



Charles County Planning Commission

JoAnn Ptack
Chairman

Roberta Wise
Vice Chairman

Thomas Datcher
Secretary

Steve Magoon
Planning Director

Theresa Pickeral
Clerk

October 27, 2003

Commissioners of Charles County, Maryland
Charles County Government
P.O. Box 2150
La Plata, Maryland 20646

Dear County Commissioners:

The Charles County Planning Commission has completed their review of the report submitted by the Rural Commission. With the development pressures facing the county, it is very important to continue guiding new growth to the County's Development District and to create development patterns that support our established land use goals and policies. Addressing these issues are crucial to the County's future. The Planning Commission has judicially reviewed the Rural Commission's recommendations and discussed the various options and implications of policy changes during several meetings over the last few months. During our review of the Rural Commission Report, the Planning Commission identified several areas where we believe stronger action is necessary and those are noted below.

One of the most challenging topics reviewed during this process was the issue of residential densities in the rural area. The Rural Commission's report indicated that a build-out at one (1) unit per three (3) acres would result in a landscape that would be unacceptable due to the high consumption of land per dwelling unit and the resulting development patterns. However, the Rural Commission only recommended re-zoning the Western Peninsula, the southwestern portion of the county, including Nanjemoy, that is currently facing minimal development pressure. The Planning Commission considered the development pressures occurring in the other rural areas of the county, the location of prime agricultural soils with existing farming operations and natural resources associated with the State and County designated Rural Legacy Area and the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan. It is the recommendation by a majority of the Planning Commission members to re-zone the rural area of the county to an optimum density one (1) unit per twenty (20) acres, with ten (10) acres as the minimal acceptable density. All of the auxiliary recommendations with respect to TDR's have been made with these density ranges as the catalyst for policy. Anything less than one (1) dwelling unit per ten (10) acres would not be acceptable and would fail to preserve agricultural land and the rural character of the areas outside the Development District, currently zoned AC and RC. More restrictive densities would help preserve the county's agricultural lands while maintaining rural character, reducing land consumption and directing growth to areas where public facilities are planned.

SAY NO TO DRUGS

Post Office Box 2150, La Plata, Maryland 20646

Administration: (301) 645-0627 Development & Capital Services: (301) 645-0618 / (301) 870-3937

Permits: (301) 645-0692 / (301) 870-3935 Planning: (301) 645-0540 / (301) 870-3896

TDD Transfer Number for the Hearing Impaired: 1-800-735-2258

www.charlescounty.org/pgm

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COUNTY

Although the rural commission report recommends mandatory clustering in the AC and RC zones, the Planning Commission believes it would be more effective to provide major incentives to encourage cluster development rather than making it mandatory. Such cluster incentives should aim to preserve productive agricultural land and contiguous blocks rather than only preserving steep slopes and wetlands.

A considerable amount of time was spent discussing the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program and its effectiveness as a land preservation tool. The Rural Commission's recommendations relied heavily on the TDR program as a tool to preserve the county's rural land, ultimately recommending that each new housing unit constructed obtain a TDR in order to build. The Planning Commission believes that requiring a TDR for every new unit is not a legal or viable recommendation. As a result, we have made several recommendations that will strengthen the TDR market, using Calvert County's approach, which has become the model TDR program in the country. This involves re-zoning the development district to reduce the current by-right densities, thus requiring the purchase of TDR's to increase densities. Key to a successful TDR program is creating a large demand, while controlling the supply.

For your convenience, we have attached a summary sheet which compares our findings with those of the Rural Commission and areas of differing opinions. We look forward to discussing recommendations with the County Commissioners.

Sincerely,

CHARLES COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Jo Ann Ptack, Chairman

Enclosure (1)

cc: Charles County Planning Commission