one week in September for these farms to survive.

Most galling is the way the County has gone about this process. Even though the BOE was supposedly not "required" to notify the public, that we are finding out about this only now is a serious breach of trust and transparency. We understand that the only opportunity for public comment was to come after Mr. Maravell's lease is terminated and a private partner is found to

build the fields. This is process delayed and therefore process denied.

Please delay your decision until the proper space and time is given to solicit and consider public input on this important issue that impacts not just the farming community or residents of Potomac but the entire County.

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K Bostick". The signature is stylized with a large, cursive "K" and a more formal "Bostick" in a smaller, slightly cursive font.

Kristina Bostick
Senior Conservation Associate
Montgomery Countryside Alliance