



Charles County Government

CHARLES COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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February 17, 2026

RE: Letter of Information for SENATE BILL 36 - Land Use - Zoning - Limitations
(Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026)

Dear Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the Charles County Board of County Commissioners, I write to provide information for the Economic Matters Committee concerning Senate Bill 36, which proposes to significantly alter existing local authority over certain land use and zoning matters. Local control of land use and zoning in Maryland has deep roots in the state's commitment to home-rule and community self-determination. While the State authorizes zoning through enabling legislation, Maryland has long placed primary responsibility for land-use decisions in the hands of counties and municipalities. This framework reflects the understanding that land-use issues are inherently local, shaped by distinct histories, geographies, economies, and civic priorities. Over time, local zoning authority has become a central tool for managing growth, protecting environmental and historic resources, coordinating infrastructure, and balancing private property rights with the public interest. The importance of local control in Maryland lies in its flexibility and responsiveness, allowing communities to adapt state policy goals to local conditions while giving residents a direct voice in shaping the places where they live and work.

Several bills this session would remove local authority of land use and zoning, taking a "stick" rather than "carrot" approach to promoting greater amounts of housing across the State. It is important that the legislature preserves local land use and zoning authority for individual jurisdictions to adequately manage infrastructure, keep up with growth, respond to community concerns and vision, and maintain a fiscally constrained budget. It is also important to mention that the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development has published a 2030 Housing Production Target for Charles County which is 5,516 units. With a 10-year average of 822 new residential units per year (including 1,178 in 2025) and an additional 200-300 units per year within our municipalities, Charles County is on target to meet the published DHCD target without state intervention in applicable regulations. Charles County is managing growth responsibly and effectively, while also meeting state targets. *Should this bill be found favorable, we urge the Senate to exempt counties already meeting the DHCD housing targets, as they are meeting their prescribed contribution of new housing units without undue fiscal impact.*

The proposed Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026 (HB 239/SB 36) erodes local zoning authority, impacts neighborhood character, limits the County's ability to effectively manage infrastructure, and inhibits the ability of the public to provide input and the effectiveness of their feedback. Limiting local

discretion over lot sizes, housing types, and development standards could undermine carefully developed comprehensive plans, strain local infrastructure, and alter neighborhood character without sufficient coordination or public input. Uniform, statewide mandates, such as the proposed Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026, do not adequately account for the wide variation in local conditions, including differences in infrastructure capacity, environmental constraints, housing markets, and fiscal impacts. Local government decisions are best made by local governments.

We recognize the intent of this bill is to accelerate local regulatory approvals to produce more housing per year. However, ironically, the greatest lag in local regulatory approvals is in meeting the State's stormwater regulations that are mandated to be administered by the counties. We believe that a more effective approach to faster housing approvals would be a cooperative effort between the State and local regulatory agencies to provide flexibility in reaching the State performance goals, rather than the rigid processes currently in place. Instead of shattering the integrity of local regulations, a cooperative approach to "how we get there" would be significantly less damaging to the counties and municipalities, while still accomplishing the intended housing goals. Charles County respectfully urges the General Assembly to carefully consider the impact of this proposal on local governments that are already planning for, and accommodating, growth in a responsible and transparent manner. Preserving local land-use and zoning authority is essential to ensuring that development aligns with community vision, infrastructure capacity, fiscal sustainability, and meaningful public participation.

Charles County remains committed to meeting Maryland's housing goals and supporting affordability, but firmly believes these objectives are best achieved through collaboration and partnership, not broad state preemption. We ask the Legislature to continue to respect and uphold the long-standing principle of local control in land-use decision-making.

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CHARLES COUNTY, MARYLAND**



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