

Dear Charles County Commissioners,

Thank you for providing the opportunity for the public to comment on ZTA #20-156. I would first like to say that I am for the new ZTA. Charles county is situated in proximity to our nation's capital, Washington DC and this provides substantial advantages and opportunities for Charles County with regards to its economy, tourism, future development, and prosperity. I believe that Charles county is uniquely positioned to benefit from the economic activity that occurs every year in Washington DC and this new ZTA is a pathway forward towards achieving that.

In one of the most widespread measures of economic activity, GDP, we can see how the District of Columbia is one of the biggest drivers for growth in our nation. Per the US Bureau of Economic Analysis¹, the GDP of the District of Columbia is \$143.4 Billion and ranks 5th in the country. This is just within the District of Columbia and when we look at the larger DC Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) we can see that the GDP for the entire region is \$559 Billion and that DC makes up 25% of the entire DMV area. It is important to point out that the DC MSA or DMV area includes Charles County in the calculation of GDP (see Figure 1). Now when we look at Charles County's GDP by itself, we see that it is \$5.9 Billion², or around 1% of the total GDP of the Washington Metro Area. To me, this only shows the opportunity we are given to absorb or take up more of the economic activity in the DMV area.

Chart 1. Geographic designations for the 22 counties in the Washington metropolitan area

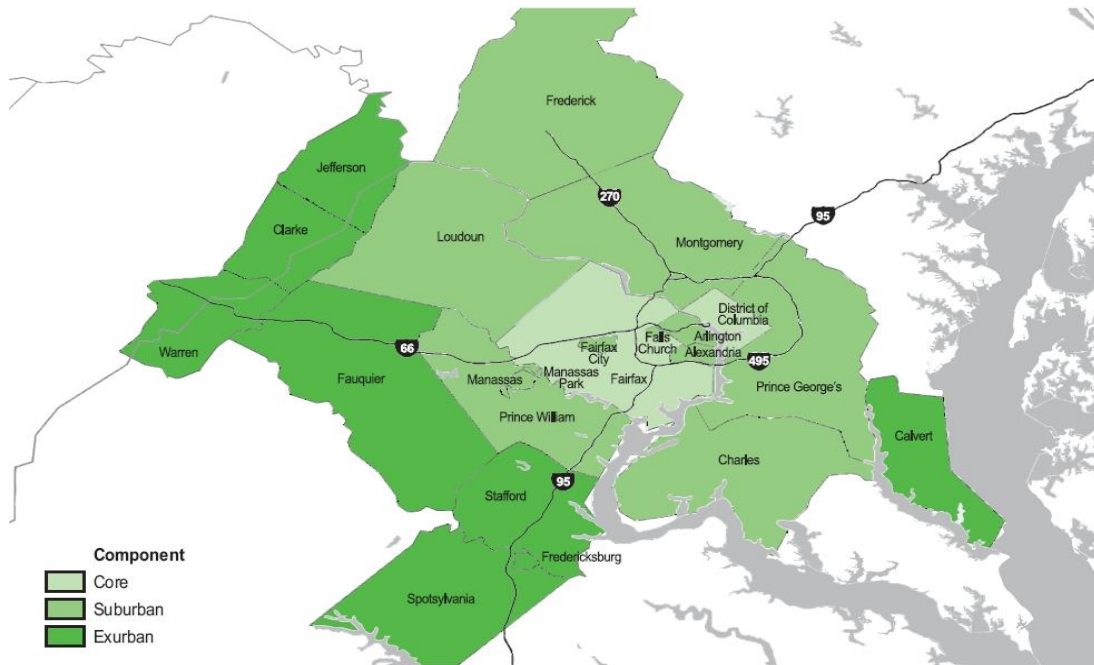


Figure 1 – Bureau of Labor Statistics – Monthly Labor Review Dec 2006

One way to help Charles County achieve this is to take advantage of the number of tourists that visit Washington DC every year. In 2019 the annual visitors to DC totaled 24.6

¹ <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/DCNGSP>

² <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/GDPALL24017>

million people and together they had spent \$8.2 Billion in DC, supported 78,266 local jobs, and provided \$896 Million in tax revenue for the District of Columbia alone³. I believe that Charles County can benefit from the large number of people that visit DC every year and can in turn can attract part of this group to visit Charles County and spend their money here and support local businesses. This will benefit the county with more tax revenue generated and in turn benefit residents as the county will have more money to spend on public infrastructure, programs, and schools.

A lot of the tourists that visit DC spend their time and money in a very urban setting visiting national museums, monuments, and historic sites. Charles County does not offer the same type of urban attractions, but this is where I think that Charles County stands out and can offer something that is uniquely 'Charles County'. Charles County boasts a large amount of rural and agricultural land and this is a feature that is hard to find in the immediate DC area. Charles County should make use of this agricultural land as an asset to attract visitors and offer an experience that does not exist in DC by making use of the rural and agricultural landscape, such as organic farm produce, agritourism, eco-tourism, and much more. This also benefits residents of the county, as more local businesses and attractions pop up, the quality of life in Charles county will also improve.

ZTA #20-156 looks to help residents make use of their land and support them in agritourism and that is why I am in favor of it. However, I believe that there are some portions of the ZTA that needs to be clarified.

Agritourism and ecotourism will be permitted with conditions in most, if not all, of the existing zones. There are certain stand-alone uses that may be considered agritourism or ecotourism. Currently, some of these uses are not permitted or are permitted by special exception in zones where agrotourism and ecotourism would be permitted with conditions. I would encourage the County Commissioners to either:

- (1) include clear verbiage that states when a use qualifies as agrotourism or ecotourism that the language of the proposed ZTA will supersede any conflicting provision in the Code and/or
- (2) update the permissible use table to make such uses permitted with conditions consistent with agrotourism and ecotourism.

For example, I believe farm stays, cooking, tasting, and providing dining experience related to eco-tourism and agritourism such as farm to table or tasting rooms are a value-added component that is currently covered by the ZTA, but while my reading of the legislation indicates that this legislation permits such a value-added use, I request the commissioners to clarify with staff, and that staff concurs such activity is permitted by such legislation. If staff does not concur, I would request commissioners to add such language as is necessary to permit this value-added component. This would enhance and keep the county competitive with other jurisdictions.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to comment, I look forward to seeing the ZTA being implemented and positive impact it will have for the economy, residents, and the county.

³ <https://washington.org/research/washington-dc-visitor-research>