



*Friends of Harford*

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P.O. Box 1005  
Abingdon, MD 21009  
comments@FriendsofHarford.com*

## **Zoning Code Update (ZCU): A messed up process and why you should care**

### **What is a Zoning Code?**

The purpose of a zoning code is to help preserve and enhance our quality of life and environment as our County grows by regulating land use in accordance with our Master Plan. The idea that “I can do anything I want on my own land” is obviously incorrect, or you would allow a pig farm next to an adult book store in the heart of a housing development. OK, so we must have zoning regulations.

### **So, why should I care?**

The revised zoning code will likely govern all land use activity in Harford County for another 25 years. If the final approved law is anywhere close to the developers’ draft, then we have conceded all rights to quality of life and preserving the environment. Some of our concerns are listed on the back of this sheet. More information can be found on our web site: <http://www.FriendsofHarford.com>

### **The Harford County ZCU Process and Products**

The current Zoning Code was adopted in 1982 and needs to be updated for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Instead, the Department of Planning & Zoning (DPZ) settled for a minor rework of the current code, done in-house and completed in 2007. **DPZ’s draft was not the code we need for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a code responsive to Smart Growth regulations. Also, via seemingly minor tweaks, substantial citizen rights were removed while vesting more decision authority in DPZ.**

The County Executive convened a Zoning Code Update Work Group (ZCUWG) to review and offer suggestions on the draft code.. The ZCUWG met from June 2007 through April 2008. Though our government may have had good intentions in establishing the work group, it was immediately evident that the **majority of its members were employed in the housing/development industry** and voted to benefit their industry to the detriment of the county as a whole. Because decisions were made by majority vote after too little consideration, the developers’ views won. Friends of Harford, a volunteer citizens' organization promoting good land use planning, had a member on the ZCUWG, but was routinely in the minority.

The next step is for Planning and Zoning to present this revised “developers’ draft” to the citizens this summer. After that, it will be presented as a Bill to the County Council in September 2008 for them to adopt into law. The Council will have just 60 days by law to vote on this approximately 400 page document.

### **OK, what can I do?**

Attend the Planning & Zoning hearings this summer. Call or write to your County Councilmember (410-638-3343 or [council@harfordcountymd.gov](mailto:council@harfordcountymd.gov)) and County Executive David Craig (410-638-3350 or [countyexecutive@harfordcountymd.gov](mailto:countyexecutive@harfordcountymd.gov)) to express your concerns.

Our rights, our quality-of-life and our environment are important and should be protected!

# **Key failures of the draft Zoning Code:**

## **Citizen Rights**

- Takes away the right of a person whose property may be affected to file an appeal from a decision of the Zoning Administrator without having to sue the government (an expensive, time-consuming action).
- Takes away the right of any interested person whose property may be affected to even question the facts or request an Interpretation of how certain zoning decisions were reached.
- Forces you to pay lawyers and risk losing everything you own if you question your government.

## **Smart Growth**

- Ignores Smart Growth principles. No creative development ideas are encouraged.
- Discourages citizen participation and effective planning for Harford's future growth.

## **Quality of Life**

- Slashes the amount of open space provided for residents of dense housing developments, and allows developers to cheaply buy their way out of even that requirement.
- Promotes "sign wars" of ever-brighter, more intrusive and attention-grabbing signs throughout all areas of the county, and "grandfathers" them forever.
- Jams buildings of all sorts even closer together than before, and allows the remaining land to be paved over for parking lots.
- Considers stormwater management facilities, such as open pits, to be part of your required open space.
- Has no standards to protect your property from the bright lights, noisy operations, strong odors, fumes, dust, etc. from other activities near you.
- Ignores the fact that some activities or businesses impact their neighbors more than others, and therefore fails to protect you. That small B2 business-zoned property near you could become a lawyer's office – or motor vehicle repair shop.

## **Drinking Water**

- Does not protect streams or watersheds that supply our drinking water.
- Exposes more wells to contamination.
- Ignores Maryland's new law which requires onsite infiltration of stormwater.
- Maintains the excessive percentages of impervious surfaces currently allowed.

## **Transferable Development Rights (TDR)**

- Doesn't direct development inside the development envelope where it belongs.
- Sacrifices farms in southern Harford County to preserve farms in the northern County.
- Offers minimal financial benefits for farmers selling TDRs.

## **Environmental Protection**

- Significantly reduces protection of Natural Resource Districts (streams, wetlands, habitats,...)
- Contains too many loopholes and exceptions for adequate forest protection.
- Grants too much decision authority to the Director of DPZ over Chesapeake Bay Critical Areas.
- Removes protection of mature specimen trees in areas to be developed.
- Reduces protection for our existing forests.