





Howard County

Internal Memorandum

Subject: Council Resolution 36-2020
Amendments to Agricultural Land Preservation Program Easement Pricing Formula

To: Lonnie R. Robbins, Chief Administrative Officer

Through: Amy Gowan, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning 

From: Joy Levy, Administrator, ALPP 

Date: February 20, 2020

The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) supports Council Resolution 36-2020, which amends the formula used to determine the price the County will pay when purchasing development rights under the Agricultural Land Preservation Program (ALPP). The pricing formula must be adopted by County Council Resolution and was last amended in 2013.

The Agricultural Preservation Board (APB) began working on revisions to the formula in July 2019 to better reflect current agricultural practices and land use conditions. After much consideration, the APB approved a revised formula at their January 27, 2020 meeting. Many of the items either stayed the same or had minor changes, however there were several significant updates:

- **Parcel size** – The current price formula provides one point per acre with a maximum of 200 points. The average parcel size in the RC (Rural Conservation) and RR (Rural Residential) zoning districts is approximately 40 acres. The proposed change awards points based on the applicant property parcel size relative to the average 40-acre parcel size. The proposed maximum number of points was reduced to 150.
- **Zoning** - The current price formula awards 100 points if the property is in the RC zoning district and 0 points if it is in the RR zoning district. The revised scoring system proposes to eliminate the zoning criterion, thus removing a preference for RC land.
- **Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan (SCWQP)/Best Management Practices (BMPs)** –The Soil Conservation District (SCD) identified challenges with the current scoring criteria in this category and noted deficiencies in capturing the implementation of BMPs. Based on SCD's advice, the revised scoring system amends this criterion so that it better reflects ongoing stewardship efforts and the applicant's working relationship with SCD.
- **Road Frontage** – The current price formula awards a maximum of 50 points for linear feet on a scenic road versus a non-scenic road. The revised scoring system proposes to move this measure to the Optional APB points and allocate up to 5 points for farms located on the Historic National Road (Rt. 144) or a Maryland or Howard County Scenic Road.

- **Relinquishment of Parcel Division Rights** – The current criterion awards extra points if the property owner relinquishes the right to divide 100-plus acre parcels into 50-plus acre parcels. Since there are fewer than a handful of 100-plus acre uncommitted parcels in the West, these points are proposed to be eliminated.
- **Optional APB Points** – In previous application cycles, the APB had optional points to award or subtract based on farm desirability. These discretionary points were more subjective than the main criteria and were eliminated prior to the 2013-2018 acquisition cycle. The proposed amendment will reinstate the 50 optional APB points and provide guidance to the APB for awarding them.
- **Protection of Green Infrastructure Network (GIN) Points** – The current pricing formula awards up to 100 extra points if the property has GIN hubs and/or corridors on site and the owner is willing to protect these resources. The proposed amendment will move the GIN points from the main scoring system to the Optional APB points, reduce the maximum points from 100 to 10, and broaden the criterion to include stream buffer width.

Fiscal Impact: The amended pricing formula will not require any additional staff resources or General Fund expenditures. There are no additional appropriations for easement acquisition being requested at this time due to remaining funding from the last Council allocation. The revised scoring may impact the amount the County pays to purchase future easements and could result in an increase to the purchase price.

cc: Jennifer Sager, Legislative Coordinator, Department of County Administration