

# BALTIMORE

## House finds consensus on shoreline limits

### Bill would overhaul Critical Area law

The O'Malley administration's bid to tighten shoreline development restrictions won preliminary House approval yesterday, as builders and local officials joined environmentalists in backing the compromise legislation.

The bill, which would overhaul the 24-year-old Critical Area law regulating construction near the Chesapeake Bay, has been the subject of lengthy negotiations

among all parties.

The legislation would grant greater authority to the 29-member state commission that oversees development within the 1,000-foot strip of bay front known as the "critical area" because it helps keep pollution from washing into the water and protects wildlife habitat.

The measure would require greater coordination between local and state officials on granting exceptions, or variances, from waterfront building limits. It also would expand from 100 feet to

300 feet the setback from the water required for new homes along rural stretches of shoreline.

A key compromise occurred a few weeks ago when administration officials agreed to drop a provision giving the state commission final say in whether to approve shoreline disturbance after the fact.

David Bliden, executive director of the Maryland Association of Counties, said the compromise gives local officials greater guidance in enforcing the law without having to surrender their traditional control over land use.

Environmentalists, who had voiced worry earlier about the concessions given to local officials to win their endorsement, praised the final product yesterday.

"The thing that is still intact, and has not been compromised, is the original intent of the bill," said Kim Coble, Maryland director of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. She called the bill "a substantial improvement" over the existing law, which has been roundly criticized by environmentalists as poorly enforced.

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