

The Capital

Top Stories

County Council OKs scenic road protections

By JEFF HORSEMAN, Staff Writer

The County Council made it tougher to build along rural south county roads last night, despite a councilman's protests that the protections should apply countywide.

By a 6-1 vote, the council approved an ordinance barring everything from country clubs to rubble landfills from being located along 22 roads from Davidsonville to Bristol.

County Executive Janet S. Owens and Council Chairman Ed Reilly, the Crofton Republican who represents south county, sponsored the bill as a way to preserve south county's rustic character.

"If I'm criticized for trying to keep south county rural, then bring it on," Mr. Reilly said.

The bill builds upon a resolution passed in the 1990s that set up a historic and scenic roads commission. The now-defunct commission drew up a list of scenic or historic roads based on certain criteria, such as their narrow, twisting routes.

The list covered the entire county. But the ordinance only applies to roads in areas of south county zoned residential-agricultural.

Councilman Barbara D. Samorajczyk, D-Annapolis Roads, said the bill's protections should apply "equally and uniformly" to similar roads outside south county.

"You're taking roads that met the qualifications (for scenic roads) and yet you're only going to take some of the roads in south county and protect them," she told county Planning and Zoning Officer Joseph Rutter.

By applying protections to "a subset of a subset," Mrs. Samorajczyk said the bill strips protections from scenic roads outside south county.

Mr. Rutter replied that the scenic roads listed in the 1990s have never been protected, since the commission that created the list was formed by a resolution, which is not legally binding.

If other councilmen want to protect scenic roads in their districts, Mr. Rutter said he's happy to work with them.

But Mr. Rutter and Mr. Reilly argued it's not as easy as applying the bill's provisions to other parts of the county, since the bill's language deals specifically with south county zoning.

The county has taken other steps that effectively slow growth south of Edgewater. The small area plan for south county encourages land preservation, and Ms. Owens' economic

development policy has been to avoid recruiting large scale employers or development projects to the area.

Speakers testifying against the bill included Philip Hazen of Tracys Landing, who feared it would unduly restrict property rights.

"Roads really serve property," he said. "Property does not serve roads."

Dave Thomey of the Maryland Aggregates Association opposed the bill because of its limitations on sand and gravel mining and clay pits.

"Sand and gravel operations are a temporary use of the land and can be a benign use when compared to other high-density impact uses," he said.

Mike Lofton, president of the Harwood Civic Association, supported the bill.

"We think this will be a strong step toward preserving the rural character of south county," he said, calling sand and gravel operations "the most near-term and gravest threat" to residents' quality of life.

Mrs. Samorajczyk cast the only 'no' vote.

Water, sewer plan

It was a tough night all around for Mrs. Samorajczyk, who offered 22 amendments to the county's master water and sewer plan only to see every one die for lack of a second.

The plan maps out future extensions in the county's water and sewer service.

A bill passed last night amended the plan to reflect re-zoning and changing infrastructure needs.

Mrs. Samorajczyk's amendments came after she grilled Mr. Rutter about technical information and what the state Critical Area Commission thought about the bill.

The county Planning Advisory Board wasn't properly informed of some of the bill's provisions and recommended against approving others, Mrs. Samorajczyk said, adding that her amendments dealt with their concerns.

Mr. Rutter said Mrs. Samorajczyk should have had all the information she asked for and that he was confident the plan met Critical Area standards.

The amended plan passed 6-1 with Mrs. Samorajczyk opposed.

Also last night, the council allowed the introduction of a bill requiring miniature motorcycles in the county to be registered.

Councilman Pamela G. Beidle, D-Linthicum, is sponsoring the bill in hopes of educating "pocket bike" riders of state laws governing their vehicles. A public hearing on the bill is scheduled for March 6.

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