

Our Say: Needed west county developments deserve council OK

On Monday the County Council will consider long-discussed changes to stormwater regulations and subdivision rules. The bill contains zoning changes removing the final hurdle for Arundel Gateway, a mixed-use development on 300 acres near Laurel. We urge the council to pass it.

In addition to shops and office space, Arundel Gateway would provide west county with 1,600 homes, meeting a need for housing that is bound to grow as the Base Realignment and Closure Process brings jobs to Fort George G. Meade and the surrounding area.

This is a good project that has stayed in the pipeline for years in spite of difficult zoning and infrastructure issues. But it has been stalled, primarily because the county executive wanted developers to wait years for the comprehensive rezoning plan, and then decided to delay action further until after the election. This is a problem he created.

It's true that the plan would become cannon fodder in this year's election campaigns, seized on by the candidates. But the delay has jeopardized several good projects, including Arundel Gateway.

Also at stake is Riverwood, a work-force housing project on Brock Bridge Road that also would help satisfy housing needs in growing west county. Riverwood's developer proposes to build a contract school if the county provides the necessary zoning.

Because the developers of these two projects are working together to help satisfy adequate facilities needs, it's possible a failure by the council to pass the Arundel Gateway bill on Monday night could delay the Riverwood project as well as its proposed Imagine school. Area residents counting on the arrival of that school are not going to be happy.

Even if the council passes the new stormwater regulations and subdivision rules, County Executive John R. Leopold could exercise a line-item veto. His administration is bothered by the bill because it believes Arundel Gateway should not be OK'd before the comprehensive plan is approved. It is simply bad government to hold up a developer who has all the approvals he needs just for the sake of administrative decorum.

The importance of this bureaucratic finagling is lost on most people, including us. What's not lost on local residents is the impact of these projects being stalled.

BRAC employees will be arriving in the county over the next several years. If Anne Arundel County wants to compete with neighboring counties to get some of them to move here and pay taxes here, it must have housing and shopping amenities. These projects offer that.

The council showed leadership in moving to enact the changes earlier this month. We hope it gives the bill and its amendments final approval tomorrow night. If it does, we urge Leopold to not interfere. Besides bringing needed housing to west county, the measure would bring significant revenue, from hookup fees to property taxes - something to which Leopold, as he looks ahead to more struggles to balance the county budget, should be sensitive.

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