



SIERRA CLUB

MARYLAND CHAPTER

Southern Maryland Group

Written Testimony: Support for Amendment to the 2016 Charles County Comprehensive Plan, Septic Tier Map, Newburg

Relevant to: Public Hearing on May 25, 2022 at 6:00pm
Submitted by: Ben Hance, Chair, Southern MD Sierra Club
Submitted on: May 25, 2022

To the Board of Commissioners of Charles County, MD:

The Southern Maryland Sierra Club is submitting this document as written testimony to the Board of County Commissioners for the Public Hearing, at 6:00pm on May 25, 2022. Consider these comments to be officially submitted for the public record.

On behalf of the five thousand (5000) members and supporters of the Southern Maryland Sierra Club, we ask that you **Support the Proposed Amendment** and that the property in question in Newburg be **designated Septic Tier 4 with a land use designation of Agricultural Conservation**. We believe that our following explanation will adequately demonstrate the necessity of **Adoption of this Amendment**.

The Area is Consistent with Tier 4 Criteria

The 900 acres in question is well suited to be designated Tier 4. Indeed Tier 4 seems the most appropriate designation, as the land is zoned Rural Conservation and surrounded by Priority Preservation Area. It is adjacent to both the Zekiah RLA and state and county parks land. This area is a natural spot for conservation efforts, and any other path would be unsuitable and detrimental to the preserved and conserved land surrounding and adjoining the acreage in question.

The argument for development lacks justification

There is no proper evidence that development of this area would provide tangible economic benefits to the local community or to Charles County as a whole. The only visible benefits would seem to be the enrichment of certain corporate landowners and their land management companies. If a development project does not benefit the community, it has no valid reason to be advanced. However, there is concrete evidence of the economic value of preserved agricultural and forest land. Recent studies show a Natural Capital Asset Value of up to \$5,500 per acre per year. This benefits the local



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community, and the whole county in a manner that development and paving of the area simply cannot. And while some vested interests may claim that this amendment will be “bad for business”, it is important to note that this area is not in a business district or key development district. Redevelopment and revitalization of buildings with the vacancies and empty offices in town centers around the region, while preserving this productive farmland to continue its productive and beneficial working life, will lead to a much more economically favorable outcome for **all** Charles County residents.

Infrastructure in the area is not suited for more intense development

The issues at the Wastewater facility in Cliffton are well known. The proper solution to these issues is not to expand the sewer demand and place increased stress on it, as keeping this area open for increased development would do. Setting the area in question to Tier 4 and Agricultural conservation will ensure an environment of sustainable demands on wastewater infrastructure. As well, the transportation and educational resources in the area would be put under great strain by increased development and only at obscene and unnecessary cost to the County and its residents would they be upgraded to serve a more densely developed Newburg. This amendment solves that problem before it occurs. It keeps development in line with both the character of the area and the limits of the local infrastructure.

Development represents an extreme risk to the local environment and watershed

The area in question is 0.25 miles from the Potomac River. This means that any environmental impact has immediate, direct impacts on the health of the river. Development in this area would necessarily come with increased impervious surfaces from paving and construction. Studies have shown that as little as 5% impervious surface in the immediate area around a body of water can result in a significant decrease in aquatic life and by 10% impervious surface half of all aquatic life has vanished from the local marine ecosystem. Failure to adopt this Amendment keeps the area open to development that could have catastrophic effects on the local aquatic ecosystem. Additionally, the farm and forest land at risk serves as a valuable wildlife corridor and habitat area that cannot be replaced once destroyed. Development of this area will result in the loss of invaluable environmental resources that the residents of the county do not have to spare.



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Thank you for your time and consideration, and once again we urge you to **Adopt this Amendment.**

Regards,

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