

# Anne Arundel Council plans to push forward BRAC housing project

## Council chair wants to override Leopold's veto

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The chairman of the Anne Arundel County Council plans to push for final approval of a military-related development project near Fort Meade at Monday night's council meeting, against the wishes of County Executive John R. Leopold.

Leopold vetoed an earlier bill granting zoning for the 1,600-home development that supporters say is needed to support job growth spurred by the federal Base Realignment and Closure plan, or BRAC.

Council Chairman C. Edward Middlebrooks said he plans to introduce a resolution to override Leopold's veto, allowing the Arundel Gateway project — a 300-acre residential and business development planned east of the Baltimore- Washington Parkway in Laurel — to move forward. Middlebrooks said he's confident he can garner the five votes needed to pass the measure.

"Arundel Gateway helps the county deal with BRAC and the ensuing infrastructure needs of the county," said Middlebrooks, a Republican. "In all likelihood, you'll see an override. I think it's the right thing to do. This project is so worthwhile. I expect the council to pass it."

Leopold, also a Republican, has argued that approval for Arundel Gateway should be part of the county's once-a-decade comprehensive rezoning process.

Leopold's critics say the county executive is delaying action on the larger zoning bill until after the November election, to avoid political fallout from controversial projects. Leopold is seeking re-election.

Supporters of the Arundel Gateway say the project will provide much-needed development near the military installation, and a delay will cost the developer \$10 million in county-authorized federal stimulus bonds.

The county's rezoning process has come under scrutiny recently. Laurel area residents have expressed frustration at the speed of the rezoning process, after the developer of the 1,000 home project called RiverWood offered to build a \$23 million elementary school to entice county leaders to approve the project. RiverWood is awaiting approval.

Leopold called the legislation granting zoning to the Arundel Gateway project "spot zoning or special interest zoning" and said he vetoed it because it does not pass legal muster, according to the county's Office of Law.

Leopold denied accusations from political opponents that he purposely delayed the broad zoning bill. He said he wanted to wait for the council to pass new storm water runoff rules, in accordance with a new state law. Also, the council will gain several new members after the election, who should be included in discussions, he said.

Joanna Conti, an Annapolis business executive who is Leopold's Democratic challenger in November, said in a statement that Leopold is "playing political games."

"Leopold put the comprehensive zoning process and other zoning legislation on hold this spring to avoid having to make any controversial zoning decisions prior to the election," said Conti.