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Prince George's Council Passes Controversial Stormwater Bill

Many sides were dissatisfied with the bill.

By [Sonia Dasgupta](#) and [Joshua Garner](#) | [Email the authors](#) | July 20, 2011

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After months of wrangling, the Prince George's County Council Tuesday passed an updated stormwater management bill.

The bill, which passed 7-0, requires more rigorous guidelines on how developers will deal with stormwater management.

Developers will now have to manage a half-inch of stormwater runoff from their properties, instead of the previous .25 inches required. This legislation will apply until 2016, when the standard will move up to .75 inches.

Residents and environmental experts clashed with developers over the strength of the bill, CB-15-2011, during Tuesday's public hearing.

Homeowners said developers should be required to manage at least one inch of stormwater runoff, the minimum to protect water quality, according to spokeswoman Emily Gillespie from the Anacostia Watershed Society.

Greenbelt Mayor Judith F. Davis told the council that the bill didn't go far enough in securing standards. Davis wanted amendments added that would allow municipalities to weigh in on developments in their jurisdiction.

"The city of Greenbelt opposes [the legislation] as it is written," she said. "Greenbelt believes the requirements for redevelopment will take too long to help the current problems in our waterways."

University Park Mayor John Tabori, also at the meeting, told Patch Monday he opposed the bill's requirements as well and thought it should be more stringent.

"It's been a very long and hard process to improve our stream so it can manage a large amount of water," Tabori said. "In (Montgomery County) and D.C. developments must be able to manage up to 2.7 inches of rainwater.

Although the county's previous legislation was lenient, Tabori said University Park has asked developers to upgrade their stormwater management standards as a condition of the town's approval of their development.

Tom Stickle, a resident of University Park and chair of the Wells Run Stream Committee, said the state of Maryland passed its stormwater management standards in 2007, but Prince George's County has yet to meet the state's expectation.

Still, developers told the council that implementing higher standards would drive up the cost for projects.

While residents argued that the bill fell short of the same standards in Montgomery County and Northern Virginia, developers said projects in Prince George's aren't as profitable and do not have the same leasing rates as those jurisdictions.

But Dana Minerva, executive director at the Bladensburg-based Anacostia Watershed Restoration Partnership, said the bill didn't go far enough. She the council that the bill should include more incentives for "green" developers.

"This is a good start but it is only a start," she said. "I believe there is a flaw in the bill."

Brad Frome, deputy chief of staff for county executive Rushern Baker, told the council that the bill strikes a unique balance between concerns from residents and developers.

"The touchstone for us is that we have a bill that no side is please with—I think we succeeded," he said. "It's a good compromise."

The legislation is needed, according to Susan Hubbard, spokeswoman with the county's Department of Public Works and Transportation.

"The county cannot approve building permits until the legislation is passed because there has to be local enabling legislation as required by the state in order to implement the program," Hubbard stated in an e-mail.

Only the city of Bowie has its own stormwater management program.

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COMMENTS (3)

Jon Flag as inappropriate
 4:04pm on Wednesday, July 20, 2011
 So are the standards any different in Bowie's program?
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Mark Ferguson Flag as inappropriate
 6:30pm on Wednesday, July 20, 2011
 There is a lot of bad information going around about the bill, and some of it has made it into this article. The facts are that all new (greenfield) development, whether in Montgomery County, Prince George's County, or Garrett County is required to manage (at a minimum, more in certain site- or watershed-specific circumstances) all of the runoff from a storm with 2.7" of rainfall over a 24 hour period, a storm which is expected to occur once a year, on average. That amount of runoff will vary from a comparatively small amount on a site with low development density, to a very high amount in highly-developed areas with lots of paved and roofed surfaces.
 State law (which the County's proposal exceeds) requires a site that is redeveloping to treat all of the runoff from that same 2.7" storm for new areas (beyond the existing impervious coverage), and to provide treatment for half of the runoff from existing areas (which had no treatment at all before).
 The County's proposal will require redeveloping sites to meet the State requirements for the next five years, and then will phase in a more stringent requirement so that by 2019 (I think) redevelopment projects will have to provide new treatment for 100% of all existing impervious surfaces.
 The article's statement makes it seem like the County's requirement is 0.5" instead of 2.7". That is absolutely false.
 The City of Bowie's requirement is the same as the State's; less than the County's.
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Dana Flag as inappropriate
 12:50pm on Thursday, July 21, 2011
 As Mark said, it is important to distinguish between new development and redevelopment. Under the bill, the standard for REDEVELOPMENT is .5 inches until 2016 when it moves up to .75 inches and to 1 inch in 2019. (So until 2016, the volume standard in Bowie and the County for redevelopment will be about the same.) In the Anacostia watershed, we are 75% developed, and most of our pollution in the Maryland portion of the river comes from stormwater, so the redevelopment standard is very important. And very dense places like Philly have had a 1 inch standard in place for a long time. At the end of the day, I was very thankful that Council Members Olson, Lehman, Turner, Patterson and Franklin did adopt strengthening amendments in the subcommittee, but was disappointed that they could not amend the bill to move the dates for the stronger redevelopment standards a little sooner in the Council meeting. Still, they adopted a bill that is better than the state law and I believe that we made a lot of progress in the fact that the Council endorsed the concept that we need a stronger redevelopment standard in the County.

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