

To: County Executive Steuart Pittman
Members, Anne Arundel County Council

From: Kathy Gramp, on behalf of the Advocates for Herring Bay¹

Date: October 1, 2020

Re: Bill 69-20, Zoning-Farm or Agritourism Heritage Site Stays or Special Events

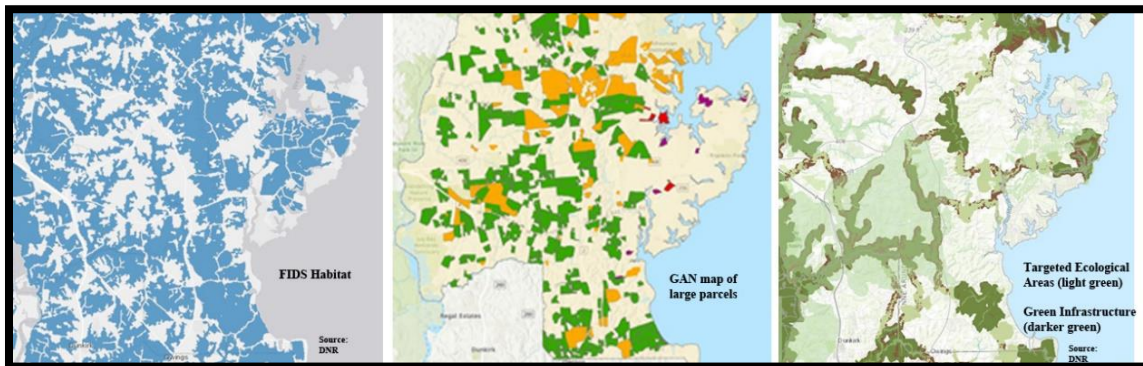
Bill 69-20 is changing the zoning code to allow large tourist events and overnight stays—indoor or outdoor—on parcels across the county. As shown in the three maps below, it will make large tracts of forested and environmentally sensitive land available for those new uses, including land designated as Targeted Ecological Areas, Habitat for Forest Interior Dwelling Species, and Green Infrastructure.

As written, the tourism activities authorized by Bill 69-20 could pose various risks to Anne Arundel County's forests and natural resources, including:

- Forest fragmentation and clearing for glamping or camping sites, trails, driveways, parking areas, event venues, restroom facilities, and other ancillary facilities;
- Stream and wetland degradation from trails and pathways used for motorized or nonmotorized vehicles, especially on parcels characterized by steep slopes;
- Habitat disruption from amplified sound and lighting, especially at night;
- Wastewater management in areas served almost exclusively by septic systems; and
- Increases in impervious surfaces for accessory facilities, which would be left to the discretion of the property owner, in contrast to other counties in Maryland that require that accessory structures be subordinate in size and intensity to the structures supporting the principal use of the property.

In our view, Bill 69-20 must include regulations that will ensure that tourist activities in forests and wetlands are sited and managed in an ecologically sustainable manner. Because ecosystem management requires specialized expertise, we recommend that those standards—whether added to Article 17 or Article 18 of the code—be developed in consultation with scientists and naturalists at the Patuxent Wildlife Refuge, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, and Jug Bay.

If the county is unable to enact effective safeguards at this time, we urge the Council to amend the bill to exclude forest and wetland habitats from the locations eligible for the temporary, conditional, and special exception uses authorized by Bill 69-20.



¹ The Advocates for Herring Bay is a community-based environmental group in southern Anne Arundel County.