

Zoning...

Does the word “Zoning” make you yawn? Have you read the 700-odd page new zoning code that the County says has been right there on their website for over a year now? No? You started but got lost on page 3 - the definition of Afforestation when they said trees should grow to “ a DBH of 2 inches or more within 7 years.” But before that, you got sidetracked by the definition of Adult bookstores. Should those words really be in a Zoning Code where kids can read it?

And - you really don't get the difference between CI, GI and LI.

And - how can you have more houses in R1 than R2 when you thought R1 meant fewer houses?

And - Which one are they getting rid of - COS or CDS?

And - why is it there's no “green” environmentally friendly building incentives in there when most other places are adding them?

And - where in all those pages is the list of the things they took out from the old code?

And - what is new?

Why do we have a huge book with no instruction manual ? It's because this is written for developers, their engineers and their lawyers, not for you and me. But we're the ones who will have to live with what it says.

What can you do?

Go to our website www.friendsofharford.com and click on Zoning Code. We are trying to make this easy to understand without all the “wherefores” and

“shalls” and “mays”. We have trouble too. Sometimes we get overly complicated just like the zoning code does. If you don't understand something, ask us. Go to comments, and say - What do you mean by this? We will answer you.

But read this issue and learn all you can about what concerns Friends of Harford. It should concern you too. Then go to the public hearings.

Tuesday, September 16th - Bel Air at County Council chambers

Tuesday, September 23rd - North Harford High School

Stand up for your rights. Stand up for what is good for this county. Stand up for rules that protect the environment. Stand up to keep development from overrunning our rural areas. Stand up to let everyone know that you support Friends of Harford.

Now What?

Enacting legislation is a strange way of fulfilling the wishes and desires of the politicians' constituents - the folks who live here in Harford County.

For all the public hearings, no one on the County Council or the Administration who created these bills has to change their thinking to yours. While they must listen to you, that is all they have to do.

However, if enough people say the same thing, the political will may change to your way of thinking because of the desire to serve the people and perhaps

the desire to be reelected .

One of the oddities of legislation is called the amendment process. In our County, anyone on the County Council may change the legislation by amending it before the final vote on the bill.

The amendment can be introduced minutes before the final vote and may make a drastic change to the intent of the bill being amended. There is no public hearing for amendments. There is no public reading of the amendments before they are given at the County Council meeting. If you attend that County Council meeting, that is when you will know about it.

An Open Process?

Much has been said by the County Administrative branch, which wrote the code about how open and transparent this zoning code update has been for everyone.

- The Draft Code has been on the County website for over a year.
- True, but the new code did not come with instructions, such as what is different from the old code? Or what does this mean? This code came with the understanding that you knew the old Zoning Code and could easily point out the hundreds of changes with no help. Not even a page index was provided for a 400 page document.
- The Zoning Code Update Workgroup meetings were open to the public.
- True, but they were held during normal working hours.
- True, but the public could make no comments.
- Planning & Zoning held 3 informational meetings for the public to review and give comments about the changes.
- True, but they did not spell out what the changes were from the old code.
- True, but there is no record anywhere that any public citizen's comment was incorporated into this August 2008 legislation.

- Planning & Zoning held informational workshops with the County Council members after each Zoning Code Update Workgroup meeting.
- True, and the public was not permitted to attend.
- Planning & Zoning held two open public meetings with the County Council where changes were discussed.
- True, again, the public could not speak or ask questions.

Next Step Is To Put The Code Into Action

The new code will be put into effect in time for the Comprehensive Rezoning review. It will change the face of the county with new relaxed rules for the most part.

Comprehensive Rezoning Is Coming

Starting October 15th, with the passage of the new Zoning Code, the County intends to kick off the Comprehensive Rezoning request process.

As we did last time, we are seeking volunteers and asking you to look at your neck of the woods and tell us what you think of the rezoning requests the County has received.

FOH will provide you with maps and descriptions of the requests.

We will also include a rating form we developed from the last time.

This is where all of the new code gets put to use. This is where the changes will occur. So if you are concerned about how your neighborhood will look next year or the year after, please take the time to help.

After all the rezoning requests have been made and the Department of Planning & Zoning publishes the list, we will host an informational meeting to meet each other and organize our groups.

Please volunteer by calling 410-939-5629 or email us at comments@friendsofharford.com.

need for an expanded envelope.

Mass Transit and Development

Almost daily, the news media is constantly showcasing the growing need for more bus and rail transit and closer commutes as citizens are giving up the use of their vehicles due to increased public concerns regarding strained economic and environmental factors. At the same time, the Nation's economy has been experiencing a fast downward spiral with increasing inflation due to accelerating energy costs and the turmoil in the Mid-east. Consequently, the availability of funding for public transportation, now already scarce, will be even more difficult to acquire.

Harford County, like many areas in the country, is experiencing growing pains and must quickly find alternatives to past and present development practices many of which have proven unsatisfactory and permit sprawl. There is an urgent need for aggressive redevelopment that will attract and direct citizens to the main economic centers where necessary resources and infrastructure are already in place.

Along with the escalation of energy costs as well as increasing environmental concerns, long-overdue mass transit options should now be an immediate concern and a top priority for resolution by Harford County officials together with its citizens. Other than maintaining and preserving the existing infrastructure and highways, the immediate priority for all available funding should be concentrated on providing adequate public transit services. Citizens should be encouraged to both live and work in the higher density areas in order to conserve space and promote more efficient land use for future generations. Easy access to reliable transit systems is crucial to sustain the economic health of dense population centers as well as to connect the public to essential services.

It is imperative that Harford planning officials explore other areas around the country such as Portland and Seattle, for successful working models of high density population centers to gain insight into efficient and effective planning and development where the success of those centers is heavily dependent upon the public's access to transit. Seattle has an excellent website that gives a very detailed history of how they

have overcome some of the city's congestion and growth problems. Those cities also rely heavily upon public involvement and input toward finding resolutions regarding growth and development issues. It would also be considered prudent to invite an experienced planning consultant from one or more model cities to gain insight as to possible solutions to correct our current sprawl mentality. Such a measure should also reduce the time to take remedial actions and avoid costly mistakes.

Since new planning and zoning legislation is currently under review, the timing is now appropriate for Harford County to mandate that adequate space for bus/van transit and attendant passenger facilities be a part of all new development efforts. County planners, together with the various residential and business communities, should work together to quickly identify the resources needed to ensure transit facilities are made available to the public in areas requiring revitalization as well in the older established neighborhoods in the more suburban areas.

There is a predictable and increasing population of senior citizens who will require transportation as they lose their ability to drive and many will relocate into the more densely populated areas where required facilities should be readily available. As do all citizens, they will require easily accessed, affordable, safe, and reliable transit in order to pursue needed services. More citizen friendly pedestrian walks, bike paths, with connections to transit stops should be part of all development. Multilevel parking facilities should be utilized in new high density development to the maximum extent possible in an effort to conserve as much green space as possible to enhance environmental quality.

This would involve identifying potential existing lots along major roads throughout the County for strategically-placed transit stops, such as park and rides, schools, shopping centers, banks, etc.

All major transit stops should provide adequate and easily accessible parking facilities, bicycle racks, patron shelters, and be handicap accessible. They should be well-lit, equipped with trash receptacles and be monitored by camera and/or frequent patrols. This would involve identifying potential existing lots along major roads throughout the County for strategically-placed transit stops, such as park and rides, schools, shopping centers, banks, etc.

School and college parking lot size should be

restricted to the space absolutely necessary in order to concentrate on classroom facilities. That would require more bus/van transit and satellite parking areas assigned to each educational facility. Student parking at public school lots should be strictly limited and perhaps imposing parking fees would be an incentive to encourage utilization of the County's heavily subsidized public school buses. This could also serve to educate the younger citizens as to the merits of energy conservation by utilizing transit.

A satellite transit stop should be centrally established on the HCC campus grounds whereby securable bike racks, furnished with bikes, could be provided for campus population use to access the more

remote buildings. That may require the installation of additional racks. The bikes would be returned and secured at the transit stop as the students depart. An in/around van could be used by the student population during inclement weather conditions.

We must find alternatives to more vehicles on the highways, costly fuel consumption and improve both our living environment and our quality of life. Even realizing that mass transit systems are very expensive, continuing on the present path will ultimately cost us more.

This Will Be Law!

We've updated the ScoreCard from the last issue to include how the Department of Planning & Zoning weighed in on these issues. Where Planning & Zoning says "YES", it is in Bill 08-44. Without an amendment to change these items, they **WILL BECOME LAW.**

The Zoning Code WorkGroup had a majority development community and associated businesses makeup. Almost every vote came down on the side of development. The main focus of the group was to increase density and thereby increase profitability from current standards.

Development, increased density and profitability are not dirty words. They are necessary for orderly growth. However, they are not to be increased at the cost of our finite non-renewable resources. How many parking lots have you seen that have been turned back into a wildflower field?

In all, the WorkGroup voted to make 207 changes to the May 2007 Draft Zoning Code. The Department of Planning & Zoning included 183 of them into the new Bills 08-44 and 08-45.

Score Card - What did Planning & Zoning Do?

Electronic signs of any color up to 120 sq. ft. may be used in all zonings from neighborhood B1 through B3 and commercial zoning and by any "institution" anywhere in the County.		
Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES
Inside the Development Envelope, there will be no more Forest Conservation to preserve and keep trees.		
Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES

Project development signs increase to 48 square feet from 32 square feet.		
Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES
Put Transfer of Development Rights Receiving Areas on existing AG zoned land to new rezoned RR land in the Rural Infill areas of Jarrettsville, Joppa, Fallston and Forest Hill. Typically throughout the US, receiving areas which are successful have existing public water and sewer. These areas do not.		
Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES
In the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, a development bumpup will automatically be granted to the next density if more than 30% of a parcel is within this district or within a habitat protection area.		
Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES
Wells, septic reserve areas, stormwater management ponds and buffers may be put on any other zoning designation if the property is split zoned. This effectively overturns the Black Horse decision issued by Judge Plitt in 2003.		
Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES
100 foot buffer radius no longer required on a property for all new drinking water wells.		
Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES
Buffer yards need not be required for parcels in a project if they are owned by the same person or entity.		
Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES
Allows motor vehicle repair shops, filling stations and service stations to be next to properties using private wells.		
Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES

Changed requests for Interpretations from anything in the Code, narrowing it to whether a proposed use is permitted in a particular zoning district, or whether a proposed use is a valid non-conforming use. Removed the right to request an Interpretation from the Zoning Administrator from “interested persons whose property may be affected,” and limited that right to only the property owner changing the use of the property or to his agent.

Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES

Removed the right to appeal decisions of the Zoning Administrator by “any person aggrieved”

Planning & Zoning	Friends of Harford	Majority ZCU
YES	NO	YES

County Council

Harford County Council

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Election Day

Don't forget to vote. In addition to the referendum FOR/AGAINST slots, the following is the local slate:

Representative in Congress District/Circuit 01

- Kratovil, Frank M. Jr.
Democratic (443) 249-0607
- Harris, Andy
Republican (877) 263-9008
- Davis, Richard James
Libertarian
-Richardson, John
Unaffiliated (410) 255-0685

Representative in Congress District/Circuit 02

-Ruppersberger, C. A. Dutch
Democratic (410) 252-2505
-Matthews, Richard Pryce
Republican (410) 255-0599
-Gaztanaga, Lorenzo
Libertarian (443) 414-6539

Representative in Congress District/Circuit 06

-Dougherty, Jennifer P.
Democratic (301) 695-6781
-Bartlett, Roscoe
Republican (202) 225-2721
-Hoover, Gary W. Sr.
Libertarian (240) 520-0518

Judge of the Circuit Court District/Circuit 03

-Bollinger, Thomas J. Sr.
-Eaves, Angela M.
-Stringer, Pat