

Nearby Counties Gained Tax Powers, Lost Some Aims in Assembly Session

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ANNAPOLIS, April 5—Montgomery and Prince Georges counties emerged from the 90-day Maryland General Assembly session with broader taxing power but with only mild changes in vital land use controls.

Most important local bills were enacted, but many were drastically amended and some were killed outright.

Local members of the House of Delegates and Senate are responsible for most of the action or inaction on local bills because of the General Assembly's traditional respect for the wishes of individual county representatives.

Probably the biggest surprise and mystery concerning local legislation was the rejection by Prince Georges of measures to allow underground storage of natural gas in the Brandywine area.

House of Delegates members, led by Lansdale G. Sasser Jr., met secretly late one

night with Sen. H. Winship Wheatley Jr., and killed the legislation. The only reason given for the turndown was "a division of opinion."

Wheatley's running feud with Senate majority leader Edward S. Northrop (D-Montgomery), which came to a head during Northrop's successful fight for the Washington Area Transit Pact, also created doubt for several days about the status of several local bills.

However, in a flurry of last-minute activity, more than 30 key bills previously passed by the House were rushed through the Senate.

Controversial bi-county measures concerning the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission were approved, although with the spice removed.

Planning Commission park tax authorization was raised from 10 to 12 cents instead of 15 cents per \$100 assessed

valuation, as requested, and the planning tax went from 3 to 4 cents. The increase must be approved by the local governing bodies.

The park district was expanded to include upper Montgomery County at a reduced tax rate of 5 cents, but the original proposal was sliced to almost nothing in Prince Georges where extension included only the Vansville election district and the Henson Creek section of the Oxon Hill area.

Sanitary Commission Jurisdiction was extended in Prince Georges to most of the Piscataway and Brandywine districts and in the Bethesda, Potomac, Laytonsville and Olney districts of Montgomery.

Probably the single most important action affecting Montgomery gave the County Council veto power over extension of major trunk sewer lines. This measure was strongly advocated by the Montgomery delegation leader Blair Lee 3d to prevent development of areas ahead of planning.

The politically potent bill calling for Prince Georges to make tax rebates to municipalities was killed but in its place the delegation decided a committee should study county and town fiscal problems and report back to the Legislature.

In addition, both counties are to receive two more resident Circuit Court judges.

The Prince Georges bill was specially constructed as a constitutional amendment to allow present legislators to resign and become judges. It was tailored for Sen. Wheatley, who is known to covet a judgeship and is expected to resign from the Senate in 1960 to run for a seat on the bench.

Companion bills were enacted specifying that members of the Planning Commission and the Sanitary Commission refrain from voting on any matter that could be construed as a conflict of interest. Lawmakers said the bills were not meant as a reflection on any present members of the two commissions.