



William B. Hunt, AICP, Director
Harry Knight, Deputy Director

To: Commissioners of St. Mary's County
Dr. Rebecca Bridgett, County Administrator
From: William B. Hunt, Director *WBH*
Date: December 15, 2020

Request for Public Hearing Staff Proposal

Topic: Amendment to the St. Mary's County Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance to include Commercial Wedding as a use type

Background: The origin for this request is the tourism task force led by the Department of Economic Development. Commercial weddings were discussed at many of the meetings but there was no final position taken on the types of zoning regulations appropriate for commercial weddings held on farms. Commercial weddings on farms are a source of income for the farm owner and economic development for the County generally. However, commercial weddings are disruptive to homeowners who live in rural areas. The conflict between the farm owner who provides a rustic, scenic location, including waterfront in some cases, for a wedding for compensation and the nearby homeowner comes primarily from Saturday evening and nighttime weddings, and the noise from their parties and vehicle traffic when the guests leave. The CSMC directed staff to write an ordinance addressing commercial weddings following the briefing of August 25, 2020.

Prior Action: The CSMC adopted the Tourism and Hospitality Master Plan as part of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in March 2017. One of the identified priorities in the Plan was to address the regulatory issues that may hinder tourism and hospitality progress in the County. In November 2018 the CSMC approved a Tourism Regulatory Task Force to make recommendations regarding issues affecting the tourism industry. The primary topic of the Task Force was the number of events on farms per year, and these discussions mainly involved commercial weddings.

Summary of Proposed Request: At the August 25, 2020, briefing the direction from CSMC was to prepare an ordinance for commercial weddings. The major components of the proposed ordinance include:

- The proposed ordinance adds a new use type to the zoning ordinance. Since Commercial Wedding is a new use in the zoning ordinance it is a use that should be added to Schedule 50.4 Use Classifications, Use Types and Location within Zoning Districts and Section 51.3. Specific Regulations and Standards for all zoning districts to indicate where the commercial wedding use is allowed and if it is a Permitted, Accessory, or Conditional Use.

- Locations in growth areas where commercial weddings are currently being held will need to submit a change of use analysis to continue to hold commercial weddings
- Commercial weddings on farms will need conditional use approval from the Board of Appeals, a major site plan, and must meet the following:
 - Notification to property owners within 1000 feet of the property requesting a conditional use permit for a commercial wedding business so these owners can attend the public hearing to make comments to the Board of Appeals about the conditional use permit
 - A noise suppression plan and noise modeling by an acoustical engineer of all the activities of a wedding (rehearsal, ceremony, party, cars leaving) to ensure that the decibels at the property line do not exceed 65 dB daytime, 55dB nighttime
 - Wedding vehicles have to be off site no later than 10:00 pm
- For any location holding a commercial wedding that is accessed by a private road, the private road has to meet the standards for a private road. Speed limit is 20 mph and there must be speed limit signs.
- The Commercial Wedding Use will not be allowed in the AICUZ
- Because the Commercial Wedding Use will be allowed in the Critical Area, the ordinance, if approved by CSMC, will need to be sent to the Critical Area Commission.

Stakeholders and Notification: Land Use and Growth Management will contact wedding venues through the websites or other advertisements from these businesses. The Internet will be searched for associated local wedding businesses, such as caterers, deejays, tent rentals, and others with wedding services or products.

Collaboration:

Chris Kaselemis, Director, Department of Economic Development
 David Weiskopf, County Attorney
 Neil Murphy, Deputy County Attorney

Recommendation: Authorize staff to schedule a public hearing on January 5, 2021, for public comments on the proposed amendment to the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance for the Commercial Wedding Use.

Timeline:

Dec 15th – Request for Public Hearing for Ordinance for Commercial Weddings/Temporary Events
 Dec 18th – Publish public notice
 Dec 25th – Publish public notice
 Jan 5th – TIME TBD – PUBLIC HEARING
 Jan 12th Public Comment Period Ends
 Jan 26th – DECISION