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Frederick County commissioners take over development approval By [Sherry Greenfield](#)
Staff Writer

The approval to build homes and businesses in Frederick County is now in the hands of elected officials.

On Feb. 21, the Frederick Board of County Commissioners voted to give themselves the power to approve new homes and businesses — rather than the seven-member appointed planning commission.

While board members said they wanted to make it easier for developers to build, there have been concerns that the planning commission has rejected projects that do not meet existing limitations placed on growth in the county. The Board of County Commissioners would like to override those limitations in order to speed up growth.

This means that commissioners will determine if proposed development meets the growth-control standards included in the county's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO).

The ordinance determines if roads, schools, water and sewer are adequate to handle proposed growth.

Commissioner's President Blaine R. Young (R), however, said the board will continue to enforce the county's growth policy.

Commissioners see the change as a way to make the development approval process more efficient — a goal they have been working toward since the 2010 election. Commissioners over the last year have loosened building regulations and reduced fees to make it easier for developers to build in hopes of creating more jobs.

The planning commission, which opposed the county commissioners decision to take approval power, will still be tasked with determining if a proposed development meets the county's comprehensive plan — a long-term blueprint for growth.

However, the planning commission will only offer recommendations to the county commissioners, who will make the final decision.

Some builders say they welcome the change and see it as another step by commissioners to make the county more business-friendly.

"First off, I really want to take this opportunity to thank the commissioners for all their efforts, including this one, to streamline the development process and improve efficiency," said Stephen Oder, with Cavalier Builders in Frederick, at a public hearing last week. "This change is reasonable. We recognize that this does not change any of the

requirements for the APFO. We also recognize that you're simplifying the process, but not easing the requirements."

Commissioners approved the change in a 4-1 vote, after listening to opponents argue that the board's interests lie with the developers and making it easier for them to build houses and businesses.

"We the taxpayers do not trust that the developers and the county commissioners are looking out for our best interests," said Margo Schmidt, of Frederick. "I'm also against the rezoning of farmland and open space for development. We already have a Rockville down the road. We do not need another one."

Frederick County has a population of 236,015, according to the 2010 U.S. Census. In comparison, Montgomery County has nearly 1 million residents, and Rockville — the county seat — has 47,388.

Commissioner David P. Gray (R) voted against the change, saying that the planning commission has the experience to handle the approval process.

"This board has never done that," he said. "The planning commission has the expertise, not this board."

Janice Wiles, executive director of Friends of Frederick County — a group that advocates for land preservation — said in an email that the change is a benefit for developers, not taxpayers.

"Allowing private interests to dictate the adequacy of public services is bad government as it will impact the taxpayers for a long time to come," she said.

sgreenfield@gazette.net

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