

# Affordable housing mandate for Crown Farm supported

■ **County Council, planners push for farm preservation, housing at proposed development**

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The Crown Farm developers may be asked to contribute \$1 million to a county agricultural easement plan instead of buying the significantly pricier transferable development rights, known as TDRs.

About 12.5 percent of the community must also be moderately priced dwelling units, or MPDUs, under the county's affordable housing program.

Those recommendations, made by the County Council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee Monday, illustrate an increasingly complex "give and take" relationship among the county, Gaithersburg and the development team as they look to build out one of the last large parcels in central Montgomery.

Developers are asking that the 183-acre Crown Farm property off Fields Road, which is under county jurisdiction, be annexed into Gaithersburg.

Because developers are proposing significantly more commercial space on the land than envisioned in the county master plan, the County Council must review and approve the change before it can be annexed.

In the past week, the county Planning Board and the PHED committee, made up of council members Steven Silverman, Nancy Floreen and Marilyn Praisner, reviewed the proposal in two separate meetings, and the advisory groups took different stances regarding the transferable development rights.

About 94 acres of the Crown Farm is designated as a "receiving area" for the rights from a farm in the agricultural reserve.

Under the program, the developer would be required to pay for those TDRs — at about \$40,000

Washingtonian Center project lacks supports  
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each — to help preserve other farms throughout the county. This could total about \$8.5 million.

But the developers did not envision paying the TDRs, and some council members cited a need to "give and take."

The development team, led by businessman Aris Mardirossian, has proposed donating 30 acres to 34 acres for a much needed high school on land worth about \$80 million.

Instead of paying for the TDRs, Floreen and Silverman suggested the developers contribute much less, about \$1 million, to the county's agricultural easement preservation program in exchange for the school site.

"The challenge here is the trade-off of benefits," Floreen said. "...There's no other way we can acquire this school site. Period."

Praisner, as well as the Planning Board, maintained that the TDRs should not be ignored. The payment could help reserve one or more farms on agricultural preserve land, county planners said.

"As the city residents benefit from the agricultural reserve, it would make sense that [this development]... ought to use TDRs," Planning Board Chairman Derick P. Berlage said.

A second major component of the annexation could be the use of

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— Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park

MPDUs, affordable housing that the county sets aside for those whose income levels range from about \$39,500 to \$63,300.

The developers and Gaithersburg council members had considered setting aside 12.5 percent of the units as "workforce housing," which is a slightly higher income bracket.

Although Gaithersburg council members are mulling their own affordable housing plan, the Crown Farm may be required in the annexation to follow the county's rules, the PHED committee said.

Some residents and decision-makers, including Praisner and county Planning Commissioner Meredith Wellington, have suggested the process has been rushed.

The developers said they are financially bound to an annexation by June 1.

"I think there's more in writing we need to see," Praisner said.

As of Monday, county planners and the developer had not agreed to how many TDRs would be required on the property.