

The Capital

South County

Reilly's landowner relief bill faces changes

Intended to let families subdivide in areas with overcrowded schools

By ERIN COX, Staff Writer

South county residents who feared a proposed law would usher growth into rural corners of Anne Arundel are resting a little easier this week. But not too easy, they say.

"It (takes) a constant vigilance on the part of south county to keep it rural," said Churchton resident Mike Shay, founder of the South Arundel Citizens for Responsible Development, or SACReD.

A new law proposed by County Councilman Ed Reilly, R-Crofton, would have allowed people to subdivide property and build up to five homes regardless of whether nearby schools were too full to handle more students.

Backers said Mr. Reilly's law would be the only salvation for local families who want to give land to their children.

Although Mr. Shay, county planning officials, councilmen and school leaders sympathize and support finding a solution for these families, they characterized Mr. Reilly's bill as creating a loophole for developers to circumvent the hurdle of crowded schools. "The bill was never really crafted to serve the people they were intending to serve," Mr. Shay said.

As of Monday night, the bill has been amended seven times to more narrowly define the people it served and make it enforceable - in some instances under the objection of Mr. Reilly.

Two amendments passed during Monday night's council meeting limit the number of new houses to three and also require the land owner to possess the property for five years before subdividing. Amendment sponsor Councilman Josh Cohen, D-Annapolis, said both measures were designed to avoid creating a loophole for developers and were "an attempt to more narrowly focus the bill on the stated purpose of helping the families. Mr. Reilly said that was his intention of the bill, but he rejected those two amendments because it put unnecessary limits on the process.

Another public hearing on the bill is scheduled for Jan. 22. Mr. Shay said his organization has not decided whether they support this version of the bill.

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