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Legislative Report Overview of Key Bills and Implications

HB 1266: Fairness In Zoning

Status: Referred to committee; no hearing date set

Summary: Developed by Delegate Alston, HB 1266 remains a bill of concern. It creates greater potential for pushback against development.

Key Components:

- **1. Reduces Local Planning Board Authority** The bill allows the **District Council to override the County Planning Board's decisions** on zoning and subdivision matters. This weakens local planning authority and **creates uncertainty** in the approval process, making it harder for developers to move forward with projects efficiently.
- **2. Increases Political Influence in Planning Decisions** By giving the District Council the power to review and take final action, zoning decisions could become **more politicized** rather than based on professional urban planning principles. This could lead to **inconsistent approvals and favoritism**, discouraging fair development.
- **3. Delays Development Timelines** The bill changes timelines for zoning hearings and judicial reviews, which could lead to **longer approval processes** and slow down critical development projects. More bureaucratic steps mean higher costs and delays for developers, which could **deter investment in the county**.
- **4. Expands Who Can Challenge Zoning Decisions** It **broadens who has standing to file appeals** against zoning decisions, including individuals and associations that may not be directly impacted. This could result in **more legal challenges and delays**, adding uncertainty and discouraging developers from proposing new projects.
- **5. Limits Certain Zoning Changes** The bill **restricts the District Council from amending zoning laws for certain properties** in specific ways.

This could **hinder innovative growth strategies**, especially for mixed-use and high-density developments.

HB 503: Housing for Jobs Act

Status: Hearing scheduled for March 4th at 1:00 PM

Purpose: Ensures regional housing infrastructure keeps pace with job growth by assigning responsibility for closing housing gaps to local jurisdictions.

Key Provisions:

- Annual Housing Gap Calculation: The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Department of Planning will publish yearly reports detailing job-to-housing ratios and deficits.
- Regional Designations: Maryland is divided into six housing planning regions.
- Local Obligations:
 - Requires municipalities to approve housing projects unless substantial reasons for rejection exist.
 - Encourages affordable housing for households earning $\leq 60\%$ of the Area Median Income (AMI) for at least 40 years.

Implications:

- Encourages housing development in high job-growth areas.
- Limits local government power to reject housing projects.
- Prioritizes affordability for lower-income families.

Legislation Summaries

PG-407-25 (HB0396): Substance Abuse and Early Intervention Fund

Status: Referral to Committee; Hearing on February 5th

- Provides 90 days of treatment for expelled students in Prince George's County.
- Covers treatment for uninsured/underinsured minors.
- Managed by the Prince George's County Health Department.
- Funded by \$2M annually starting in FY 2027.

CB-005-2025: Minimum Wage Indexing

Status: Still in Committee

- Indexes Prince George's County's minimum wage to the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- Annual wage adjustments capped at 5%, with no reduction if CPI declines.

CB-097-2024: Rent Gouging Bill (Failed)

- Proposed a 15% rent cap but did not pass. Has not been reintroduced yet.

PG-410-25: Tax Credit for Public School Volunteers (Withdrawn)

- Proposed a tax credit for volunteers in Prince George's County Public Schools.

MG/PG-117-25: Zoning Authority for municipalities

- Introduces a 15,000-population limit but does not impact you directly.

PG-301-25 (HB0408): Youth Violence Review and Response Team

Status: Hearing scheduled for March 6th at 1:00 PM

- Supports youth exposed to gun violence.
- No current funding assigned.

PG-408-25: Community Associations – Management Registration Fee

- Introduces a \$100 fee for community association management registration.
- Assists homeowners seeking legal action against their HOA.

PG-412-25: Property Taxes for Abandoned Properties

- Targets tax policy adjustments to address neglected properties.

MG/PG-102-25: WSSC Speed Cameras in Work Zones

- Allows WSSC Police Department to manage speed cameras in work zones.
- Revenue retained by WSSC.

Analysis and Recommendations

Budget Challenges

The state structural shortfall highlights the urgent need for either:

- Revenue generation through new taxes or reassessment of corporate tax cuts.
- Strategic budget reallocations to reduce expenditures without harming essential services.
- The governor aims to close the budget gap through economic development rather than tax increases.
- The Blueprint Act will be adjusted, but no cancellations are expected.

Bills Under Watch

- SB-292, HB139, HB238, and HB255 remain under monitoring for potential impact. Law enforcement bills.
- SB820: Municipal Fine Increases
 - Increases maximum fines for municipal infractions from \$1,000 to \$5,000.
 - Enhances municipalities' ability to enforce local laws.
- HB997: Local Admissions and Amusement Tax
 - Authorizes a local 3% tax on gross receipts from food and beverage sales at establishments with on-site consumption.

- Exemptions include off-premises alcohol sales and vending machine sales.

House Bill 1043: Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2025

Purpose: Strengthens voter protections in Maryland by preventing voter suppression and vote dilution.

Key Provisions:

- Public Notice Requirements: Election-related policy changes require public notice.
- Prohibition on Discriminatory Election Actions: Prevents policies that impair voting rights.
- Legal Enforcement: Individuals and organizations can file lawsuits against violations.
- Election Methods & Voting Policies Defined: Includes rules for at-large and district-based elections.

Impact:

- Increases transparency and accountability in election rule changes.
- Strengthens legal protections for voters, particularly those in protected classes.

HB1525: Annexation Restrictions

Purpose: Restricts municipalities from annexing land outside their state legislative district.

Key Conditions:

- Land must be contiguous and adjoining to the municipality.
- Annexation must not create unincorporated enclaves.
- The land must not belong to another municipality or legislative district.

Status: Emergency measure requiring a three-fifths majority vote for enactment.

Senate Bill 0505: Redevelopment Authority Annexation Rights

Key Provisions:

- Expands the definition of "person" to include redevelopment authorities in annexation referendums.
- Allows property owners, including redevelopment authorities, to participate in annexation votes if fewer than 20 residents qualify.
- Declared an emergency measure for immediate implementation.

Analysis of HB 990

Summary:

House Bill 990 mandates that individuals appointed or employed by municipalities in financial oversight roles—such as comptrollers, treasurers, and other financial administrators—meet minimum educational and professional qualifications. Key provisions include:

- **Education Requirements:**
 - A bachelor's degree or higher in accounting, business administration, finance, public administration, or a related field.
 - Completion of at least 27 semester hours of accounting coursework, including financial accounting, auditing, ethics, and accounting information systems.
- **Experience Requirements:**
 - A minimum of five years of full-time experience in accounting, finance, or public finance, with at least three years in a supervisory or leadership role.
- **Continuing Education:**
 - Municipalities must establish annual professional development and ethics training for financial officers to maintain compliance.
- **Compliance and Oversight:**
 - Municipalities must maintain and publicly disclose records of financial officers' qualifications.
 - The Legislative Auditor must review and report on municipal compliance with these requirements annually.
- **Effective Date:**
 - Applies to new hires and appointees starting July 1, 2025.
 - Full compliance, including continuing education, required by June 30, 2030.