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## Council seeks compromise on stormwater regulations

### Environmentalists, developers remain divided on construction proposals

by Daniel Valentine | Staff Writer

The Prince George's County Council has called for environmentalists and developers to reach a compromise on stormwater regulations, but a solution anytime soon doesn't seem likely.

"You can't even agree on the basic facts," Councilman Mel Franklin (D-Dist. 9) of Upper Marlboro told a panel of environmental and construction advocates at a stormwater management meeting Jan. 11.

The debate centers on how much builders should be required to do to contain rain on developed properties. Because most developments include paved surfaces such as parking lots, most rain drains into sewers and rivers, carrying trash, chemicals and other pollution, instead of mainly filtering into natural areas at the sites.

Last year, the council attempted to introduce legislation that would have required developers to catch all rainfall on properties. The bill died on the last legislative day after developers raised objections.

A new county proposal calls for builders to use a special pavement that absorbs water, plant more trees and limit the overall developed surface area, but no specifics have been decided.

The meeting was held in hopes of spurring compromise on what the council said is expected to be a top priority this year.

Brent Bolin, director of the Anacostia Watershed Society, urged the council to call for almost total on-site filtering.

"We have basements flooding every year. It's not because of rivers overflowing their levees; it's all that rain running down [U.S.] Route 1," Bolin said. "The time for half-measures is past."

Andre Gingles, a lawyer who has represented many of the area's largest developers, warned that requiring too-stringent environmental designs can increase costs and make entrepreneurs less likely to redevelop large, paved abandoned malls that lawmakers want revitalized.

"There are a lot of reasons not to bring development to certain areas," Gingles told the council. "What we're trying to say is that you don't want to add to those reasons."

Council members expressed frustration over the lack of compromise.

"Tell us: What can you live with?" Councilwoman Mary Lehman (D-Dist. 1) of Laurel asked the panel. Environmentalists said sites should be designed to absorb at least 2.7 inches of strong rainfall that comes in summer months without letting any leak over to area roads and streams. Gingles said developers would like regulations that would let a site handle up to one inch of rain.

Councilwoman Andrea Harrison (D-Dist. 5) of Springdale said little has changed in the debate.

"Back then, I thought everybody was overstating their case," Harrison said. "And I still feel that way now."

Members hope to introduce a bill and pass it by June.

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