



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

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Subject: Planning Board Recommendations on the 2025 Landscape Manual Update

To: Opel Jones, Council Chair
 Christiana Mercer Rigby, Council Vice Chair
 Deb Jung, Council Member
 Liz Walsh, Council Member
 David Yungmann, Council Member

From: James Cecil, Chair, Howard County Planning Board

Initial

Date: December 11, 2025

Background

Landscaping is required by Section 16.124 of the Subdivision and Land Developments regulations in Howard County. The Regulations also establish the Landscape Manual as the technical manual used to regulate performance standards. The first Landscape Manual was adopted in 1993 and amended in 1998. The most recent update was an update to the recommended plant lists in 2010. The main body of the Landscape Manual has remained unchanged since 1998.

Process

Title 16, Subtitle 9, Section 16.900(j)(1)(i) of the Howard County Code outlines the duties of the planning board to include making recommendations to the County Council in all matters relating to the adoption and regulations relating to the Department of Planning and Zoning. The clause states that:

The Planning Board shall make recommendations to the County Council and the Zoning Board on all matters relating to:

The Planning and Zoning of the County, the adoption and amendment of regulations regarding the Planning and Zoning of the County, and amendments to the zoning map or zoning regulations.

In accordance with the regulations, the Planning Board held a public meeting to consider an update to the Landscape Manual on December 4, 2025. The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) posted a draft of the updated Landscape manual on the Planning Board webpage on November 20, 2025, two weeks prior to the Planning Board meeting.

At that meeting, DPZ staff and the Department's consultant, Site Resources, Inc., presented an overview of the updated Landscape Manual and the process used to develop the plan; including gathering input from the subdivision review committee (SRC), the development community and the general public in the form of focus group meetings and through a dedicated e-mail address, research gathered from surrounding jurisdictions, drafting and editing in response to survey and comment responses specific to the draft version. DPZ also provided an overview of proposed changes to the regulations and examples of the impact of these changes on example projects.

The Planning Board members received public testimony from 1 individual by e-mail. There was no testimony at the meeting. The Planning Board asked questions of staff following the presentations. A recording of the proceeding is posted at: <https://howardcounty.granicus.com/player/clip/6501?redirect=true>.

Planning Board Recommendations for the 2025 Landscape Manual Update

The Planning Board expressed appreciation in discussions for the plan's thoroughness and the strength of the overall process. They expressed appreciation for the edits the Department of Planning and Zoning made to the draft in direct response to feedback from the SRC, development community and the public. Members also noted the helpfulness of including an intent section in the manual.

Board members asked staff questions about the motivation and reasoning behind the reduction of the substitution rate of shade trees in certain scenarios. Staff outlined the conflicts that were identified in certain development types and the process followed to evaluate changes and establish flexibility for better design choices.

The members also asked for clarification regarding which lists will be maintained outside the adopted manual and the process will be for updating them. Staff clarified that the recommended plant list, the recommended street tree list and the prohibited plant list will be outside the manual to allow for more periodic updates to keep pace with changes in the industry and horticulture regarding any issues that arise with individual species such as vulnerabilities with pests and diseases. Updates to these lists would be done through policy updates.

The Board asked about Howard County's Bee City program. Staff provided that the Office of Community Sustainability manages the Bee City program and offers grants and plan assistance. The Landscape Manual update supports this County initiative in hopes that future Homeowner Associations will be aware of the resources available.

Board members asked if the manual included sections on best practices, maintenance, soil preparation, planting and staking details and modifications to the parking island planting requirements. Staff confirmed that the manual includes these new sections.

Based on the information presented and the Board's discussion, Mr. Godsey made a motion that the Planning Board make a **FAVORABLE** recommendation in support of the adoption of the Landscape Manual by the County Council. Ms. Mosier seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.