

Testimony by Myron Horst
of Dickerson, MD
before the Montgomery County School Board
Rockville, MD
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I am Myron Horst, a farmer from Dickerson, Md.

The current agricultural use of the Brickyard School site is important to many citizens in Montgomery Co. It is not just another corn and soybean field. There is a huge demand for locally produced food. Our farm supplies eggs to nine stores in the Metropolitan area and we cannot keep up with the demand. People want locally produced food.

Agricultural land available to produce local food is rapidly disappearing. The citizens of Montgomery County need the Brickyard property to remain in agriculture.

The current agricultural use of the Brickyard property is also very important to many of us because it is being used to produce GMO free organic corn and soybeans for seed stock. This site is unique for organic seed production because it is miles away from conventional farms whose corn and soybean fields could contaminate the seed crop with their airborne GMO (genetically modified organisms) pollen. GMO contamination is becoming a serious problem in organics. Nick Maravell also maintains heirloom and hard to find organic seeds and some of this genetic diversity could be lost.

You can be proud to have Nick Maravell farming this particular piece of land. Recently he was appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack in September 2010, to the National Organic Standards Board. The 15 member board includes only 4 organic farmers from across the nation. Nick Maravell is one of them!

Is there any private money being given to develop the ball fields? Is there a possibility that the Monsanto corporation, that is pushing their GMO seeds, wants Nick Maravell out? They have been eliminating other non-GMO seed producers across the nation through various means. Recently Monsanto has been running a lot of PR ads in this area on the radio and on accuweather.com

Please keep the Brickyard property in agriculture! It is more important than play.

Krista Kurth's public comment to the Montgomery County Board of Education on the leasing of land on Brickyard Road in Potomac.

I wish to state my opposition of the leasing of the BOE land on Brickyard to Montgomery County for the building of playing fields. I ask that the BOE renew the lease with Nick Maravell for continued use as an organic farm growing non GMO heirloom crops.

While I understand the allure of building playing fields for the children (I myself had two boys grow up playing on existing fields in MC), I strongly believe that maintaining agricultural uses in MC, especially this unique Organic agricultural use, is critical for our children. Montgomery County is rapidly losing its agricultural heritage, a vital piece of its environmental diversity and its biodiversity. Our children are losing touch with the land and where food comes from. They are not familiar with crops and the food cycle. We are losing touch and it is our job to teach them, to show them, to have an organic farm in their back yards, to drive by that field of food and see it, yes see it growing. It is rare to have as part of our daily experience in Potomac such access organic food being grown in our midst.

While I love having playing fields for our children to play on, for me the question is what is best here, at this particular location on Brickyard Road. And that is not more playing fields - there are plenty of fields at nearby schools and parks to use – as evident when my children played sports every weekend on local playing fields, but supporting the last vestiges of our founding agrarian way of life right here in Potomac in the form of Nick's Organic farm, which embodies a respect for and understanding of nature and the health of our food that is the best thing we can possibly do for our children.

On a more practical note – there are issues with traffic, and particularly busing, that will come with the development of the proposed playing fields. This should immediately be a red flag to those doing planning. This community can't support the use of these fields. You/we will have to bring the children to them. Think about that for a bit. "lets go out and play" becomes "let's drive for 20 mins, or carpool or create a busing system, to go out and play." That fundamentally doesn't make sense, and will make less and less sense as the energy and pollution needed to create those trips, those parking lots, that runoff, those streets, lighting, mowing, maintenance and a cascade of other, often unseen, costs mount up and need to be paid for. Unlike the soccerplex in Germantown, this site is surrounded by houses on big lots and has other nearby playing fields. This community doesn't have the density to support the demand, this isn't an integrated solution, it is not a planning solution that was carefully thought out...it is a poor plan based more on opportunity than common sense. This is a "we can stick it here" solution. Few who are here will use this facility, so you will drive tons of kids in and tons of kids out. Who is this for? it is not for us.

The Potomac community has also made it clear, when they completed the last Potomac

Master plan, that they do not want anything the land on Brickyard to be used for anything other than a farm or a natural park. The proposed playing field does not have the support of the community in which it would be located.

It is clear to those who look at this situation closely, that there is a significant environmental and communal downside to stuffing playing fields in a community that doesn't want them and won't use them in terms of traffic, pollution and loss of heritage. And yet, if you think about the downside of keeping an organic farm there?.....well I guess the deer are going to be happier. Maintaining the farm that has been there for more than 30 years, still allows for the sites use as a future school location. And if at some time in the future more playing fields are needed and the community changes its mind, then this proposal could be revisited then.

I think it is critical that we carefully plan the uses of our public lands and I do not find this proposed development to be well thought out. Nor has the community (or Nick Maravell) been given adequate time to discuss this issue, let alone adequate notice of this change. It feels like this decision is being stuffed down our throats, when what we would rather be eating is organic food. Nick's organic farm brings the cycle of life, the primal magic of the dirt, spring growth, summer fullness & autumn bounty and the fallow field with its latent promise....right here to Brickyard road, our own piece of partnership with the earth.