

Close vote sends zoning change to joint session

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A proposed text amendment to the Calvert County Zoning Ordinance that would allow indoor commercial recreational facilities in Light Industrial (LI) and Employment Center (EC) districts will be discussed at a joint work session of the Calvert County Commissioners and Calvert County Planning Commission. The county commissioners voted 3-to-2 in favor of moving the proposed change forward during their Tuesday, Oct. 22 meeting.

The county zoning ordinance currently conditionally permits indoor commercial recreation facilities in the Rural Commercial (RC) District and with special exceptions permits such facilities in many town center zoning subareas.

In a report by the Department of Community Planning and Building staff, the application for the change was submitted by Stephen Moreland and John Downing. The applicants, whose business is in an industrial park in Owings, were seeking a change to the law for use of an indoor commercial recreational facility in the LI District. The staff report states department personnel discussed the request with the Department of Economic Development staff and decided to recommend adding the EC District.

In justifying the request, the applicants reported problems since 2008 in acquiring quality tenants in the industrial park. Potential small businesses looking for a more cost-effective location and challenged to afford the prohibitive costs of town center space, are trying instead to locate in the other surrounding counties.

"We've had this come before us many times," said Commissioner Gerald W. "Jerry" Clark [R], who indicated he was not supportive of the request for permission to locate the indoor recreational businesses in the LI District. Clark explained he feels Calvert's town centers need such facilities in order to attract customers to the retail stores and restaurants. "To go forward with an amendment like this doesn't make much sense to me," he said.

Commissioner Susan Shaw [R] was also familiar with the location the applicants are seeking to convert into an indoor recreational facility, which she said "was a warehouse" and noted "there's a rubble landfill there with trucks moving in."

Shaw warned that "as soon as a child gets hurt" there would be questions about why the county government allowed the facility to be located in an industrial park. Shaw added that she was concerned about traffic issues and likely "compromises" that would occur with incompatible businesses operating side-by-side.

The other three commissioners had different opinions.

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