

AGRICULTURAL/FORESTAL DISTRICTS

Agricultural/Forestal Districts are rural conservation zones reserved for the production of agricultural products, timber, and the maintenance of open space land as an important economic and environmental resource. Districts are voluntary. By establishing districts, a landowner or group of landowners agree not to convert their farm, forestland, and other open space lands to more intense commercial, industrial, or residential land uses for a term of four to ten years. In return the County and the Commonwealth agree not to take actions or make infrastructure investments that will place increased pressure on landowners to convert land in the district to more intense land uses during the term of the district.

The County's Agricultural and Forestal District regulations are to "conserve, protect, and encourage the development and improvement of agricultural and forestal products, and conserve and protect agricultural and forestall lands as valued natural and ecological resources which provide essential open spaces for clean air sheds, as well as aesthetic purposes". There are currently four Agricultural/Forestal Districts in Isle of Wight County. They are the Courthouse District, the Knoxville District, the Longview District, and the Moonlight District.

BENEFITS OF AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTAL DISTRICTS

Section 15.2-4312 of the Code of Virginia identifies four main benefits of Agricultural and Forestal Districts:

- Land lying within a district and used in agricultural or forestal production automatically qualifies for an agricultural or forestall use-value assessment whether or not a local ordinance establishing a land use program has been established. This land must still meet the minimum requirements to qualify for land use taxation.
- Local governments may not enact local laws or ordinances within a district which would unreasonably restrict or regulate farm structures or farming and forestry practices. Local ordinances, comprehensive plans, land use planning decisions, administrative decisions and procedures affecting parcels of land adjacent to any district shall take into account the existence of such district and the purposes of this chapter.
- Local, state, and federal agencies must take into consideration the existence of a district when developing and implementing policy. This policy must promote agriculture and forestry within the district.

- Special taxes for services cannot be levied on most property within a district.

OTHER BENEFITS TO THE LANDOWNER INCLUDE:

- Districts provide protection for up to ten years and can be renewed after the initial term expires.
- Participation offers some protection from eminent domain.
- Acquisition of land or easements for power lines, roadways, and other infrastructure within a district is subject to review by the Board to determine whether or not it will adversely affect the district.
- Districts prohibit the expenditure of public funds for non-farm related purposes within a district except when a public service corporation or public agency files a notice of intent with the Board – the Board must then determine whether or not this expenditure would threaten the district.
- Property in the district is protected from ordinance that might limit customary farming and forestry practices.
- Districts must be taken into account by local planners when proposing ordinance or zoning changes.
- Districts establish a community where like-minded individuals band together to preserve farming, forestry, and open land.

HOW DO I JOIN?

You can join at the end of renewal of the district pursuant to [Section 15.2-4310 of the Code of Virginia](#).

HOW DO I START A NEW DISTRICT?

Pursuant to [Section 15.2-4309 of the Code of Virginia](#).

HOW DO I COME OUT?

Written request to withdraw the land from the district pursuant to [Section 15.2-4314 of the Code of Virginia](#)

The Isle of Wight County Agricultural/Forestal Advisory District Council meets in the Robert C. Claud, Sr. Board Room at Isle of Wight County Courthouse, Isle of Wight, Virginia. The meetings are held on an as-needed basis on the first Wednesday of the month beginning at 4:00 P.M. Please call the Central Permitting at 757-365-6211 for additional information.

Revised February 25, 2019

If you have any questions, please call the Central Permitting office at 757-365-6211 or email at planreview@iwus.net