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Prince George's County imposes new limits on where storage facilities can go

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When you think about commercial development, you might think about the restaurants, grocery stores or other venues you visit on a regular basis. But more often in Prince George's County, Maryland, it has also meant self-storage complexes, to the frustration and dismay of too many residents.

Now, county-imposed limits are coming to make that less likely in the future.

The county council unanimously passed on Tuesday a bill that limits future storage facilities to industrial zones of the county. It comes after months of compromise and discussion that ultimately led to the grandfathering in of those facilities currently in the works.

Early opponents of the legislation argued that the reason you were seeing so many of those facilities pop up is that they're in high demand, with only a few storage units sitting empty. Developers and storage unit owners had already invested time and money in building new ones in parts of the county too, so the new law won't mean an immediate end of new storage units next to homes or some commercial developments.

"It's going to make a difference to people," said Council member Jolene Ivey. "You will, of course, still see a few go up in areas that are not in industrial areas because they're already in process, and we're trying to balance the people who have invested money in their projects already."

It was a rare moment in recent months that commercial developers have been thanking the council ahead of a vote.

“I just wanted to thank the council and council members for the consideration through the project, through the drafting of this bill and recognizing where certain individuals were in the process,” said Trey Burke, representing one storage company.

Robert Antonetti, who has represented several commercial interests before the county over the years, was in agreement, saying the compromise “makes sense.”

But early in the hearing, some Bowie residents showed up ready to lobby the council on one particular storage facility in the Elder Oaks area.

“I was disappointed to learn through word-of-mouth that there were plans to construct a storage facility walking distance from my home,” Danielle Hussein said. “I don’t want a storage facility in my backyard.”

The project planned near Hussein’s place of residence had drawn hundreds to a town hall meeting in Bowie a few weeks ago, at which there was growing opposition for the storage facility. But then Council member Ingrid Watson said a lawyer informed her that the company planning the project would not build a storage facility there after all.

“The attorney for the applicant has confirmed they are not moving forward with the project,” Watson said to the applause of those attending.

It’s actually one project the council would have allowed to move ahead had the developers sought to do so. It’s not clear what could go there instead.