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Appendix A: Selected Zoning Terms

Setback - The required minimum distance between the building line and the front, side, or rear property line or an adjacent use or zone line.

Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R.) - The total gross floor area of buildings on a site divided by the gross area of the site. An F.A.R. requirement limits the bulk or height of a building in relation to its parcel size.

Residential Transition Area: RTAs are buffer areas that are required when low density single family, semi-detached and duplex buildings adjoin higher density housing types such as townhouses and garden apartments.

Special Exception - The Baltimore County Zoning Regulations (BCZR) contain use listings for each zone which indicate whether a use is permitted by right or by special exception. If a use is not included on either of these lists, the use is prohibited from locating in the zone. If a use is permitted by right, the use is appropriate for any location in a zone. A use permitted by special exception is appropriate for some, but not all locations in a zone. For example, in the Density Residential (DR) zones, dwellings are permitted by right; nursing homes are permitted by special exception.

If a use is permitted by special exception, a petition must be submitted to the Administrative Law Judge. The ALJ will hold a public hearing, after which a decision will be issued. The ALJ must find that the use will meet certain criteria concerning impacts to the surrounding community, and also meet any other special regulations listed for that use or zone in the BCZR. If a use is not included on the special exception use listings for the zone, it cannot be permitted through the special exception process.

Special Hearing - The ALJ has the authority to conduct hearings involving any violation, alleged violation or the interpretation of any zoning regulation upon notice to "the parties of interest" and subject to the right of appeal to the Board of Appeals. Any "interested person" may petition for a public hearing which must be advertised, and posted if a specific property is involved.

Variance - The BCZR permits variances from height and area regulations, from off-street parking regulations and from sign regulations. A petition is submitted to the ALJ who must find that strict compliance with the regulations would result in "practical difficulty and unreasonable hardship." The variance is not permitted if it will cause "substantial injury to public health, safety and general welfare" or if the resulting development would not be in "strict harmony with the spirit and intent" of the regulation which is varianced.

The ALJ has the authority to grant variances of height and area regulations without holding a public hearing for owner-occupied lots zoned residential, if the property is posted and there are no requests for a public hearing within 15 days.

It is not possible to obtain density or intensity of use beyond what is permitted in the zone through the variance process.

Nonconforming Use - A nonconforming use is a legal use which does not conform to a use regulation for the zone in which it is located or to a special regulation applicable to the use. A nonconforming use can continue until circumstances such as abandonment of the property leads to the discontinuation of the use. Theoretically, nonconforming uses are replaced over time with conforming uses.

Urban Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) - A line established by the Planning Board dividing that portion of Baltimore County considered "urban" from that portion considered "rural." Generally, the line between urban zoning and rural zoning. The URDL has been established as a component of the Master Plan.

Appendix B: Major Zoning Milestones

1945
Zoning was introduced in Baltimore County as county commissioners adopted a "comprehensive" set of zoning regulations containing seven zones: four residential, one commercial, and two industrial.

1955
Zoning regulations were expanded to 13 zones: six residential, three commercial, and four industrial. There were no purpose or intent statements or locational requirements contained in these classifications.

1970
Bill 100 significantly revised the BCZR.

- Eliminated minimum lot sizes (except for small lot subdivisions).
- Created DR zones (density residential) with permitted density equal to the DR number times gross acreage (i.e., DR-5.5 = 5 1/2 units/acre).
- Allowed the transfer of density between zones on a parcel to encourage more creative and innovative subdivisions, better use of open space, and diversity of housing types.
- Introduced the concept of a Planned Unit Development (PUD)
- Recognized the significance of the Urban Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) with the creation of two rural zones, Rural Deferred Planning (RDP) and Rural Suburban Conservation (RSC).

1975
Resource Conservation (RC) zones were introduced: RC-2, RC-3, RC-4, RC-5.

1979
Growth management and basic services legislation enacted; RC-2 zone revised.

1980
Office zones RO, O-1 and O-2 revised

1988

- Chesapeake Bay Critical Area regulations and two new zones were introduced: RC-20 and RC-50.
- Major update of the county's parking regulations.

1992
In accordance with the 1989 Master Plan, revisions were made to the BCZR modifying Bill 100 provisions:

- Limited density transfers.
- Residential uses limited in DR-1, DR-2, and DR-3.5 to single family units only.
- Townhouses permitted in DR-5.5 only with finding of compatibility.

1994

- Performance-based business zones were created: BLR and CB.
- Office zones were revised; changing O-1 to OR-1, O-2 to OR-2 and creating the O-3 zone.

1997
Major update of the county's sign regulations.

2000
Two new rural zones were created: RC-6 and RC-7.

2002
The Middle River Employment Zone District (M-43) was created.

2004
Another rural zone was created: RC-8.

2012
Two new overlay districts were created, Neighborhood Commons (NC) and Mercantile Exposition (ME)