

PRINCE GEORGE'S ZONING REWRITE

CREATING A 21ST CENTURY ZONING ORDINANCE FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

**The lists below are community comments only. The comments below have not been filtered by staff and have not been adopted by staff.*

June: Listening Session Notes

Newton White Mansion

Mitchellville, MD

June 3, 2014

- There is a perception of a lack of political will among decision makers to implement new zoning when it is developed, especially if those changes do not keep the status quo in place.
- The zoning process needs to be more inclusive of a wider array of residents and business owners. In general, efforts should be made to make the meeting attendees more representative of the county's population. Younger residents in particular should be at the table because they are interested in multi-modal transportation. The process needs fresh perspectives from those who have not been part of the process before. The effort could be modeled on political campaign efforts to attract new voters.
- Officials should engage the public early and often, relating to them how zoning could affect their everyday lives.
- We need to better understand the linkage between the Zoning Ordinance update process and adopted plans.
- The process should be based on the needs that communities share with officials. Once we get some general agreement on the critical needs, we need to have experts offer recommendations on the best means to achieve these goals.
- The politicized nature of planning and zoning in Prince George's County is a major impediment to a good process.
- Be clear on the objective of the process and the purpose of the Zoning Ordinance.
- There should be some investigation of whether there is conflict within existing urban agriculture regulations (see Planning Department study).
- Need more information/messaging about the county, making sure that residents are connected; specifically, there is a need for more advertising about public forums and focus groups; more robust outreach campaigns to new residents to inform them of county regulations, opportunities, etc. Community organizations and developers may be good conduits to share this information.
- This process will use terms that have different meanings for different groups (e.g. sustainability); definitions and descriptions should be added to the website.
- Training of the zoning process for the public is critical. Building a Citizens' Zoning Academy based on the Citizens Handbook would be a place to start.



- Officials need to instead sit down with people throughout the zoning process to provide updates and gather feedback on key ideas.
- Prior experience is that the current process does not do civic engagement in the right way. Examples:
 - Goals are vague and unclear;
 - The public is asked to review long documents with no summary of key changes;
 - The public does not hear new updates until long after the first notice, when decisions seem to have been made;
 - The public is often given only one choice with opportunity to negotiate changes.

The zoning process should be designed to promote the following community needs and desires:

- Retail within walking distance of living and working spaces
- More development inside the beltway
- Healthier food options
- Better public transportation (to reduce the need for cars); need to connect trails and side walks
- Incentives for business (what happens if FedEx Field becomes vacant?); want no giant malls
- Bikeable, walkable communities, and wider road shoulders
- Community space
- Consideration of residential uses when zoning for adjacent commercial uses
- Home owner equity



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Oxon Hill Manor

Fort Washington, MD

June 4, 2014

- The current system allows developers to change whatever zoning regulations they do not like through text amendments or other means, allowing development that does not meet the county's needs.
- Need to place a moratorium on zoning changes until the current zoning update is complete.
- Homeowners need to be made responsible for violations; in cases where they violate ordinances, they are decreasing aesthetics and quality of life for the rest of the community.
- Increase protection for homeowners (currently no buffering requirements for home occupation).
- There is a need to create a process to notify newcomers of the zoning codes when people move in to a specific area, in order to establish accountability for behavior. This could even happen as people/businesses begin to apply for leases or mortgages in a specific area (pre-education).
- It is important to help residents and businesses better understand the relationship between county planning and the zoning process, and the relationship between current zoning and future zoning.
- The zoning and development process in Prince George's County benefits big corporations and wealthy developers instead of benefiting residents; people are skeptical of the zoning rewrite process.
- Residents should be allowed to raise chickens on one's property, even if that means establishing certain rules to address larger community concerns.
- Homeowner parking is penalized, while commercial parking is favored. There is a need for more handicap parking and less reserved space, especially around government buildings.
- I should be able to park in my front yard if I want and not get a ticket.
- We need good public transportation and transit oriented development to reduce the need for motorized vehicles.



- The new zoning code should promote a sustainable future for Prince George’s County. The code should provide for sidewalks, walkability, trails, and open space for children. The code should also incorporate more green standards for buildings and create requirements for green technology.
- The new code should work to protect wetlands throughout the county.
- The new code should include requirements to protect surrounding communities by demolishing structures in hazardous conditions.
- Safety infrastructure for children (e.g. crossing highways and in school areas) should be created.
- Requirements should be included to screen unsightly dumpsters from public view. Current Landscape Manual does have requirements; but in reality, it could be enforcement issue.
- Protection should be implemented for historic viewsheds. Additionally, citizens need to have a mechanism to provide feedback on viewsheds they would like to see to be protected.
- Need more affordable housing and we need to make sure the zoning code includes requirements that increase the amount of available affordable housing stock.
- Need to build more residential areas close to retail and office uses.
- There is a concern about protecting historic properties. One idea is to design the zoning code to require buffer zones between historic properties and new economic development. Current Landscape Manual has the requirements.
- An example of no edge consideration/buffering is National Harbor, which impacts nearby residential uses.
- The county should consider some interim amendments to address immediate concerns “low-hanging fruits” without waiting for the end of the 2-3 year zoning rewrite process.
- Need more open and transparent process, nobody listens to us and we are discouraged by the current zoning policies and process.
- The update process should consider regional differences between urban and rural areas.
- Zoning needs to be flexible enough to deal with changing needs in the county. The zoning code should be designed to allow for periodic changes over time; specifically, the code should include a process for periodic review and update (more often than once every 10-20 years).
- Need to add enforcement officials and more citizens to the zoning advisory panel.
- There should be moderation in enforcement of zoning requirements to avoid discouraging new residents and businesses from siting in Prince George’s County.
- There needs to be reasonable timelines for the zoning rewrite process (we should not be in a hurry).
- Identify best practices/best models/cases for citizen input around the country that the Planning Department can review and implement in this process and beyond; one example



might be the development review districts. In particular, zoning hearings often take place far from the involved properties and should be scheduled closer to those sites.

- The zoning process should clarify whether zoning requires new development to be compatible with the zoning requirements when existing nonconforming buildings are torn down or nonconforming uses are terminated.



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June: Listening Session Notes

**Parks & Recreation Administration Building
Riverdale Park, MD**

June 5, 2014

- In the existing general plan, there is no consideration for how municipalities will engage in the process, which is important because municipalities have no zoning authority. There is a significant concern among municipal officials that politics will impede the zoning process.
- The existing zoning process is not clear and transparent.
- The current process should be streamlined, and changes should be made to expedite the review process. There should be consolidation of some zoning regulations to help reduce the code from its current size.
- It would be helpful to share examples of tangible results achieved by consultants in other zoning updates, e.g. business and investment coming into cities as a result of new zoning codes.
- The residents of the town of Riverdale Park expressed support of the current M-U-TC review process that creates an advisory review committee at the municipality level to let the municipalities play an active role in the development process.
- Sustainability, safety, connectivity and bikeability are important qualities that should be included in the new zoning code. Specifically, there should be an effort to support bike lane development and reduce motor vehicle dependency.
- Environmental protection is currently treated as a separate issue, not integrated and prioritized within the zoning code. Environmental protection (in particular watershed protection) should be considered at least on equal ground as economic development.
- Efforts should be made with the zoning code to protect the “Green Wedge” between Greenbelt and Fort Meade.
- There is a need for zoning updates that protect historic homes and sites. There is a significant concern about the impact of high-rise buildings being built near historic sites. The zoning code should encourage preservation of historic sites, particularly along waterfront areas.
- Zoning should encourage and support revitalization of older communities in the county.



- Zoning should seek to address the types of businesses that locate in specific areas (e.g. liquor stores, bail bondsmen, B & Bs, etc.), and specifically seek to attract high-quality businesses to neglected corridors and areas.
- Concerned about suburban encroachment on rural areas and want to make sure rural communities are protected from such growth patterns. There was a specific concern about siting of landfills and dumping sites in South County.
- The zoning code should encourage more infill development (residential and commercial) close to transit.
- The zoning code should encourage development of buildings/spaces that can creatively support recreational activities; recreational areas should be walkable and accessible from neighborhoods. There should also be efforts to encourage development of arts and history facilities in these areas.
- There should be protections in the zoning code to support local food production even in backyards (support for raising chickens on private property in the code).
- Preservation of county as multi-ethnic, vibrant, rent control, low-income housing (value of being an inclusive county).
- Zoning should address overcrowding issues, i.e., the number of people that can occupy a single dwelling (a significant concern in college towns), as well as addressing increasing crime rates in certain areas.
- Zoning should address the desire among a small but growing number of residents for micro dwellings/"tiny houses" (residential units under 2000 square feet).
- Zoning officials should be certain to engage the University of Maryland, as there are a number of zoning issues that will require their cooperation to address.
- Outreach to unregistered Home Owner Associations may be necessary to make sure that they receive notices about meetings.
- Documents on the zoning process need to be written in a way that provides simple-to-understand details for the lay person.
- Using more traditional means of notifying the public (mailings, door-to-door outreach) may be equally effective as digital means in certain areas where access to computers, internet, etc., may be more limited.

