Balto. Co. labels sewer section deficient after heated growth debate

By Natalie Jones

Sewer relief structures like the one on Falls Road near the Baltimore Streetcar Museum has seen millions of gallons of sewage mixed with water flow into the Jones Falls. STAFF FILE

The Baltimore County Council on Monday approved a narrowed plan to flag parts of its sewer system as "deficient," with supporters warning of environmental risks in the Jones Falls corridor and opponents arguing the move could choke off economic growth.

Councilman Izzy Patoka, a Pikesville Democrat, initially sought to designate an area surrounding Lake Roland south to the Baltimore City line as deficient, spurred by testimony at a recent public hearing from Beth Miller of the Green Towson Alliance.

Miller requested that the area from Lake Roland to the city line be marked as deficient on the sewer map, contending that the area's pipes cannot safely convey sewage to a treatment facility. The Green Towson Alliance has long advocated that the area be designated as deficient.

But critics, including Baltimore County administration officials and Councilman Julian Jones, a Woodstock Democrat who's also running for county executive, said the proposal risked imposing a sweeping development freeze.

The council ultimately adopted a scaled-back version of Patoka's amendment as part of the 2026 Basic Services Maps, which guide where development can occur based on water, sewer, and transportation capacity.

The council makes a decision

Instead of designating a broad swath from Lake Roland to the Baltimore City line as deficient, the approved measure flags the first 10 manholes south of West Joppa Road — a designation the council has greenlit over the last few years.

The manholes themselves aren't failing, Patoka said, but the length of pipe identified by the manholes are.

"It's not just about development here, it's also about the environment," Patoka said. "That's what concerns me, is the administration and some of my colleagues are saying, 'Well, what is it going to do? What is it going to do to the developers in this county?'"

In a statement issued before the meeting, Jones sharply opposed Patoka's broader proposal, calling it "anti-growth" and "anti-housing." He said the measure lacked engineering justification, was introduced without consultation with public works officials and would override the county's data-driven process for evaluating sewer capacity.

Baltimore County administration officials echoed those concerns, arguing that the proposed designation had no basis in engineering standards and could block development in parts of Towson, Pikesville, and Lutherville.

"Impacted homeowners would not be able to build additions on their home," said Brad Kroner, the county's deputy director of government affairs. "Properties with defective septic would be unable to connect to public sewer."

Under the plan approved Monday night, only one area, around 2323 E. Joppa Road, would be affected. That property is currently up for sale with no construction plans.

An environmental argument

Environmental advocates, however, say the county is underestimating the problem. Miller said that since 2019, her group has found three sanitary sewer overflows below the dam at Lake Roland, one of which occurred last July. The county disputed the most recent alleged overflow, Miller added.

"We need an accurate and transparent system for determining sanitary sewer capacity for new development," she said. "There's a day of reckoning coming with this sewer system, foreshadowed by repeated sanitary sewer overflows below the dam of Lake Roland, and that day of reckoning will fall to our new county executive and expanded county council."

County officials acknowledged known problem areas. Lisa Eicholtz, deputy director of public works, said a section near Brooklandville has already been identified for relief sewer upgrades, with construction underway and expected to be completed by fall 2027, pending property easements.

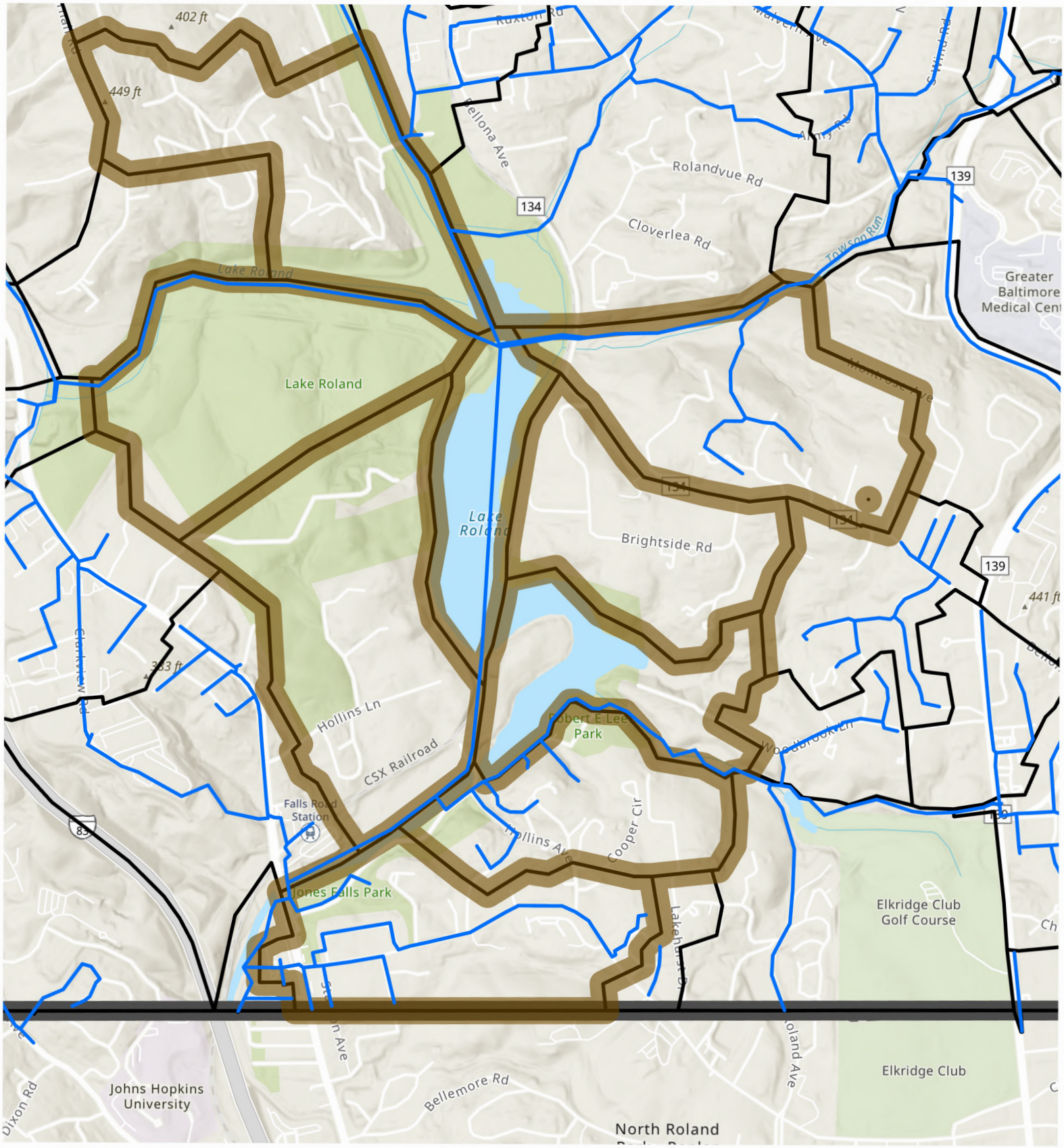
The updated 2026 Basic Services Maps take effect in two weeks, setting the framework for where — and whether — development can proceed as county leaders continue to wrestle with the balance between growth and infrastructure limits.

Have a news tip? Contact Natalie Jones at najones@baltsun.com.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO BILL 37-26
Councilmember Patoka

1. On page 2, in line 12, after "1. 2026 Basic Services Sewerage Map" insert "WITH THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENT: THE AREA SHOWN ON THE MAP ATTACHED AS EXHIBIT "A" SHALL BE DESIGNATED AS A DEFICIENT AREA".

EXHIBIT A



Feature Class Production Dates
Sewer Areas - 2026
Sewer Gravity Mains - 2026
County Boundary - 2008

Produced by Baltimore County
Office of Information Technology
GIS Services

Published April 30, 2026

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0 0.1 0.2 0.4 Miles

Legend

- Sewer Gravity Mains
- Deficient Area
- Sewer Service Areas
- County Boundary