



December 10, 2024

RE: Bill 24-037- Zoning Code Chapter 267 Liquor Stores B1 Special Exceptions

Friends of Harford  
PO Box 294  
Abingdon, MD 21009

Friends of Harford opposes Bill No. 24-037. While we value the contributions of local businesses to our communities, this bill raises significant concerns. It proposes a zoning change that would allow liquor stores in B1 districts by Special Exception; a change seemingly tailored for one specific property, with potentially far-reaching consequences.

Currently, liquor stores are allowed in Village Business (VB) zones, which are similar in intensity to B1 but limited to just nine locations. They're also allowed in more intensive areas like B2 and B3. Current zoning ensures that liquor stores are placed in areas that align with the character and needs of surrounding neighborhoods. However, if this legislation is approved, B1, which includes over 200 parcels, could have a much larger impact compared to the nine limited VB locations being used as the basis for this change in zoning.

This proposed legislation risks increasing the concentration of liquor stores, especially in residential areas, and opens the door for state-level laws that allow cannabis dispensaries in liquor store locations.

Bill 24-009, "Zoning for Cannabis Dispensary," which failed to pass on May 21, 2024, highlighted the connection between cannabis dispensaries and liquor stores. During the discussion, Councilman Penman expressed his belief that cannabis should be illegal in Harford County, but acknowledged the county does not have authority over the state law. He referred to HB 805, which prohibits localities from enacting stricter regulations on retail dealers, effectively allowing liquor store locations to be used for cannabis dispensaries. Councilman Penman reiterated his opposition to cannabis dispensaries in the county. The County Council voted 7-0 against the bill, in order to uphold state regulations that govern dispensary locations, which includes liquor store sites. Given the County Council's awareness of the state-imposed regulations, it raises the question of why there is a need to expand the potential for liquor store locations, even by Special Exception, into residential areas when the impacts are unknown.

We ask the County Council to uphold the current zoning, preserve the character of our neighborhoods, and prioritize the well-being of the entire county over the interests of a single property owner. Please vote against Bill No. 24-037.