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Montgomery, Md., council approves new zoning rules for White Flint area

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The Montgomery County Council unanimously approved a [new building zone](#) Tuesday that is widely considered the template for a major revision of [the county's](#) zoning rules.

The measure, which paves the way for developers to begin remaking the White Flint area along Rockville Pike, is part of a larger effort to simplify the zoning code and promote more urban development in the largely suburban county.

The new zone will make it easier for the county to approve mixed-use commercial and residential communities designed to enable residents to live, work, dine and find entertainment within walking distance. County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) supports the bill, which becomes law without his signature. "We are trying to make the code easier to follow," said council member George L. Leventhal (D-At Large).

The council brushed aside complaints by environmentalists and agriculture groups that the plan doesn't require large enough payments from developers for farmland preservation in exchange for the right to build denser communities that expand their profits.

Council member Marc Elrich (D-At Large) said he lacked the votes to get stricter standards to compel developers to pay more for extra density to help preserve open space in the county's 90,000-acre agricultural reserve, mostly northwest of Rockville. He said he hoped to raise the issue again when the county begins its sweeping zoning code revision later this year.

The new zone includes density bonuses for developers to choose among, [including for providing more housing for disabled residents](#), which was proposed by council member Duchy Trachtenberg (D-At Large). The bill also gives developers extra density for building close to public transportation. The tallest buildings, up to 300 feet, would be closest to the White Flint Metro station, and would be among the tallest in the county.

The council also began tackling the question of who ultimately pays for roads, sidewalks, parks and other improvements needed to create a more urban community. The panel gave preliminary approval Tuesday to the establishment of a "development district" that would be funded partly by developers and partly by the county. Final approval of an overall plan for White Flint is expected later this month. Redoing White Flint's infrastructure could cost as much as \$1.1 billion, according to the county's Finance Department.

"This will be an interesting spring," said council President Nancy Floreen (D-At Large), who, along with council member Michael Knapp (D-Upcounty), shepherded the measures.