



April 9, 2024

Re: Commissioners' Hearing, Proposed Bills 2024-07 & -08,  
ZTA 23-176 & ZMA 23-02, Aviation Business Park

Good evening. I am Hal Delaplaine of 10645 Village Drive, La Plata, and I am speaking on behalf of the Conservancy for Charles County.

The purpose of the proposed Aviation Business Park Zone is to facilitate economic development that is compatible with Maryland Airport. The county asserts that this action requires the removal of more than 550 acres from the protection of the Watershed Conservation District (WCD). This action essentially would reverse the Murphy Administration's 2017 rezoning around the airport to enact the WCD. Further, this action comes on the heels of creating a new permissible use within the WCD; it allows a housing complex of up to 92 units on three acres of a 20-acre parcel that abut protected Pomonkey Forest. The WCD looks to be under sustained, coordinated attack.

The purpose of the WCD is to maintain Mattawoman Creek as functioning spawning and nursery habitat by limiting development such that the watershed's impervious surface (IS) remains 10 % or less at build out. According to Maryland DNR's Fishing and Boating Service, the 10 % threshold is based on studies of Chesapeake Bay fish habitat deterioration as development increased across the State. DNR says that 10 % is still a realistic objective for the Mattawoman but increases beyond that benchmark will result in increasingly negative, irreversible ecological shift. The Aviation Business Park would allow up to 70 % IS on 550 acres, much of which is currently forested with steep slopes and is proximate to Mattawoman Creek.

Some suggest mitigating the impact of this proposal on the Mattawoman by using a scientific approach to drawing the zone boundary which admittedly would be more difficult than ham-handed reliance on roads and parcel boundaries. Alternatively, the county could insert language prohibiting development on specific slopes and on specific, identified sensitive areas. DNR has offered to assist the county in assessing the effect of this proposal on impermeable surface within the zone and its impact on the fisheries. Without such an assessment, it is doubtful the county could know what it is doing.

I ask the commissioners to accept DNR's offer of an assessment and to defer approving this action until they have learned its result.

Hal Delaplaine, President