

## Message from Director Lynda Eisenberg

February 2025

Dear Community Member,

It has been an exciting and productive end of 2024 and 2025 kick-off here at DPZ. Our team has been working diligently to enhance Howard County through several initiatives, including administering Sustainable Communities grants, updating the Landscape Manual, and working to help preserve and restore our cherished historic cemeteries.



We are also thrilled to announce the return of our popular planning & zoning introductory course, PlanHoward Academy, this spring. We're putting great effort into making it both informative and enjoyable. Additionally, I'm delighted to introduce some new members of our team and celebrate a few well-deserved promotions.

In this newsletter, you will find updates and resources on how the Department of Planning & Zoning is working to make our community an even better place for everyone. We hope you enjoy reading!

*Lynda Eisenberg*

## County Announcements



### Fee Change

Effective February 1st, County customers will now incur service fees for credit card and ACH payments related to the following services: building, electrical and plumbing permits; water and sewer bills (please note, direct debit enrollment will not incur a fee); health department services; onsite landfill fees; animal control donations; and special event permits. The service fee for these items will be 2.45

percent for credit cards transactions, \$1.50 for ACH transactions and \$3.95 for Visa debit transactions. All other existing service fees will

remain the same. The service fee associated with the transaction will be shown during the checkout process.

Payment by mail and in person is still available (and incurs no additional service fees).



## The Housing Expansion & Affordability Act (HB538)

As of January 1, 2025, the Housing Expansion and Affordability Act (HB538) officially went into effect in Maryland, introducing new

opportunities to make housing more affordable and accessible for Marylanders. The state law made considerable changes to the state Land Use Article, which helps guide how counties plan for growth and development.

For a better understanding of the key provisions and the types of projects that qualify, we encourage you to view the [DPZ Policy Memo](#). To make the process easy, Howard County has created a simple checklist to help applicants determine if their project qualifies under the new guidelines. If you are considering new development or qualifying substantial renovations, this checklist is required to be included with the first plan submission.

For more details or to access the checklist, visit [our website](#).

## DPZ at Work



**GATEWAY**  
master plan

## DPZ Unveils Preferred Master Plan

Recently, DPZ hosted its third public meeting to present the preferred Master Plan for the transformation of Gateway. This bold vision integrates key elements from the three options presented in September and reflects valuable input from the community.

The Master Plan reimagines Gateway as a forward-thinking Innovation District – an ecosystem designed to drive sustainable job creation, foster long-term economic growth, and attract top talent in research, entrepreneurship, and technology. The Gateway of tomorrow prioritizes a phased mixed-use redevelopment strategy, enhancing connectivity and walkability while creating spaces that inspire collaboration.

Following additional public insights, DPZ will collaborate with our consultants to finalize the Master Plan Draft later this year. The draft will then be presented to the Planning Board for review before advancing to the County Council for adoption.

To view the latest presentation and explore the project, please visit our [website](#).



## DPZ Supports Façade Improvement Programs targeted to Ellicott City's Main Street, North Laurel, and Savage Businesses

DPZ has been busy helping to beautify several areas within the county through two recent awards provided by the [Maryland Façade Improvement Program \(MFIP\)](#) to support the Ellicott City and North Laurel Savage [Sustainable Communities](#).

Currently, DPZ is working with the Ellicott City Partnership to disburse \$100,000 in grants to Main Street businesses. These grants will be used to enhance the

character and attractiveness of Main Street by helping owners improve the exterior façades of buildings. For more information about this program, please reach out to [Ellicott City Partnership](#).

The North Laurel-Savage MFIP grant for \$75,000 also encourages businesses to complete façade improvements. DPZ has partnered with the Howard County Economic Development Authority to administer this program.

For any questions about the Sustainable Communities program in Howard County or the North Laurel-Savage MFIP, please contact Kristin O'Connor at [koconnor@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:koconnor@howardcountymd.gov).

Before



After



## Get Rewarded with the Route 1 Tax Credit Program

Don't miss out on the opportunity to enhance your property with the Route 1 Tax Credit Program! With spring just around the corner, now is the perfect time for Route 1 businesses to make impactful cosmetic upgrades—whether it's refreshing your landscaping, painting your building, installing new signage, or tackling other exterior site improvements. The Route 1 Tax Credit Program offers commercial and industrial property owners the chance to receive a tax credit of **up to \$100,000 per site** for renovation projects that enhance the visual appeal of their properties. This is a great way to invest in your business's future while boosting the aesthetic of the Route 1 corridor.

Property owners David & Debbie Marc previously took advantage of the Tax Credit Program for their property, The Hair Station of Elkrige, and they couldn't be more pleased with the results. "The process with the County was simple and seamless," recounts David. "We submitted a brief application along with some descriptions and a few photos, and the County was there to answer all our questions. Thanks to the program, we were able to significantly improve the building's appearance with new windows and siding."

The benefits of the program extend far beyond financial savings. “There is very little cost out of pocket since you receive property tax credits, which essentially gives you money back,” David explains. “Not only does it increase the value of your property, but it also elevates the entire area, benefiting neighboring businesses. Plus, customers really take notice and appreciate the improvements.” Watch their full video [here](#).

If you own a commercial or industrial business along Route 1—or know someone who does—now is the time to take advantage of the Route 1 Tax Credit Program. To qualify for the program, a property must have frontage onto Route 1, be adjacent to a property with Route 1 frontage, or be within the perimeter of Map 20.129D (Elkridge). It must also be under 15 acres, have up-to-date property tax payments, and have no existing code violations.

Visit the Route 1 Credit [webpage](#) to complete your application today. The application deadline is fast approaching so **act now** to secure your spot and make your business improvements with the financial support you deserve!



## DPZ Welcomes Back PlanHoward Academy

**It's back!** DPZ's award-winning planning course is returning for 2025, offering residents an overview of the planning and zoning process. This free, five-week program connects community members with professional planners and legal experts for weekly sessions on planning fundamentals.

Designed for the Howard County community, the course examines Howard County's growth from its early days as a farming settlement, to the development of the Columbia planned community in the 1960s and 1970s, and beyond. Participants will gain a clear understanding of planning principles and zoning practices that shape the area's development.

Through structured instruction, applied activities, and practical resources, this course provides the foundational knowledge needed to engage effectively in Howard County's planning efforts. Take advantage of this opportunity to build your knowledge and contribute to your community's future.

**DPZ is now accepting registration applications for PlanHoward Academy until February 21s.** If you are selected from the applicant pool, participants will be expected to attend each once-a-week evening session. To apply for this year's PlanHoward Academy, [click here](#).



## **DPZ Opens Applications for Howard County Historic Cemetery Grant Program**

DPZ is excited to announce that the Howard County Historic Cemetery Grant program is now accepting applications!

For its 5th year, DPZ is partnering with the County's Cemetery Preservation Advisory Board (CPAB) and the Howard County Genealogical Society to sponsor a grant program for projects that support the repair, protection, landscaping, or educational signage of the County's historic cemeteries.

Howard County's Historic Cemetery Inventory contains over 200 historic cemeteries and burial grounds, many of which date to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These cemeteries range from small family plots, to larger, formal cemeteries that are owned and managed by a church, nonprofit, or independent owners. Many of these smaller and privately owned cemeteries could use financial support in their maintenance and upkeep.

The Historic Cemetery Grant offers a total of \$6,000 in funds to be distributed for cemetery projects that pertain to a public education, restoration, or clean-up effort of one of the County's inventoried historic cemeteries. The deadline to apply is March 14 at 5:00 pm. For more information or to apply, [click here](#).



## DPZ Digs into Landscape Manual Update

DPZ is making significant progress in updating the Landscape Manual, which provides guidance for new residential and commercial developments. Building on insights gathered during focus groups in phase one, our team is conducting in-depth research to develop a comprehensive outline that will guide the work of our consultant. Together, we aim to draft a modernized manual that reflects the evolving needs of Howard County.

Draft versions of the updated manual will be shared with county agencies, the development community, and the public for feedback before it is presented to the Planning Board and County Council for adoption later in 2025. The current manual, adopted in 1993, provides direction on critical elements such as required landscape plantings, perimeter landscape buffers and screening between land.

To help understand the value of the updated manual, see our interview with Planning Specialist, Donna Despres below. To stay informed on the progress of the Landscape Manual update, access previous presentations, or to review the existing manual, please [click here](#).



## DPZ Expands EV Charger Checklist

DPZ is making it easier than ever for Howard County residents in townhomes and apartments to go electric! The Engineering Division has expanded their EV Charger Checklist to include commercial associations, such as those in townhome and apartment complexes.

If you're thinking about installing an electric vehicle charger or receptacle in your dedicated parking spot, you're just a few steps from completing the process. Once DPZ's Development Engineering Division reviews your submission and verifies permissions, your request moves to the Department of Inspections, Licenses, and Permits, who will issue the permit. It's a simple and streamlined way to support sustainable living in our community!

To view the EV Charger checklist, [click here](#).

## Openings on Boards & Commissions



# The Historic Preservation Commission is looking for a few good members

If you have professional experience or training in fields such as architecture, historic preservation, urban design, history or related disciplines, and have a demonstrated interest in the preservation of historic areas of the County - the Historic Preservation Commission wants you!

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) plays an important role in the preservation of Howard County's history. Committee members provide advice regarding historic sites and historic districts; ensure changes to the appearance of a historic district or site are in compliance with County code and architectural design guidelines; and provide advice regarding the design of development in relation to historical resources.

To be eligible for consideration, candidates must be a Howard County resident, meet the qualifications of the Commission, and be able to attend the Commission's meetings, which are generally held on the first Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. The Commission is seeking up to three members, one of whom must live or own property in the Lawyers Hill Historic District. Architectural experience/knowledge preferred but not required.

## Cemetery Preservation Advisory Board Seeks Committee Members

Help the Cemetery Preservation Advisory Board (CPAB) foster the preservation of Howard County's historic cemeteries and burial grounds. Spots on the CPAB are now available for professionals with a background in the development-building industry or have special interest or knowledge in fields such as history, architecture, preservation or genealogy.

The CPAB assists in maintaining and updating a cemetery inventory, may provide advice on development and subdivisions involving historic cemeteries, supports the County's cemetery restoration grant program, and helps make determinations regarding the discovery of previously unknown burials.

The Board is currently seeking three members. To be eligible for consideration, candidates must meet the professional qualifications of the Board and be able to attend the Board's meetings held the second Tuesday of every other month at 10:00 a.m. at the George Howard Building in Ellicott City.

To view the application process for applying to serve on the HPC and CPAB, please visit the County website for [Boards and Commissions](#). Under the "Serve on a Board or Commission" section, select "Application Process" and then "Apply to Serve" where a Login is required.

If you have any questions about the application process to become a Commission member, please email [ApplyBC@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:ApplyBC@howardcountymd.gov).



## New Hires & Promotions Spotlight

### New Hires

- **Randolph Mitchell, Planning Specialist**  
We are thrilled to introduce Randolph Mitchell, who joined the Department's Division of Comprehensive and Community Planning seven months ago. Randolph brings valuable experience from his time with Carroll County Government, where he worked in the Department of Planning & Land Management.
- **Payton Semmont, Planning Support Technician II**  
Howard County native and UMCP graduate, Payton Semmont has joined the Land Development Division as a Planning Support Specialist II. Payton is excited to contribute to the community she calls home and be a part of a sustainable, equitable development that has a positive impact.
- **Kerry Lenny, Communications and Outreach Coordinator**  
Kerry is a Howard County resident that comes to DPZ after three decades with a local advertising and marketing agency. Her experience includes working with small and medium-sized Maryland businesses that included local developers and builders.
- **Hannah Weber, Planning Specialist II**  
Hannah Weber, Planning Specialist II for Division of Public Service & Administration, also comes to us by way of Carroll County Government. Hannah spent her five years in Carroll as a Comprehensive Planner for Mt. Airy. Her diverse experience included zoning, site plan review, and implementation of the Master Plan providing a substantial foundation for her new role!

### Promotions

- **Chad Edmondson, Deputy Director**  
We are excited to announce that Chad Edmondson, a familiar face in the Department, will step into the role of Deputy Director following Jessica Bellah's departure at the end of 2024. Chad, formerly the Chief of Engineering, brings a wealth of experience as a dedicated 24-year veteran of Howard County Government, making him a natural fit for this leadership position.
- **Eric Bushman, Planning Supervisor**  
As a Planning Specialist in DLD, Eric Bushman spent time reviewing wetlands and forest stand delineations. He will be putting those

## Employee Spotlight



### Q&A with Donna Despres

*RLA, Planning Specialist at the Department's Land Development Division*

**What is the primary role of the Division of Land Development (DLD) within the Department of Planning & Zoning?** We are the project managers for most of the plan processes that come through the Department. It's almost easier to tell you what we don't do. DED (Development Engineering Division) manages all red lines (changes to existing plans) and environmental concept plans - and we manage everything else. When a submission comes into the department, whether it's a final plan, a sketch, or a site development plan, it's our job to make sure that the different agencies review the plan as required.

**You are also a Certified Professional Horticulturalist. Does that experience help you in this role?** It's not necessarily required for this type of position, but it is a specialty, similar to someone in this role who has urban design or maybe environmental design experience. Having that expertise can be extremely helpful in identifying potential issues or concerns. Understanding the characteristics of a particular plant or tree and how they react and interact with the environment can help avoid issues now and in the future. Take, for example, a plan, that by code, has a requirement of three shade trees in a development

area. If I'm working with an engineer who is an expert in their field but might not have much experience with landscape design, I can provide some feedback. I review their choices and if something looks like it might cause problems, I offer suggestions to help them find better options.

**I'm beginning to understand why you were selected to be the project manager for the Landscape Manual update.** It's a nice fit with my experience that's for sure.

**How important is the Landscape Manual to county planning?** Almost every submission to the Department must include a landscape plan. The Landscape Manual serves as the comprehensive guide for new residential and commercial developments. A key feature of the manual is the approved plant list, designed to help developers and residents select the appropriate mix of trees, shrubs, and plants that supports a healthy and sustainable environment. Providing clear guidance helps regulate the types of vegetations introduced into the county, minimizing the risk of invasive species.

**What's involved with updating the Manual?** It's essentially a three-tier process. The first phase involved conducting numerous focus groups that included community members and professionals. That was completed in the Fall and now we have moved into Phase 2 which centers around research of surrounding counties, studying solutions, and developing a recommended outline. After that it's a matter of drafting the updated Landscape Manual and presenting it to the Planning Board and then the County Council. That's on schedule to take place later this year.

**What do you love most about your job?** I am a detailed-oriented person, so I enjoy the structure of project management as it relates to planning. I work solo a lot, which I like, but I'm fortunate to be surrounded by a great group of people. We meet weekly and discuss all open projects so it's a nice balance of working independently and with a team. There is a tremendous amount of experience in those meetings, and it's helpful to have others weigh in on a project and answer questions as they come up.

**What's your favorite plant?** You can't ask me to choose just one! I love them all equally. But in general, I like trees – the bigger and older the better.

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