

ZTA 22-170 Comments

With regard to Zoning Text Amendment #22-170, I urge you to support and follow through on the “strong recommendation” that was sent to you via the Planning Commission Letter of Recommendation on August 28, 2023. The “strong recommendation” in that letter urged you to change the Watershed Conservation District (WCD) building density from one unit per twenty acres to one unit per ten acres.

Back in 2017, after much research and numerous public hearings, the Planning Commission, our county organization charged with the responsibility of developing land usage guidelines, thought it was reasonable to have a one unit per ten acre building density when the plan for the WCD was first presented to the County Commissioners. Three of the five County Commissioners, at that time, thought otherwise, and with a three to two vote changed the building density from ten acres to twenty acres. That one action dramatically decreased the land value of many property owners in Charles County. I built a house on thirty-two acres in 2001, and in 2007 had a second perc recorded on the property. I did not subdivide it, but just thought getting the second perc was a good investment. Ten years later, in 2017, creation of the WCD with a twenty-acre building density, an action contrary to the Planning Commission recommendation, has caused that second perc on my property to become completely worthless. Based on today’s market, that has devalued my land by at least \$150,000.

Just one and a half miles from my driveway the community of Bensville Crossing is being developed. Seventy-seven new homes are being constructed on a parcel of land that is only a little over forty acres in size. However, on my thirty-two acres, with a second perc, I’m allowed only one house. Now, I realize, or assume, that the Bensville Crossing development plans had been approved prior to the WCD, even though construction has only taken place over the past year or so. But seeing things such as this just make the fact that the building density of the original WCD was changed from ten acres to twenty acres by a three to two vote of the County Commissioners so much harder to accept, especially since the entire WCD concept was so bitterly opposed to begin with.

Back in 2017, I wasn’t alone, I had never before seen a more diverse group of LOCAL organizations come together to oppose something as was the opposition voiced against the WCD. There were objections from the real estate community, the business associations, the Chamber of Commerce, the Navy Base, the NAACP, the Democrat Central Committee, the Republican Central Committee, our state

legislators, and others. Support for the WCD came mainly from a small but vocal group that was predominantly from outside of the county.

I understand that a major premise of the WCD is the preservation of the Mattawoman Creek. If that is truly the case, then why does the Maryland Department of Natural Resources maintain a fifty-slip boat marina there, and why do we continue to promote and host numerous bass fishing tournaments every year? Power boating kicks up sediments, increases algae growth, and deposits numerous toxins into the water. Any net positive impact of the WCD on the Mattawoman Creek will take years to materialize, if ever. A ban on power boating would have an immediate effect. What this tells me is that preservation of the Mattawoman Creek by protecting its watershed was NOT the real reason for the WCD. So, what was the reason?

The people OF Charles County never wanted the WCD, but given that it has been enacted, I would like to see it reflect what was originally proposed by the Planning Commission, and is once again strongly recommended by the Planning Commission – a one unit per TEN acre building density.

I will also be speaking in-person at the public hearing.

Thank you,

John D. Rutherford
3875 Pearl Street
White Plains, MD 20695
301-848-1911 (M)
jdrut@comcast.net