

ZTA 25-09

FUNERAL AND INTERNMENT SERVICES – ALKALINE HYDROLYSIS



Description

This ZTA would define the terms Alkaline Hydrolysis, and Cremation, and amend the use standards for Funeral Home, Undertaker to permit Alkaline Hydrolysis in certain situations where Cremation is prohibited.

ZTA 25-09
Completed: 7-3-25

MCPB
Item No. 9
7-10-25

2425 Reedie Drive
Floor 14
Wheaton, MD 20902

	Benjamin Berbert, Planner III, Design, Placemaking, and Policy Division Benjamin.Berbert@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4644
	Lisa Govoni, Supervisor, Design, Placemaking, and Policy Division Lisa.Govoni@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-650-5624
	Atul Sharma, Chief, Design, Placemaking, and Policy Division Atul.Sharma@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4658

ZTA SPONSORS

Sponsor:
Councilmember Fani-Gonzalez

INTRODUCTION DATE

June 17, 2025

COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING DATE

July 22, 2025

REVIEW BASIS

Chapter 59

Summary

- The Maryland General Assembly in 2024 approved the “Green Death Care Options Act” which established regulations for water cremation facilities.
- ZTA 25-09 amends the Montgomery County Zoning Code to define and allow for water cremation, by adding the term Alkaline Hydrolysis to the Code.
- Alkaline Hydrolysis is the process of decomposing a body by placing it in a pressurized vessel with water and an alkaline solution.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND	3
Rationale For Introduction	3
SECTION 2 – ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	3
ZTA 25-09 As Introduced	3
ZTA 25-09 Recommendations.....	4
SECTION 3 – CLIMATE ASSESSMENT	4
SECTION 4 – CONCLUSION	5
SECTION 5 – ATTACHMENTS.....	5

SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND

Rationale For Introduction

Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 25-09, Funeral and Internment Services – Alkaline Hydrolysis was introduced on June 17, 2025, by Councilmember Fani-Gonzalez (Attachment A). The ZTA is scheduled for a District Council Public Hearing on July 22, 2025.

The Maryland General Assembly in 2024 passed legislation requiring the state to establish standards and regulations that would permit Alkaline Hydrolysis within the State. This ZTA, 25-09, amends the Zoning Code to create definitions for Alkaline Hydrolysis, and for Cremation. Alkaline Hydrolysis is defined as the process of reducing human remains using water, alkaline chemicals, and heat inside a watertight vessel to accelerate decomposition of a human body. Alkaline Hydrolysis is sometimes referred to as water cremation, or “green” cremation. Cremation is the disposal of a dead human body by means of incineration.

In Alkaline Hydrolysis, the body is placed in the vessel, filled with water and an alkaline such as potassium hydroxide, and heated to approximately 350 degrees for 2-3 hours. All that remains are bone and other hard tissue fragments, and the liquid, which is generally inert, sterile, and can be disposed of through normal sanitary means. The process is considered “greener” because the remains are placed in an urn similar to standard cremation, without the associated carbon and other particulate emissions that come from standard cremation, or the land utilization with traditional burials.

SECTION 2 – ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ZTA 25-09 As Introduced

DIVISION 1.4. DEFINED TERMS

The first section of ZTA 25-09 is two additions to Section 1.4.2. Specific Terms and Phrases Defined. A definition for the term Alkaline Hydrolysis is added starting on line 6, and a definition for the term Cremation is added starting on line 10.

DIVISION 3.5. COMMERCIAL USES

The next section amended by the ZTA is Section 3.5.4. Funeral and Interment Services. First, the definition for Crematory is updated to include both Cremation, or Alkaline Hydrolysis as an activity that occurs (line 22).

The remaining updates with the ZTA occur in the use standards for Funeral Home, Undertaker. Currently, cremation is prohibited where Funeral Home, Undertaker is a limited use¹. The ZTA makes an exception allowing Alkaline Hydrolysis as an accessory use (lines 37-38). The use standards for where Funeral Home, Undertaker is allowed as a conditional use² are also updated, permitting Alkaline Hydrolysis as an allowed accessory use of the conditional use in those zones.

ZTA 25-09 Recommendations

Planning Staff support the ZTA as introduced, including creating the new defined terms for Alkaline Hydrolysis, and Cremation, and allowing Alkaline Hydrolysis as part of a Funeral Home, Undertaker use. There are no anticipated negative externalities with Alkaline Hydrolysis to surrounding properties like traditional cremation, greatly reducing any compatibility concerns.

SECTION 3 – CLIMATE ASSESSMENT

Bill 3-22, passed by the County Council on July 12, 2022, requires the Planning Board to prepare a climate assessment for each Zoning Text Amendment, Master Plan, and Master Plan Amendment, effective March 1, 2023. Each Climate Assessment must include the potential positive or negative effects a ZTA may have on climate change (including greenhouse gas emissions) and on community resilience and adaptive capacity. The climate impact assessment for ZTA 25-0 is attached in Attachment C.

Planning Staff anticipates minor positive impacts on carbon emissions and sequestration, and very slight positive and negative impacts on adaptive capacity. There are no clear relationships to this ZTA and the county's Climate Action Plan. The positive impacts around greenhouse gas emissions and sequestration include a slight reduction in vehicle trips and travel distance since Alkaline Hydrolysis is going to be allowed in more places than traditional cremation. There may also be reductions in total greenhouse gases and other particulate emissions if some choose Alkaline Hydrolysis because most crematories are fueled by natural gas or propane. Slight positive outcomes are expected for adaptive capacity and community resilience, with minor improvements to local air quality with reduced demand for cremation, and new economic opportunities for existing funeral homes. Any negative impacts would only occur if this new process were to negatively impact existing crematories in the county.

¹ Funeral Home, Undertaker is a limited use in the CRT and CR zones.

² Funeral Home, Undertaker is a conditional use in the AR, RE-2, RE-1 and R-200 zones.

SECTION 4 – CONCLUSION

Planning Staff recommends the Planning Board support ZTA 25-09 as introduced. The ZTA creates definitions for Alkaline Hydrolysis and for Cremation, and allows Alkaline Hydrolysis as part of the use Funeral Home, Undertaker.

SECTION 5 – ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Zoning Text Amendment 25-09 Intro Packet

Attachment B: Climate Assessment 25-09