

Amendment 5 to Council Bill No. 28 -2023

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Amendment No. 5

(This Amendment amends HoCo By Design Chapter 6: Dynamic Neighborhoods to remove language about specific housing types in the Rural Crossroads and substituting general language about maintaining the rural character of the West if housing options are expanded.)

1 In the *HoCo By Design* General Plan, attached to this Act as Exhibit A, amend the following
2 pages as indicated in this Amendment:

- 3 • Chapter 6: Dynamic Neighborhoods: 56.

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5 Correct all page numbers, numbering, and formatting within this Act to accommodate this
6 amendment.

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Housing Opportunities in the Rural West

The Rural West is a unique and special place in Howard County and should maintain its rural character. As previously noted, residential development in the Rural West follows a low-density, large-lot development pattern with a significant percentage of land preserved through agricultural and environmental easements. The Rural West also includes three Rural Crossroads, which are small nodes of mixed-use areas with a focus on commercial activity along a rural highway. While the Rural West presents some opportunities to expand and diversify its housing options, especially in areas with greater school capacity, it is not intended for significant development as it lacks access to public water and sewer.

Smaller, more affordable missing middle housing units, such as modest duplexes, would likely require a shared sewage disposal system or multi-use sewerage system (a type of sewerage system that serves more than one lot, or more than one user on a single lot, respectively). These systems can be costly to install, and annual maintenance fees could present challenges to owners or renters of moderately priced dwelling units. Depending on the septic system, soil, and the site, detached ADUs could potentially connect to existing septic systems with capacity. However, this may require changes to state code. County and state code clarifications related to facility ownership, regulation, and maintenance may also be necessary prior to implementation. With smaller lots and clustered homes, more households could connect to one shared or multi-use sewerage system, which could make these systems more cost-effective options. Zoning changes may be needed to allow for smaller lots in the west.

The Rural West is also home to most of the County's farming community, with significant land permanently preserved through easements. With residential land uses often adjacent to agricultural uses, there is potential for conflict between farmers and their neighbors. Neighbors frequently have concerns with farming practices, such as pesticide spraying, equipment/tractor noise, odors and dust, slow-moving tractors on roads, and agribusiness operations on the farm that bring visitors to the area. Additionally, new housing developments sometimes remove existing mature tree stands that can serve as natural buffers and screening between agricultural and residential uses. As new housing is developed in the west, it is important that new residential development incorporate adequate buffering and screening, including preserving wooded perimeter areas where possible, to minimize any potential adverse impacts between uses.

Maryland Agricultural Conflict Resolution Service

According to the Maryland Department of Agriculture, the Maryland Agricultural Conflict Resolution Service is the official US Department of Agriculture (USDA)-certified agricultural mediation program for Maryland, offering confidential assistance to help resolve agriculture related issues in a productive environment.

Further, the farming community has experienced challenges with hiring and paying their workers. Farm workers in Maryland earned an average annual wage of \$32,890-\$33,400 in 2019. With an annual wage this low, farm workers representing an individual household likely have difficulty living in the County and making ends meet. The Economic Prosperity chapter discusses the challenges in the agriculture industry in greater detail. However, this chapter includes policies and actions that focus on improving relationships between farm operations and their neighbors and creating affordable housing opportunities for farm workers.

Maintaining the rural character of the West, minimizing conflicts between residential and agricultural land uses, addressing environmental concerns, and meeting the needs of the farming community are paramount ~~if housing options are expanded. in expanding housing options. By guiding residential and commercial development in the Rural Crossroads (see the Focus Areas Technical Appendix), permitting ADUs, encouraging affordable housing for farm workers, and allowing the use of community or shared well and shared or multi-use sewerage systems for certain residential development opportunities, the Rural West may provide opportunities to expand the County's housing mix.~~

