

Council limits hunting near homes

■ County executive has 10 days to sign bill into law

BY TITUS LEDBETTER III
STAFF WRITER

The County Council approved a bill Tuesday by a 7-0 vote that closes the gaps between county and state deer hunting laws and makes it easier for police to enforce them.

The new law reduces the county's safety zone for firing weapons from 200 yards to 150 yards from a home or other occupied building, as mandated by state law. It also eliminates language that stated hunters cannot discharge a gun within 100 yards of a public road, but keeps the stipulation that prohibits the discharge of a gun on or across a road, again aligning county law with state law.

Several Clarksburg residents, concerned about deer hunting too close to their

homes, are happy with the stiffer restriction.

The county executive has 10 days to sign the bill into law, and the law will take effect 90 days after it is signed.

Kelsie Holtje, who lives on Cool Brook Lane, said hunters have been shooting deer closer to her home and her neighbors' homes than what is safe.

"I don't mind them hunting as long as it is not close to my house," said Holtje.

CONT.

HUNTING

County police Officer George Boyce of the 5th District said his station receives calls weekly from residents complaining about deer hunting after hours and on unauthorized property.

He said an officer meets each person making a complaint to verify that the incident took place. Boyce said officers try to locate the hunters and verify their hunting licenses.

But Holtje is frustrated because by the time police come, the hunters have already left the area.

Councilman Michael J. Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown, who introduced the bill, said that police told him they were having trouble enforcing the laws with the gaps in the county and state law.

"But we have clarified the rules to the distance from people's homes and the direction people can shoot guns, or bows and arrows, in areas close to people's homes," Knapp said. "They have to be positioned away from the roads."

Regulated deer hunting is also allowed on parkland this time of year.

Little Bennett Regional Park has been closed since Monday for deer hunting, and will remain closed until Friday.

The deer hunts reduce car accidents and limit nearby crop damage, said Rob Gibbs, chairman of the county's deer management work group.

Gibbs said there are as many as 60 deer per square mile in the 3,600-acre park. Last year's hunt removed 134 deer. He hopes this year's will remove at least 100.

"By reducing the number of deer in the area we reduce the amount of food they eat," he said. "We are trying to have a balance."

There were 43 deer collisions near Little Bennett in 1996 when the deer hunts started but only seven in 2002, Gibbs said.