

Council seeks opinions on McMansions

■ Proposal would limit size of home based on size of lot

Residents can tell the County Council what they think about so-called McMansions — large homes built on lots intended for smaller homes — at a public hearing June 17.

The Infill Development

County News

C. BENJAMIN FORD

Reform Act of 2008, introduced by Councilman Roger Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac, would require a home's size in older residential neighborhoods be based on lot size and not its zoning.

The issue arose after some homeowners added second stories to expand their older homes or tore down an existing home to build a 4,000-square-foot one on lots originally intended for homes a fourth of the size.

"We're not talking about requiring smaller houses," said Councilman Marc Elinch (D-At Large) of Takoma Park. "We're talking about making them slightly less enormous."

In many older neighborhoods, the homes occupied roughly 17 percent of the lot's size. Homes in R-60 zones are allowed to cover as much as 35 percent of the lot.

In the past, homeowners tended to put more emphasis on having a home with a yard and trees, but in recent years buyers have wanted larger homes, Berliner said. That resulted in some homes "looming" over their neighbors, he said.

A task force formed to discuss the problem could not reach a consensus on what was the correct proportion, he said. His bill would limit homes to covering a maximum of 30 percent on lots with 6,000 square feet of space.

Councilman Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg said he thought Berliner's bill struck the right balance of looking out for the needs of neighbors and homeowners wanting to redevelop their properties.

"This includes well-thought-out changes to the zoning law," Andrews said.

One of the complaints often heard at task force meetings was the larger homes on smaller lots

tended to form a "mass," Berliner said. To encourage architectural features that would break up the mass of large homes, features such as bay windows, porches, balconies and chimneys would be excluded from measuring the square footage of the home, Berliner said.

The bill also would require the county's Department of Permitting Services to clarify the definition of "sloping lots," he said.

Currently homes built on a slope are given a height allowance, but the county does not define how much of a "slope" is required to qualify, Berliner said.

County has \$17.6 million gas problem

Think you're paying a lot at the pump? Montgomery County expects to spend nearly \$17.6 million in fiscal 2009 for the county's fleet. That's up 11 percent over fiscal 2008.

The county expects to use 2.5 million gallons of unleaded gas, 3.1 million gallons of diesel, 20,601 gallons of ethanol and nearly 1.1 million in natural gas.

The figures were in the County Council's review of the fiscal 2009 Department of General Services' operating budget.

The council's Transportation Committee also recommended the county buy 42 new Ride On buses. Half of the buses would be diesel-electric, said Councilwoman Nancy M. Floreen (D-At Large) of Garrett Park.

Leggett, council disagree on library plan

The County Council and County Executive Isaiah Leggett are not on the same page when it comes to the Silver Spring public library project.

The council wants the project to be done in one phase with a building to include a library, retail spaces and affordable housing in a joint development. The executive wants to build the public library in one building with the housing and retail project following later.

Park and Planning Chairman Royce Hanson said that while a similar mix of space was done at Silver Spring Transit Center, it was not a "great success."

"It's important to have a coherent and comprehensive plan for this site," Hanson said.



Berliner