COUNTY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE COUNTY, MARYLAND
Legislative Session 2025, Legislative Day No. 5

Bill No. 17-25

Mr. Wade Kach, Councilmember

By the County Council, March 3, 2025

A BILL
ENTITLED

AN ACT concerning

Government Reorganization – Division of Agriculture

FOR the purpose of organizing county government by establishing a Division of Agriculture within the Department of Economic and Workforce Development; defining certain terms; establishing the purpose of the Division; establishing the duties of the Division; establishing a Chief Agriculture Officer who shall lead the Division; requiring a report be submitted to the County Executive and Council regarding certain consolidation of budgets and positions related to agriculture; and generally relating to the Division of Agriculture.

BY adding

Sections 3-2-410 through 3-2-414
Article 3 – Administration
Title 2 – The Administrative Services
Subtitle 4 – Department of Economic and Workforce Development
Part II – Division of Agriculture
Baltimore County Code, 2015

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.
[Brackets] indicate matter stricken from existing law.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from bill.
Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

WHEREAS, agriculture is a significant contributor to the economy, agricultural and environmental stewardship, public health, and quality of life in Baltimore County with disciplines encompassing all economic levels; and

WHEREAS, agriculture touches nearly every one of the Baltimore County Agencies, but often plays a secondary role within the decision-making of each agency; however, when considering the culminative value, agriculture plays a significant role in health, environmental sustainability, planning, natural resources, public works, recreation, social services, food access, food safety, environmental sustainability, emergency disaster relief, tourism, rural workforce and more; and

WHEREAS, agriculture is fragmented across numerous County Agencies, with no single dedicated leadership role to administer and understand the various programs, funding sources, and grants offered by local, State, and federal agencies at the Baltimore County Agricultural Center, resulting in duplication of services, delays in regulatory transparency, slower reviews of plans submitted to the Soil Conservation District, and underutilization of State and federal funds for County initiatives and emergency disasters; and

WHEREAS, it is essential to develop a more effective means of assuring that the agriculture sector of Baltimore County will be an integral part of the local decision-making process of Baltimore County Government; now therefore

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE COUNTY, MARYLAND, that the Laws of Baltimore County read as follows:

ARTICLE 3 – ADMINISTRATION

Title 2 – The Administrative Services

Subtitle 4 – Department of Economic and Workforce Development

Part II – Division of Agriculture

§ 3-2-410. DEFINITIONS.

IN THIS PART, THE FOLLOWING WORDS OR PHRASES HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.

(1) "AGRICULTURAL CENTER" MEANS THE BALTIMORE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL CENTER.

(2) "DEPARTMENT" MEANS THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

(3) "DIVISION" MEANS THE DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

§ 3-2-411. DIVISION ESTABLISHED.

THERE IS A DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

§ 3-2-412. PURPOSE.

THE PURPOSE OF THE DIVISION IS TO:

(1) PROMOTE AGRICULTURE AS A VIABLE COMPONENT OF THE COUNTY'S ECONOMIC SECTOR;

(2) SERVE AS A LIAISON BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH AND THE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY THROUGH THE AGRICULTURE ADVISORY BOARD, THE AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD, AND THE BALTIMORE COUNTY FARM BUREAU;

(3) IMPLEMENT AGRICULTURAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS;

(4) PROVIDE FINANCIAL RESOURCES, MARKETING, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO BALTIMORE COUNTY FARMERS;

(5) PRESERVE FARMLAND AS A RESOURCE FOR FUTURE AGRICULTURAL FOOD AND FIBER PRODUCTION;

(6) COORDINATE COUNTYWIDE AGRICULTURAL INITIATIVES AND OUTREACH EFFORTS;

(7) DEVELOP AND OVERSEE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS; AND

(8) PARTNER WITH COUNTY, STATE, AND FEDERAL AGRICULTURAL AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS LOCATED AT THE AGRICULTURAL CENTER.

§ 3-2-413. PERSONNEL.

(A) THE CHIEF AGRICULTURE OFFICER SHALL ADMINISTER THE DIVISION.

(B) THE DIVISION SHALL HAVE THE PERSONNEL CONSIDERED NECESSARY TO CARRY OUT THE FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ASSIGNED TO IT, INCLUDING A DEPUTY CHIEF AGRICULTURE OFFICER.

(C) THE CHIEF AGRICULTURE OFFICER SHALL SUPERVISE THE OPERATIONS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF OF THE DIVISION, INCLUDING THE HIRING, DIRECTION AND DISCHARGE OF STAFF MEMBERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNTY PERSONNEL LAWS.

§ 3-2-414. DUTIES.

(A) THE DIVISION SHALL PROMOTE AND ENHANCE COLLABORATION BETWEEN ALL COUNTY, STATE, AND FEDERAL DEPARTMENTS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS WORKING IN THE BALTIMORE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL SECTOR BY PERFORMING THE FOLLOWING FUNCTIONS:

(1) ESTABLISH CONSISTENT AND ONGOING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE DIVISION AND PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND NON-PROFIT STAKEHOLDERS TO REMOVE COMMUNICATION SILOS AND FOSTER INNOVATION AND COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING;

(2) PROMOTE AGRICULTURE AS AN ECONOMIC SECTOR THAT:

(I) CONTRIBUTES SIGNIFICANTLY TO EMPLOYMENT, LAND PRESERVATION, AND FOOD PRODUCTION; AND

(II) IS A VITAL PART OF THE STATE AND COUNTY ECONOMY; AND

(3) PROMOTE VALUE-ADDED AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN THE COUNTY, SUCH AS FARM TOURS, HARVEST FESTIVALS, AND ON-SITE FARM STORES, AS A VIABLE METHOD FOR FARMERS TO CREATE JOBS, NEW REVENUE STREAMS, AND HELP DIVERSIFY THE LOCAL ECONOMY.

(B) IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT COUNTY AGRICULTURE REMAINS VIABLE AND COMPETITIVE, THE DIVISION SHALL HELP COUNTY FARMERS THRIVE IN AN EVOLVING MARKET BY:

(1) ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING A CENTRALIZED RESOURCE FOR COUNTY FARMERS TO NAVIGATE:

(I) ZONING, LAND USE, AND OTHER REGULATORY MATTERS RELATED TO AGRICULTURE; AND

(II) FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS, SUCH AS GRANTS AND LOW-INTEREST LOANS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING FUNDING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE, AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION, AND COMMUNITY-BASED AGRICULTURE; AND

(2) PROVIDING ACCESS TO GENERAL RESOURCES, TECHNICAL SUPPORT, GRANTS, AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.

(C) IN CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS, THE DIVISION SHALL DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN:

(1) A SET OF STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR THE AGRICULTURAL CENTER; AND

(2) AN AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN THAT ESTABLISHES A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO MANAGING THE AGRICULTURE PORTFOLIO WITHIN THE COUNTY AND ALIGNING THE STRATEGIES WITH THE BALTIMORE COUNTY MASTER PLAN.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, that, within 180 days of the effective date of this Act, the County Administrative Officer shall submit a report to the County Executive and County Council detailing whether any agriculture positions or budgets from the Departments of: Economic and Workforce Development; Environmental Protection and Sustainability; Planning; Permits, Approvals, and Inspections; Recreation and Parks; and the University of Maryland Extension will be consolidated under the Division of Agriculture, and, if so, shall include the plan for doing so and the timeline for such consolidation.

SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, that the publisher of the Code shall codify §§ 3-2-401 through 3-2-403 as Part I of Article 3, Title 2, Subtitle 4 of the Code and include in Part I §§ 3-2-404 through 3-2-409 as reserved sections, and shall codify Part II as set forth in this Act.

SECTION 4. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, that this Act, having been passed by the affirmative vote of five members of the County Council, shall take effect 14 days after its enactment.