



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jan H. Gardner
County Executive

News Release

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Executive Gardner Reintroduces Initiatives to Protect Forest Cover, Environmental and Historic Resources

FREDERICK, MD – County Executive Jan Gardner today reintroduced two initiatives to protect Frederick County's forests, environmental resources, and historic and cultural assets. The first legislative initiative strengthens the County's Forest Resource Ordinance to protect existing forest and ensure no net loss of forest as the result of new development. The second proposal amends the county zoning ordinance to require consideration and protection of forest, environmentally sensitive areas, and historic assets before a property can be rezoned. Both bills were introduced to the County Council in March. Before the legislation could be approved, Council meetings were put on hold under the statewide stay-at-home order, which resulted in the legislation expiring.

"We need to protect the natural and cultural amenities that our community values," said Executive Gardner. "I am reintroducing these bills because it is essential that our forest cover, our environmental resources, and our rich history are protected before any new development is approved, so we can preserve what we cherish about Frederick County for generations to come."

The first bill restores a requirement in the Forest Resource Ordinance for an acre of forest to be planted for every acre of forest cleared for new development. Trees can be planted within a new development, or there are options for planting off-site. During the four years the 1:1 ratio for forest replacement was in place, the county gained 10 acres of forest cover. In 2011, the requirement was lowered to the minimum allowed by state law. The weaker law led to large areas of forest being cut down for development with little to no replacement. Between 2012 and 2019, Frederick County saw a net loss of approximately 480 acres of forest, which averages nearly 70 acres of forest lost every year. This bill restores past practice that delivered results and prevented the net loss of forest.

The ordinance focuses on new developments, not individual homeowners. Agricultural operations are exempt from the Forest Resource Ordinance. Also exempt is the transfer of land to children, known as child lots, if less than 20,000 square feet of forest are cleared. The Forest Resource Ordinance applies to lots that have been recorded since 1992. Any lot that was recorded before 1992 is exempt if forest clearing is limited to 20,000 square feet.

The second proposal is an update to the county's zoning laws. The goal is to protect sensitive environmental areas and historic assets before a property is rezoned for development. These resources would have to be identified, along with ways to avoid or minimize any impact on these resources, before rezoning the properties. The bill also adds criteria to better define what constitutes an adequate transportation network. Based on input from the Council, the revised zoning amendments also include requirements for community outreach meetings, and specify that when population change is considered in a rezoning request, consideration must be given to how much land is already zoned to meet the 10-year need for residential development.

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