

Chapter 541

(House Bill 1267)

AN ACT concerning

**Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center – Zoning
Classification
(Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act)**

FOR the purpose of requiring a certain local zoning authority to designate and maintain certain property in a zoning classification that restricts the uses in a certain manner under certain circumstances; requiring the appropriate authority to maintain certain property in a certain zoning classification that restricts the uses in a certain manner under certain circumstances; requiring, prior to any development on certain property, a certain local zoning authority to hold a hearing and make a decision, in consultation with the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of the Environment, that the proposed development will not have a substantial impact on that property; and generally relating to land use.

BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,

Article – Land Use

Section 1–401(a)

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2012 Volume and 2025 Supplement)

BY adding to

Article – Land Use

Section 1–401(b)(19), 4–217, and 25–211

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2012 Volume and 2025 Supplement)

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,

Article – Land Use

Section 1–401(b)(19) through (32)

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2012 Volume and 2025 Supplement)

BY repealing

Article – Land Use

Section 25–211

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2012 Volume and 2025 Supplement)

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Land Use

1–401.

(a) Except as provided in this section, this division does not apply to charter counties.

(b) The following provisions of this division apply to a charter county:

(19) § 4–217 (PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE);

[(19)] **(20)** Title 4, Subtitle 5 (Accessory Dwelling Units);

[(20)] **(21)** § 5–102(d) (Subdivision regulations – Burial sites);

[(21)] **(22)** § 5–104 (Major subdivision – Review);

[(22)] **(23)** Title 7, Subtitle 1 (Development Mechanisms);

[(23)] **(24)** Title 7, Subtitle 2 (Transfer of Development Rights);

[(24)] **(25)** except in Montgomery County or Prince George’s County, Title 7, Subtitle 3 (Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreements);

[(25)] **(26)** Title 7, Subtitle 4 (Inclusionary Zoning);

[(26)] **(27)** Title 7, Subtitle 5 (Housing Expansion and Affordability);

[(27)] **(28)** § 8–401 (Conversion of overhead facilities);

[(28)] **(29)** for Baltimore County only, Title 9, Subtitle 3 (Single–County Provisions – Baltimore County);

[(29)] **(30)** for Frederick County only, Title 9, Subtitle 10 (Single–County Provisions – Frederick County);

[(30)] **(31)** for Howard County only, Title 9, Subtitle 13 (Single–County Provisions – Howard County);

[(31)] **(32)** for Talbot County only, Title 9, Subtitle 18 (Single–County Provisions – Talbot County); and

[(32)] **(33)** Title 11, Subtitle 2 (Civil Penalty).

4–217.

(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.

(2) ~~“DISTRICT COUNCIL” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 14-101 OF THIS ARTICLE~~ “CENTRAL NATURAL AREA” MEANS AN AREA WITHIN THE PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE OR THE BELTSVILLE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER THAT PROVIDES HABITAT FOR NATIVE FLORA AND FAUNA, INCLUDING FORESTS, WOODLANDS, WETLANDS, MEADOWS, AND EARLY SUCCESSIONAL GRASSLANDS AND SHRUBLANDS.

(3) “LOCAL ZONING AUTHORITY” MEANS:

(I) ~~A LOCAL JURISDICTION FOR LAND LOCATED IN ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY, THE ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COUNCIL OR OTHER BODY WITH AUTHORITY TO DESIGNATE ZONING CLASSIFICATIONS; OR~~

(II) FOR ~~PROPERTY~~ LAND LOCATED IN THE MARYLAND-WASHINGTON REGIONAL DISTRICT ESTABLISHED UNDER TITLE 20, SUBTITLE 1 OF THIS ARTICLE, A DISTRICT COUNCIL, AS DEFINED IN § 14-101 OF THIS ARTICLE.

(B) ANY FEDERALLY OWNED LAND THAT IS PART OF THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE SHALL BE DESIGNATED AND MAINTAINED IN A ZONING CLASSIFICATION THAT RESTRICTS THE USES TO OPEN SPACE, RESERVED OPEN SPACE, OR OTHER RESOURCE CONSERVATION USES.

(C) IF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OR ANY ASSIGNEE SELLS, LEASES, LICENSES, OR OTHERWISE ENCUMBERS ANY PORTION OF LAND THAT IS PART OF THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE, THE LOCAL ZONING AUTHORITY SHALL CONTINUE A ZONING CLASSIFICATION FOR THAT PROPERTY THAT:

(1) RESTRICTS THE USES TO OPEN SPACE, RESERVED OPEN SPACE, OR OTHER RESOURCE CONSERVATION USES; AND

(2) DOES NOT PERMIT COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL, OR RESIDENTIAL USES.

(D) A CENTRAL NATURAL AREA IN THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE MAY NOT BE CONVERTED TO BE USED FOR AGRICULTURE, ACTIVE RECREATION, FORESTRY, OR OTHER PLANT HARVESTING.

(E) PRIOR TO ANY DEVELOPMENT ON LAND IN THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE, THE LOCAL ZONING AUTHORITY SHALL:

(1) HOLD A PUBLIC HEARING; AND

(2) MAKE A FINAL DECISION, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT, THAT THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT WILL NOT HAVE A SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT ON ANY LAND IN A CENTRAL NATURAL AREA.

[25-211.

If the United States Department of Agriculture sells any portion of the property known as the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, the district council shall place and permanently maintain the land in a zoning classification of agricultural open space immediately after the transfer of the land to the buyer.]

25-211.

(A) ~~SUBJECT TO SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION, THE~~ THE DISTRICT COUNCIL SHALL DESIGNATE AND MAINTAIN THE FEDERALLY OWNED PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE BELTSVILLE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER OR ANY OTHER U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE PROPERTY IN BELTSVILLE OR ITS VICINITY TO A ZONING CLASSIFICATION THAT RESTRICTS THE USES TO OPEN SPACE OR RESERVED OPEN SPACE.

(B) IF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OR ANY ASSIGNEE SELLS, LEASES, LICENSES, OR OTHERWISE ENCUMBERS ANY PORTION OF THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE BELTSVILLE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER OR ANY OTHER U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE PROPERTY IN BELTSVILLE OR ITS VICINITY, THE DISTRICT COUNCIL SHALL CONTINUE A ZONING CLASSIFICATION FOR THAT PROPERTY THAT:

(1) RESTRICTS THE USES TO OPEN SPACE OR RESERVED OPEN SPACE;

AND

(2) DOES NOT PERMIT COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL, OR RESIDENTIAL

USES.

(C) ~~THE DISTRICT COUNCIL MAY NOT APPROVE ANY OVERLAYS, SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS, OR MODIFICATIONS TO THE ZONING CLASSIFICATIONS REQUIRED BY THIS SECTION.~~

(C) A CENTRAL NATURAL AREA, AS DEFINED IN § 4-217 OF THIS ARTICLE, IN THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE BELTSVILLE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER MAY NOT BE CONVERTED TO BE USED FOR AGRICULTURE, ACTIVE RECREATION, FORESTRY, OR OTHER PLANT HARVESTING.

(D) PRIOR TO ANY DEVELOPMENT ON LAND IN THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE BELTSVILLE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER, THE DISTRICT COUNCIL SHALL:

(1) HOLD A PUBLIC HEARING; AND

(2) MAKE A FINAL DECISION, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT, THAT THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT WILL NOT HAVE A SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT ON ANY LAND IN A CENTRAL NATURAL AREA.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect June 1, 2026.

Approved by the Governor, May 12, 2026.