

**Loudoun Heights -
Agritourism Council**

October 15, 2019

The Members of the
Board of Supervisors
Loudoun County
1 Harrison Street, SE, 5th Floor
Leesburg, Virginia 20175

The Members of the
Northern Virginia Transportation Authority
3040 Williams Drive, Suite 200
Fairfax, Virginia 22031

**Re: Town of Hillsboro
Charles Town Pike (Rte. 9)
Traffic Calming Project**

Dear Members:

We are writing on behalf of the Loudoun Heights Agritourism Council (the "**LHATC**"). The LHATC was recently formed to represent the agritourism business community in the Loudoun Heights Wine Region of Western Loudoun County, centered around the Town of Hillsboro, Virginia, and to promote the growth and development of agritourism in our area.

We count among our members 868 Estate Vineyards, Breaux Vineyards, Bozzo Family Vineyards, Doukenie Winery, Hillsborough Vineyards & Brewery, Maggie Malick Wine Caves, Notaviva Craft Fermentations, Harpers Ferry Adventure Center, and other local area businesses, such as farm markets and tourist destinations, that share our passion for building and sustaining a vibrant agricultural based economy in Western Loudoun County.

Combined, the LHATC represents the vast majority of firms that have invested over the years in planting Vineyards, building and operating Farm Wineries, Farm Breweries, Tasting Rooms and Wedding & Event Venues, and building and operating Restaurants, Farm Markets, and other area businesses. We are the largest group of employers in the area; and we account for the vast majority of economic activity in the area both to the West and to the East of the Town of Hillsboro.

We are writing to each of the members of the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors (the "**LCBOS**") and the members of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (the "**NVTA**") because the current Town of Hillsboro Rt. 9 Traffic Calming Project (the "**Project**") threatens everything we have built over the years and, if allowed to proceed in its current form, will have long term devastating consequences for the area economy. ***The Project, including the current traffic plan and construction plan, is fundamentally flawed because, in short, it was developed without any meaningful input or participation from the local area agritourism business community.***

2. The loss of approximately one hundred and sixteen (116) fulltime and seasonal employment due to lay-offs, deferred or cancelled hiring, and similar measures that will become necessary to respond to significant reductions in business;
3. The loss of approximately \$1,800,000 in investment in the area (in terms of new facilities, expansions, vineyard development, and similar capital investment) due to our businesses cancelling further investment; and
4. In addition to the above, potential business closures including both partial closures (shutting down portions of our operations), full closures from some of the smaller businesses that will be unable to weather the storm, and reduction in hours for employees that are retained.

When you consider how these losses will flow-down to and impact vendors, local area businesses (many of whom rely on visitors that come to enjoy the experiences agritourism provides), and the families that rely on this activity for their livelihood, the short term and long term damage will be significant. We estimate it will take at least fourteen (14) months following project completion to return to current levels. Our business depend on building a customer base from ongoing traffic that feeds growth in our Wine Clubs, ever increasing attendance at our events, and repeat customers. Shutting us down for well over a year will set us and the region back for years to come, at a time when traffic to our area remains in its early growth years.

Notwithstanding the short term and the long term damage the Project in its current form will cause to area businesses, the congestion and delays suffered by area commuters from neighboring counties and states, and long term damage to the regional economy, the Town of Hillsboro has been unable or unwilling to put forth a reasonable and compelling justification for its Project plan over less disruptive alternatives. For example, the original project was for, and still remains entitled as, a "traffic calming" project. While we support safe use of the road by pedestrians and motorists in Hillsboro, a less costly means to achieve the goal of the planned roundabouts would have been speed bumps and better speed limit enforcement in the town. Hillsboro officials advised us that they combined the traffic calming project with a water and sewer line projects (which is the reason for the many road closures), but the water and sewer systems that will use these lines will not be installed and operational for years to come, if at all. In short, we have yet to hear a compelling case for many features of the current plan.

In addition, anyone who operates an agritourism business in our area knows that people come to the area primarily to visit the local farm wineries, farm breweries, and other farm based businesses. This is what drives traffic to our area. The LHATC is in support of improving local infrastructure, but not if it severely damages the very business community that has made the investments, and toiled and labored over the years, to preserve the rural economy and make our area the destination that it is now.

In summary, the local area business community has effectively been excluded from the planning process and the needs of the local area economy have not been adequately addressed nor considered in the Project plan. This fundamental flaw in the planning process must be addressed before the Project is allowed to proceed.

As a result, the LHATC respectfully requests that the LCBOS and the NVTA do the following:

1. Place all funding and all requests for additional funding for the Project on hold, at least until the needs of the local business community, represented by the LHATC, can be heard and the Project is adjusted to meet those needs; and