

Montgomery County Council restores much of neighborhood zoning rules

Litany of changes by PHED committee rejected by full council

By Alex Ruoff, Staff Writer

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The county council rejected a set of changes to a pair of proposed zoning standards Tuesday, favoring instead a version created by the Planning Board they say is better tailored for areas such as Kensington and Takoma Park.

The vote came during a discussion over the creation of two new zoning designations; the Commercial Residential Neighborhood Zone and the Commercial Residential Town Zone. Both were proposed by the county's Planning Department in April as extensions of the original Commercial Residential Zone, created for use in White Flint, for use in communities such as Kensington, Takoma Park and Wheaton. The new zones are intended to spur development in those communities.

The original CR Zone, as well as the others, is an attempt by planners to encourage combining residential and commercial uses — like first-floor retails with residences above — in commercial areas while promoting the creation of public projects by private developers. These zones limit the size of properties that do not have public projects, which can range from police stations and parks to affordable housing, bike racks and public parking.

The county's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee recommended in July to limit that list of public amenities, removing ones such as the creation of special signs, the planting of trees, recycling facilities built into office or apartment buildings, and habitat restoration efforts.

Council members voted 6 to 3 in favor of replacing these amenities, favoring the original set of amenities first proposed by the county Planning Board in April.

Councilman Phillip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg, who opposed the change, said the longer list would result in fewer projects with the amenities he thought were more beneficial, such as affordable housing.

"I think affordable housing will lose out to almost every other option you want to do," he said Tuesday.

Councilman Roger Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac, who voted to restore the list, said he disagreed and thought many of the areas the zones are slated to be put in place — possibly in areas such as Long Branch, Chevy Chase Lake, Glenmont, Montgomery Village and Burtonsville — need more variety to encourage development.

“It is, in my opinion, an appropriate mix of both carrot and stick,” he said.

In July, both the Town of Kensington and the City of Takoma Park — who plan to use the zones — wrote to the council opposing the diminished list.

The council is expected to resume its debate Tuesday.