



Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan Frequently Asked Questions and Responses

July 21, 2020: This periodically updated FAQ provides general information about the Ellicott City and the Tiber-Hudson Watershed master plan (the “master plan”). While it is meant to inform residents, business owners, and other stakeholders, it is NOT an exhaustive resource. If you need additional information, please visit www.howardcountymd.gov/ECMP or contact the Department of Planning and Zoning at 410-313-2350.

Draft Plan

Q: What’s included in the draft plan?

- A. The purpose of the master plan is to develop a comprehensive, community-driven vision for rebuilding Ellicott City. The plan does this by establishing goals, desired outcomes and policies for the next twenty years. It also features conceptual illustrations that can serve as inspiration should specific opportunities arise over time. Key elements of the plan include:
1. A Vision statement for Ellicott City’s future
 2. Strategies to address multiple topics such as community character/placemaking, flood mitigation, environmental stewardship, economic development and transportation/parking
 3. Recommendations and options for the Streetscape, Riverfront, Lower Main, Upper Main, Ellicott Mills Gateway, West End, and Courthouse Areas
 4. Recommendations on implementation over the next twenty years

Q: Who will implement the master plan?

- A. Howard County government will serve as the entity in charge of implementing the master plan and will be working in partnership with other public and private entities and individuals as implementation occurs.

Q: What’s not included in the draft master plan?

- A. While the plan sets the overall vision and options to implement the vision, the plan does not include:
1. Specific design plans or details for individual projects
 2. Various studies and pre-design work needed for projects

Q: What elements are being proposed in the draft plan?

- A. There is a comprehensive menu of recommendations in the draft plan, grouped under five topics that apply to the entire watershed:
1. Community character and placemaking
 2. Flood mitigation

3. Environmental sustainability
4. Economic development, and
5. Transportation and parking

The plan then illustrates how these topics apply to specific areas, with recommendations and options for Main Street Ellicott City and the West End neighborhood. Cross-cutting themes throughout the plan include the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances, incorporate a multi-objective approach, and an emphasis on collaboration and partnerships.

Q. What changes to new development are proposed in the watershed?

- A. During the planning process, two major enhancements to the County's development regulations were implemented. In 2019, County Executive Calvin Ball instructed the Howard County Departments of Planning and Zoning and Public Works to collaborate on proposed changes to stormwater requirements in the Tiber Branch Watershed, which were then submitted to the council. The Howard County Council adopted these changes through two council resolutions: CR122-2019 and CR123-2019. In adopting these changes, Howard County has instituted a first-of-its kind requirement: developers of new or redeveloped sites in the Tiber Branch watershed must manage the "flash flood" (the hydraulic equivalent of the July 30, 2016 storm). This requirement to manage the flash flood is in addition to pre-existing requirements to manage the 100-year, 24-hour storm event as well as provide environmental site design (ESD) for water quality.

At County Executive Ball's request, through Council Bill 62-2019, the County made major updates to the Howard County Forest Conservation Act, which had not been updated since the 1990s. These updates included increased replanting obligations to ensure developers contribute to reforestation efforts across the entire watershed, improved stewardship of the Green Infrastructure Network (GIN), new site design requirements, a stronger fee-in-lieu regulation, and tightened variance regulation to limit exceptions.

Q: Why does the plan focus on downtown Ellicott City and the West End neighborhood?

- A. Downtown Ellicott City and the West End – what is called the 'core' in the draft plan – together comprise flood-impacted Ellicott City. The core is significant as a national and local historic treasure, an important tourism resource, and a designated Main Street community home to many small businesses. The master plan is about not only protecting these areas, but also enhancing them to showcase their importance.

Q. What changes to parking does the plan propose?

- A. Although the draft considers all modes of travel, parking presents a challenge in Ellicott City (as it does in many pre-automobile downtowns throughout the nation). The parking supply overall is sufficient, but not necessarily well-distributed. Should the location of spaces need to change over time, the plan provides some alternative parking replacement solutions. The plan recognizes that in this tightly-woven community, changes to one area can have a ripple effect elsewhere. And, the surface parking lots are opportunity sites for change. As a result, a series of options are presented in the plan for the parking lots. These options allow the plan to serve as a flexible document for implementation in the future.

Q: What changes does the plan propose to advance environmental sustainability in the watershed?

- A. The plan devotes a chapter to environmental stewardship that features sections addressing water quality, streams, tree cover and green space. These environmental tools and techniques are recommended for integration with other plan objectives such as incorporating additional stream daylighting when planning for flood mitigation and integrating green features as options for the parking lots.

Q. How long will it take to implement the plan and has the budget been established for implementation?

A. The master plan will be implemented over the long term and through many different capital budget cycles. The priority in the current budget is to advance the flood mitigation proposed in the EC Safe and Sound plan (<https://www.ecsafeandsound.org/>). The master plan's implementation chapter prioritizes policies by short (completed in 5 years or less), medium (completed in 6-10 years) and long (completed in 11 or more years). Once the plan is adopted, selected projects will be immediately prioritized for future funding.

Public Input

Q: What is the best way to provide input on the draft plan?

A. DPZ has established several ways community members can engage and offer comment on the draft plan, with details – and a user guide – available at www.howardcountymd.gov/ecmp.

Q: So much public input has gone into the draft master plan already, how will my input be used?

A. The draft plan builds upon the many comments received to date. DPZ has received over 600 comments through our online surveys. That is in addition to the input received at the 7 public workshops we held from 2017 to 2019. Once the 30-day window to review the draft plan closes, DPZ will compile the results for consideration in finalizing the plan. That finalized plan will then be submitted to the Planning Board and County Council for adoption as a general plan amendment.

Schedule

Q. What happens after the 30-day public comment window closes?

A. DPZ will compile all comments into a summary to be transmitted to the Planning Board and County Council this fall as part of the legislative process to adopt the master plan as an amendment to our current general plan, PlanHoward 2030 and will be carried over to the new general plan, HoCo By Design.

Q. How do I stay updated?

A. Information and updates on the Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan are available online at www.howardcountymd.gov/ecmp. For questions or more information about the Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan, contact Kate Bolinger, community planner with the Department of Planning and Zoning, at 410-313-2350 or email kbolinger@howardcountymd.gov.

Plan's Relationship with Other Initiatives

Q: What is the relationship between the draft plan and the Safe and Sound plan?

A. The Safe and Sound plan is a multi-phase plan built around the need for public safety, supporting business and property owners, preparing the county for a changing climate, and creating a more inclusive, community driven process for decisions regarding Ellicott City's future. The master plan is an element under Phase II of the Safe and Sound plan, and sets a long-term, comprehensive vision for Ellicott City. The Safe and Sound plan includes a flood mitigation plan for Ellicott City, which is referenced in the Master Plan, but the implementation of the two plans is separate.

Q: What is the relationship between the master plan and the General Plan?

A. The geographic scope of the master plan is downtown Ellicott City and the surrounding Tiber-Hudson Watershed. The General Plan is the comprehensive plan for all of Howard County and guides decisions related to development, land preservation, changing demographic and employment trends, neighborhood sustainability, capital projects, County services and other key issues. The master plan will be adopted as an amendment to the current general plan, PlanHoward 2030 and will be carried over to the new general plan, HoCo By Design.

Q: What is the relationship between the master plan and the Section 106 process?

A. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act involves assessment of project effects on historic properties. When a project is found to have an adverse effect on historic properties, alternatives are explored to avoid, minimize, or mitigate those effects. For more information on the Section 106 process, please refer to the [Maryland Historical Trust's guide](#). Flood mitigation projects that require a joint permit from the United States Army Corps of Engineers and the Maryland Department of the Environment will trigger the Section 106 process. Learn more about flood mitigation efforts at ecsafesound.org.