




FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Jan H. Gardner
County Executive

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE *Raymond V. Barnes, Jr., Acting, Chief Administrative Officer*

TO: County Council

FROM: County Executive Jan H. Gardner 

DATE: March 5, 2018

SUBJECT: Comments on Council Bill #18-05 – Public Safety Facilities Exemption

The Administration is opposed to Bill #18-05. This bill proposes that any and all Planning and Permitting Division (PPD) and Utilities and Solid Waste Management Division (DUSWM) fees be exempted for the design and construction of all buildings associated with volunteer fire and rescue companies, including volunteer fire and rescue company social halls. As broadly interpreted (see Finance Division fiscal note), it appears that ongoing operating expenses for fire companies would also be exempted, such as quarterly water and sewer bills.

The County already has a policy in place to reimburse volunteer fire and rescue companies for PPD and DUSWM fees. This policy has been in effect since 2003. This policy was most recently updated in September 2017 with the support of the Administration. Under this policy the County offers reimbursement of these fees on any new or renovated fire or rescue station. The current policy does not, however, provide reimbursement for projects or parts of projects that are "non-operational" functions (i.e., social halls).

Like the prior administration the County Executive recognizes that volunteer fire and rescue companies provide a valuable public service to the community throughout Frederick County. It is in recognition of this public service that the County provides a special policy for those aspects of capital projects that directly address County fire and rescue service needs. We support continuation of this policy as written.

The Administration does not support extending this policy to other aspects of a fire and rescue companies activities such as social halls or activity buildings. We do not diminish the value of these buildings to many fire and rescue companies. However, they are only indirectly related to housing the equipment needed support the fire and rescue function. Like fire and rescue companies, there are many well established non-profit and charitable organization that also engage in building projects. These non-profits also provide a valuable public service in support of community needs. Putting social halls and activity buildings for volunteer fire and rescue companies in a special category where fees are waived is inconsistent with other worthy organizations that have similar building projects planned. It is important that government provide a level playing field for non-profit organizations.

In addition, the Administration is concerned that, broadly interpreted, as included in the fiscal note, the bill exempts fire and rescue companies not only from construction related fees, but from ongoing operating expenses. The impact on DUSWM income over time would be significant. This concern also raises the issue of an inconsistent playing field for other non-profits across the County.

For the reasons noted above, the Administration is opposed to Bill #18-05 and urges its defeat by the Council.