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Incomplete paperwork nixes county's challenge of Laurel annexation

Dernoga says opposition nonetheless succeeded by highlighting stress on public facilities

by Timmy Gelles | Staff Writer

Laurel officials are pleased a proposed referendum forcing the city to take a vote of recently annexed property owners will not occur as planned.

County Executive Jack B. Johnson (D) did not sign the proposed legislation that would have forced the city to hold a referendum.

Property owners near Van Dusen and Contee roads, whose properties were annexed Dec. 8, would have had to vote as to whether they would be annexed into Laurel, despite coming to the city asking to be annexed, said Councilman Frederick Smalls (Ward 2).

"We felt the annexation was proper and appropriately done," City Administrator Kristie Mills said. "It was requested by the property owners and conformed to state law. We didn't understand what [County Councilman Thomas] Dernoga wanted to do."

Laurel Mayor Craig Moe agreed but said he was not happy the County Council opposed the 45-acre annexation.

"The law allows them to do it and we followed all the laws," he said.

On Jan. 13 Dernoga (D-Dist.1) of Laurel cited that annexations that offer more dense zoning and development have become a detriment to county residents because of the stress on public facilities. Neighboring county residents are also unable to have any input into such development. The County Council approved it unanimously.

Prince George's County owns a 2.5 acre section of the proposed annexation. Under state law, 5 percent of property owners in an affected annexation can force an approval vote. The Laurel City Council approved the annexation on Dec. 8, keeping the land zoned for rural residential use.

Dernoga said he accomplished his goal despite the failure to secure the referendum.

"My point was one of having the opportunity to raise the objection," he said. "Since the point of the resolution was to raise the issue publicly, that has been accomplished. Hopefully, there will be some considered discussion around the point."

Dernoga added that the County Council proposed the legislation months after the annexation because the council was in recess for a majority of the 45-day notification period.

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