



**Home Builders Association of Washington County  
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July 22, 2004

Mr. Gregory Snook  
President Washington County Board of County Commissioners  
100 West Washington Street  
Hagerstown, MD 21740.

RE: Rural Re-Zoning

Dear Commissioner Snook,

First I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Association to thank you and the Board of County Commissioners for appointing the Rural Re-Zoning Task Force to address the concerns of the citizenry expressed at the public hearings for the adoption of the re-zoning. We are all aware that the re-zoning of land, particularly when it results in a reduction of density is an issue that is not easily addressed.

Our County today is experiencing what other counties in the state have already been through, a change from a housing market driven by demand to a builder driven market. We all can agree that this is a direct result of build-out being experienced in the other counties, which has forced the larger builders into Washington County.

The increase in the number of large builders in the County combined with the ever-increasing land costs associated, in part, with the moratorium and the anticipated downzoning of the rural area has created a situation where the small to mid-volume builder is finding it an almost impossible task to find either individual lots or small parcels of land on which to place a minor sub-division. Given that small volume builders built this county, the means must be found to enable this segment of the building industry to remain a viable part of our County.

It is for this reason that we urge you to adopt the recommendations made by the Rural Re-Zoning Task Force, particularly the recommendation to allow a five-lot exemption for each parcel. We understand that the proposal to exempt five lots per parcel has alarmed some individuals in the county, however what must be realized is that (1) not every parcel owner would utilize this exemption and, (2) not every parcel would be able to accommodate five lots due to land conditions and/or APF constraints.

While our industry would like to see the zoning remain as it is, and feel that the proposed downzoning is much too drastic, it is our opinion that these lot exemptions, would over time, provide an inventory of lots that the smaller builder could take advantage of. It would also provide the option for those individuals who choose not to live in the congested urban area the opportunity to live in the rural area without being a part of a larger sub-division.

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We would also like to see the BOCC adopt at least some of the bonus options recommended by the Task Force (and initially recommended by the Planning Commission during their adoption of the Comprehensive Plan). Each of these bonuses, while increasing the density of a parcel would provide added benefits for the county, such as additional planting of trees, or payment into the easement purchase program.

Lastly, we would like to state that we found it very disconcerting that while the Planning Commission, in its joint meeting with the BOCC, agreed to the appointment of the Task Force, directed the County Planning staff to make recommendations and then adopted them without giving the Task Force the courtesy of hearing their recommendations prior to that decision.

We understand that land issues are the toughest issues facing every local government today. We also understand that the growth that has been talked about for over thirty years has come to Washington County and with it the concerns over schools, roads and services. However, without growth all things suffer, and if the downzoning is done without taking into consideration the smaller builder then it is this portion of the industry that will suffer the most.

Sincerely,  
HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

Timothy E. Fields  
President

CC: BOCC Vice President William Wivell  
Commissioner Kercheval  
Commissioner Munson  
Commissioner Nipps  
Michael Thompson, WC Planning Department Director