Howard County
Department of Planning & Zoning
3430 Court House Drive • Ellicott City, MD 21043 • 410-313-2350

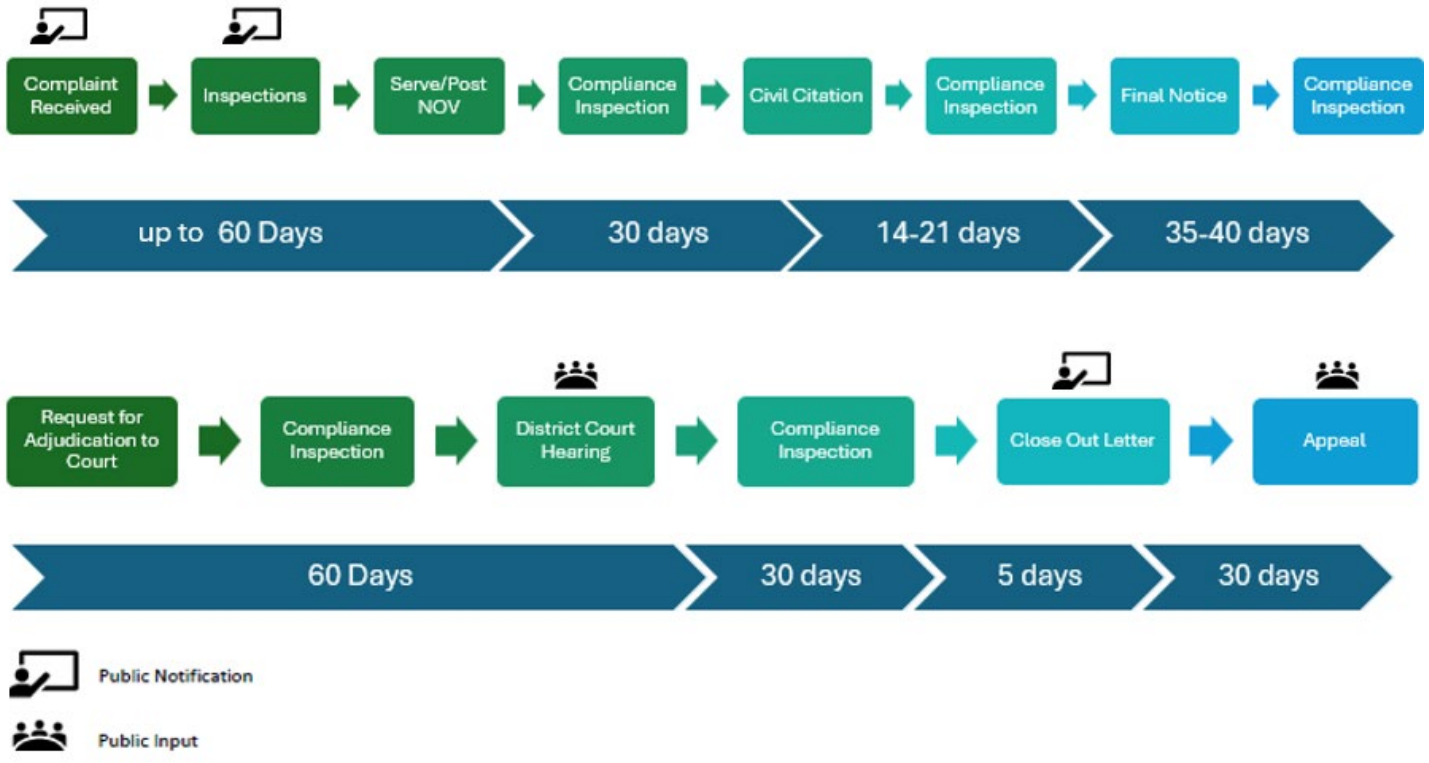
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING (DPZ)
CODE ENFORCEMENT PROCESS

Filing a Complaint:

A complaint form must be filled out and submitted to the DPZ. The complaint form is located online and can be submitted electronically, by fax (410-313-3391), email, mail or delivered in person to the Public Service Counter.

Inspection and Notice Proceedings:

Once a complaint form is completed and properly submitted to DPZ, a case is opened and an inspector investigates the alleged zoning violation. If a violation is found, the case proceeds through a code enforcement process governed by state and local law. The steps and approximate timing of the zoning code enforcement process is shown in the flow chart below.



This timeline is governed by state and county law and provides due process to the alleged violator. It also gives the alleged violator an opportunity to voluntarily abate the violations.

Abatement:

The ultimate goal of code enforcement is abatement. If the violation is abated during the inspection and notice process, DPZ closes the case and notifies both the complainant and violator. The complainant has the right to appeal the decision if an appeal petition is submitted within 30 days of the case being closed.

If the violation is not abated during the inspection and notice process, DPZ can present the case to the District Court for Howard County and seek abatement and/or fines through a Court Order. To obtain such an order, DPZ must prove the violation beyond a reasonable doubt. Therefore, it is critical that sufficient evidence is collected to meet this standard.

If the county prevails in court and abatement is required through a court order, DPZ will continue to inspect and close the case once abatement is verified. If abatement does not occur, DPZ can Petition the court for additional relief and/or fines.

Once a case is abated and closed, the code enforcement process ceases. If a new complaint is received for the same or similar activity, then a new code enforcement case is opened and the process begins again.