

PUBLIC COMMENTS

From the July 16, 2008 Planning Commission Public Hearing For the Rural Areas Ordinance amendments

General comments

- Land is the rural area property owners' investment for their future.
- This proposal could be considered discriminatory against landowners who don't live in the Urban Development Areas of Frederick County.
- Home and property is a most significant investment and many families purchased homes and land in the rural areas with the intention of living off their land.
- Belief that the proposed amendment would cause many small farming operations to fail.
- Impact to services from these five-acre subdivisions is minimal, compared to the development within the UDA.
- Proposal was a gross injustice to the people who cost Frederick County the least amount in services.
- Maintains the spirit of the Frederick County Comprehensive Policy Plan by continuing to preserve large open parcels of land, tree cover, scenic views, sensitive environmental areas, and prime agriculture and locally significant soils.
- Support initiatives that will help maintain the rural character of Frederick County in the short run.
- The County is also at risk for losing our local base for agriculture and other resources that will become increasingly important as transportation costs continue to rise.
- Recommended against rezoning in the rural areas; development in the rural areas should be a by-right style of development and not a zoning style of development.
- Would love to see development slowed down in Frederick County.
- Own land with no intention of selling; however, they would like to retain the right to sell in the future, if it was necessary.
- Farmers count on their land as their biggest asset; they don't have a lot of money in the bank.
- Purchased property to build a house and for a financial investment; the overabundance of homes in Frederick County has caused everyone's home and land values to decrease.
- Concerned about the speed in which this ordinance change was taking place.
- Realizes that when a property owner decides to develop his property, there are affects on the County's infrastructure. This is why the property owner needs to pay some type of fee for the impacts the development will have on the system.
- When an issue of this magnitude comes before a community, there is a period of gathering stake holders, land planners, and building consensus, studying rational ideas and alternatives of the proposed ordinance amendment.
- Purchased land and built their home because they wanted to live in a rural, agricultural and forest area; have already seen a significant deterioration in the quality of life as development has taken place.

- More of their money invested in their land than they do in other investments such as IRAs, etc. Proposed change would financially impact him.
- Was in the process of subdividing their property when he received his notification of proposed ordinance change. Inadequate time to enable the completion of the subdivision approval process.
- The proposal being considered would essentially be like cutting farmers' 401K in half.
- The five-acre lot should continue, along with the 60% open space.
- Farmers need the flexibility of using land as a financial tool because most farmers invest their money in land. The proposed amendment will only cripple what farmers can do in the future with the land they have, if they have to make a major decision to sell.
- There is no better quality of life than life on a farm.
- Don't force agriculture to suffer the financial setback because the County wants to keep everything open and make a nice, pretty county for everyone else.
- Commenting on the posted deadline (suggested grace period for subdivision applications - July 1 and January 8). It takes from nine months to a year to get a road ordinance approved and plans drawn by an engineering company and approved by VDOT.
- Proposed amendment change will cripple the farm economy; without equity, most farmers can't get their loans; they can't get operating lines of credit and maintain their operations.
- Predicted the proposed change would cause widespread concern over liquidity, equity, and cause dire financial hardships.
- Like to know that he could subdivide, if for unforeseen health issues he needed to sell his land for financial security.

Suggestive resolutions

- Suggestion that impact fees for rural area development to assist with costs of infrastructure improvements.
- Encourage the clustering of lots and community sewer systems.
- Problem is the imbalance between the RA (Rural Areas) and the UDA (Urban Development Areas). Suggested having both areas under the five-acre rule and if a developer in the UDA wants five houses per acre, they should purchase that right from the property owners.
- Prescribe alternative wastewater treatment systems that would allow clustering of homes on less than two acres.
- Advocate for permanent protection of agriculture, wildlife, forestry, and waterways through conservation easements, purchase of development rights (PDRs), or other legislative means.
- A better job can be accomplished towards view shed preservation with smaller lot sizes and community septic systems.
- Support for larger open space, which can be done with five-acre lots by reducing the lot size, using alternative septic systems approved by the Health Department, or by allowing easements on the parent tract for the septic systems.

Opposed to **minimum lot size increase** comments

- Farmers are not seeking to subdivide their land, but do rely on selling a five-acre portion during poor economic times to help pay bills and continue farming.
- Lot size for residential uses impacts adjacent farms. There was added cost and time to the farmer for the chemicals, fertilizers, and pesticides necessary to fight the neighbor's weedy field problem.
- Concern that if ten acres became the minimum lot size, the number of families that could afford to both work and live here will be reduced.
- Belief that the single, ten-acre lot size was a waste of land; minimum lot size of two acres or more is better.
- In favor of raising lot sizes in rural areas to five acres (previously, it was one to three acres); thought it would really slow down development in the rural areas. Time shows it didn't, but ate up more land, faster.
- Within the rural areas, it was much better to cluster development on smaller lots instead of spreading it out on five acres
- Questioned the impact this proposed ordinance amendment would have on young people in Frederick County; it was hard enough for young people just starting out to get the money together to build or buy a house without having to buy five acres of land with it.
- Believe the ten-acre lot is a waste of the County's most valuable natural resource—land.
- Recognition that one of the issues the County faces is the maintenance cost of infrastructure, such as roads, and going from five acres to ten acres will create sprawl and the need for additional roads.
- Protected two five-acre areas for a retirement nest egg. The cost of medication and the expense of keeping his property maintained, he was going to need the nest egg.
- Doubling the lot size from five to ten acres certainly reduces the opportunity for making some profit on land.

Opposed to **increased percentage** for the Rural Preservation Lot

- Not in favor of changing the rural preservation homestead lot from 40% to 60%.
- Has been more rural subdivisions with the 40% rural preservation lot, is because of the bonus lot.

Supportive of **density decrease** comments

- Increasing lot density in rural areas supports the concept of growth in UDAs and decreases the need for services, police, fire and rescue services, schools, and water, etc., in outlying areas.
- Would like to see the proposed amendment passed by reducing the number in half.
- Recognize potential economic concerns, but believe that over time, if the supply of land is available, at some point in time the demand will bring the economics back into align with where they should be to make it appropriate for everyone.

Opposed to density decrease comments

- Concern that proposed change would devalue the land owned by farmers.
- Does not support the by-right density change from five to ten acres.
- The reduction in density takes affordability out of the equation for the majority of potential home buyers and folks just wanting to live in a rural setting.
- Proposal before the Commission amounts to a downzoning of all of the land in Frederick County zoned RA (Rural Areas).
- It will be harder to garner open space easements to protect property in perpetuity from development if density is decreased. Part of the dynamic of open space easements for many potential donors is the value of the tax deduction and the tax credits. When the value of property is decreased, the value of those deductions and credits will go down.
- Definition of rural character was countryside full of small and large farms and maybe some communities; he wanted to see it preserved the way it has been for the last 50-100 years.
- Decrease in density may impact ability to implement conservation easements. If a density decrease is implemented, a property will be worth 40% less. If the property owner implements a conservation easement, he said the landowner is provided with 70-75% of the appraised value; he estimated tax credits at about 72 cents per dollar, which further reduces the property value to less than half of what it was originally valued.