

HOUSE BILL 1267

L6

6lr2367

By: **Delegates Lehman, Pena–Melnyk, Barnes, Bartlett, Boafo, Chang, Holmes, Rogers, and Taylor**

Introduced and read first time: February 12, 2026

Assigned to: Economic Matters and Environment and Transportation

Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

House action: Adopted

Read second time: March 6, 2026

CHAPTER _____

1 AN ACT concerning

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

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

14 BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,
15 Article – Land Use
16 Section 1–401(a)
17 Annotated Code of Maryland
18 (2012 Volume and 2025 Supplement)

19 BY adding to
20 Article – Land Use
21 Section 1–401(b)(19), 4–217, and 25–211
22 Annotated Code of Maryland

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



1 (2012 Volume and 2025 Supplement)

2 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
3 Article – Land Use
4 Section 1–401(b)(19) through (32)
5 Annotated Code of Maryland
6 (2012 Volume and 2025 Supplement)

7 BY repealing
8 Article – Land Use
9 Section 25–211
10 Annotated Code of Maryland
11 (2012 Volume and 2025 Supplement)

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

14 **Article – Land Use**

15 1–401.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

25 **[(24)] (25)** except in Montgomery County or Prince George’s County, Title
26 7, Subtitle 3 (Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreements);

27 **[(25)] (26)** Title 7, Subtitle 4 (Inclusionary Zoning);

28 **[(26)] (27)** Title 7, Subtitle 5 (Housing Expansion and Affordability);

29 **[(27)] (28)** § 8–401 (Conversion of overhead facilities);

1 [(28)] (29) for Baltimore County only, Title 9, Subtitle 3 (Single-County
2 Provisions – Baltimore County);

3 [(29)] (30) for Frederick County only, Title 9, Subtitle 10 (Single-County
4 Provisions – Frederick County);

5 [(30)] (31) for Howard County only, Title 9, Subtitle 13 (Single-County
6 Provisions – Howard County);

7 [(31)] (32) for Talbot County only, Title 9, Subtitle 18 (Single-County
8 Provisions – Talbot County); and

9 [(32)] (33) Title 11, Subtitle 2 (Civil Penalty).

10 4-217.

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

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

19 (3) “LOCAL ZONING AUTHORITY” MEANS:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

15 (1) HOLD A PUBLIC HEARING; AND

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

20 [25-211.

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

25 25-211.

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

32 (B) IF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OR ANY ASSIGNEE SELLS, LEASES,
 33 LICENSES, OR OTHERWISE ENCUMBERS ANY PORTION OF THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS

1 THE BELTSVILLE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER OR ANY OTHER U.S.
2 DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE PROPERTY IN BELTSVILLE OR ITS VICINITY, THE
3 DISTRICT COUNCIL SHALL CONTINUE A ZONING CLASSIFICATION FOR THAT
4 PROPERTY THAT:

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

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

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

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

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

19 (1) HOLD A PUBLIC HEARING; AND

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

24 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect June
25 1, 2026.