Howard County
Department of Planning & Zoning

DPZ Digest

Message from Director Lynda Eisenberg

July 2026



Dear Community Member,

Welcome to summer, marking the midway point for the calendar year as well as the beginning of a new fiscal year. It's been a very busy six months in 2026 as we wrap up a few key projects, kick off new ones, and work to strengthen our ongoing endeavors like PlanHoward Academy.

The Department of Planning and Zoning has successfully completed analysis and review of existing New Town zoning with the aid of the New Town Task Force. This was a critical undertaking that required considerable time and research conducted by our 22-member task force. See more on the final recommendations below.

We have also included updates on a few of our ongoing staff projects including the Route 1 and Route 40 Design Manual updates, next steps for the Gateway Master Plan, Land Preservation Parks & Recreation Plans, and more!

Finally, we have a **request for service**. If you, or somebody you know, is a county resident and is a licensed architect, landscape architect, civil engineer, or a resident from the Lawyers Hill Historic District, please consider serving on either our Design Advisory Panel or Historic Preservation Commission.

Thank you and have a wonderful summer!

Lynda Eisenberg

Elkridge's Path to Becoming a Maryland Sustainable Community



As Howard County's oldest settlement, Elkridge has a rich history worth preserving—and a bright future worth planning for.

That is why Howard County is pursuing a Maryland Sustainable Community designation for Elkridge. This recognition can unlock state funding, resources, and partnerships to support projects that strengthen the community for years to come.

While the state designation can help bring additional funding and resources to Elkridge, the real benefit is what those investments can mean for the community. It can support efforts to preserve treasured landmarks like the Brumbaugh House and other sites of historic significance, create safer and more walkable neighborhoods, expand parks and open spaces, strengthen local businesses, and make Elkridge an even better place to live, work, and visit.

Attaining this designation requires thoughtful planning and community input. Over the past several months, the Department of Planning and Zoning's Division of Comprehensive and Community Planning has been gathering data, meeting with community stakeholders, and reviewing resident feedback to help craft strategies to revitalize Elkridge.

These efforts have resulted in a draft five-year Sustainable Community Action Plan that builds on the County's General Plan, HoCo By Design and the Route 1 Corridor Plan and is focused on key priorities, including historic preservation, economic development, improving walkability, creating and enhancing open spaces, and expanding multimodal transportation options.

With community feedback, Department of Planning and Zoning staff will refine the draft plan and present it to the County Council in July for consideration of a supporting resolution. Following Council approval, staff will submit the application to the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development for review.

If approved, Elkridge will join Ellicott City, North Laurel-Savage, and Long Reach as Howard County communities recognized through Maryland's Sustainable Communities Program.

Most importantly, this effort is about building on what makes Elkridge special. By honoring its past while planning for future revitalization and investment, the community is taking an important step toward becoming an even more vibrant, connected, and resilient place to live, work, and visit.

PROGRESS IN MOTION



Progress is on the move with the Route 1 and Route 40 Design Manual updates!

The Department of Planning and Zoning, in collaboration with our consultant team, has been reviewing input from over 300 responses to community surveys and six focus groups with internal and external stakeholders to guide the design, look, and feel of development along our corridors.

More than 15 years have passed since the design manuals were first established and since that time each corridor has evolved with new businesses, transportation options, and opportunities. Efforts to update the design manuals so they are consistent with county and state plans and policies, while maintaining the corridor's distinctive and varied character, draw on several key county planning documents. These include HoCo By Design and the Route 1 Corridor Plan: A Plan for Washington Boulevard, both adopted in 2023.

As we work to advance complete streets, support connectivity, and create a sense of place and character unique to individual areas, public feedback has been an important voice informing these updates. Public release of the draft manual, including opportunities for feedback, is anticipated to take place in the fall for the Route 1 Design Manual (adopted in 2009), and in early 2027 for the Route 40 Design Manual which was adopted in 2010.

To stay informed on the progress of the design manuals and be notified of the draft release and future opportunities for public input, add your name to the interest list at: https://www.howardcountymd.gov/planning-zoning/route-1-design-manual-update.

MAKING ROOM FOR THE NEXT CHAPTER



As Howard County residents we can all agree, there is no place like home. Whether it's events at Merriweather Post Pavilion, watching our kids play sports at local parks, or enjoying time with friends and family at the lakefront — Howard County is a place that we love to live, work, and play. These places are part of our story, holding memories and strengthening connections, always reminding us why we love living here.

As more residents reach retirement age, many want to remain in the community they know and love. Staying close to familiar places, neighbors, and loved ones can make a meaningful difference in maintaining independence and quality of

life. Unfortunately, aging in place isn't always possible. Rising housing costs, changing health needs, and limited housing options often force older adults to leave the community they call home.

Working toward easing that burden, Howard County's General Plan, HoCo By Design and Housing Opportunities Master Plan both call for expanding housing choices that are affordable, accessible, and designed to meet the needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and residents with special needs.

On June 10, 2026 County Executive Ball signed Council Bill (CB) 25-2026 – Zoning Regulation Amendment (ZRA) 224 – Age Restricted Adult Housing Cottage Clusters into law. Unanimously approved by the County Council on June 1, the legislation creates a new housing option known as a cottage cluster. Cottage clusters are small groupings of at least four detached homes arranged around a shared courtyard. Each home has a footprint of no more than 1,200 square feet and is designed without a basement. These thoughtfully planned communities provide accessible, low-maintenance homes that encourage independence while fostering a strong sense of community. Just as importantly, they are designed to blend naturally into existing neighborhoods.

These homes also represent an important type of "missing middle housing," housing that fills the gap between traditional single-family homes and larger apartment buildings. By expanding these housing options, Howard County can provide more affordable choices for older adults while helping ensure residents have the opportunity to remain in the community they have helped build.

This new legislation reflects our community's ongoing commitment to planning for the future while preserving what makes our community special. By creating more housing choices today, we're helping ensure that more residents can continue making memories in the place they've always called home.

THE DETAILS ARE IN THE DATA



It’s the most wonderful time of year for data enthusiasts! The 2025 Development Monitoring System Report (DMS) has been completed, and everyone is invited to explore the latest trends, metrics, and insights shaping Howard County.

The annual report, a standard requirement of the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance adopted in 1992, is continually used to assess the growth management process so that adjustments can be recommended as needed. The plan largely tracks development activity, land preservation, and state requirements around the *Smart, Green, and Growing Legislation*.

One of the most significant findings from the report is the continued slowdown in development activity over the past five years. As the supply of vacant land available in the county becomes increasingly limited, overall development declined by one-third compared to previous years. Despite this slowdown, housing diversity remains strong with single-family homes, townhomes, and apartments continues to be evenly distributed across the five planning areas of the county: Columbia, Ellicott City, Elkridge, Southeast, and the Rural West providing equal housing opportunities for a broad range of residents.

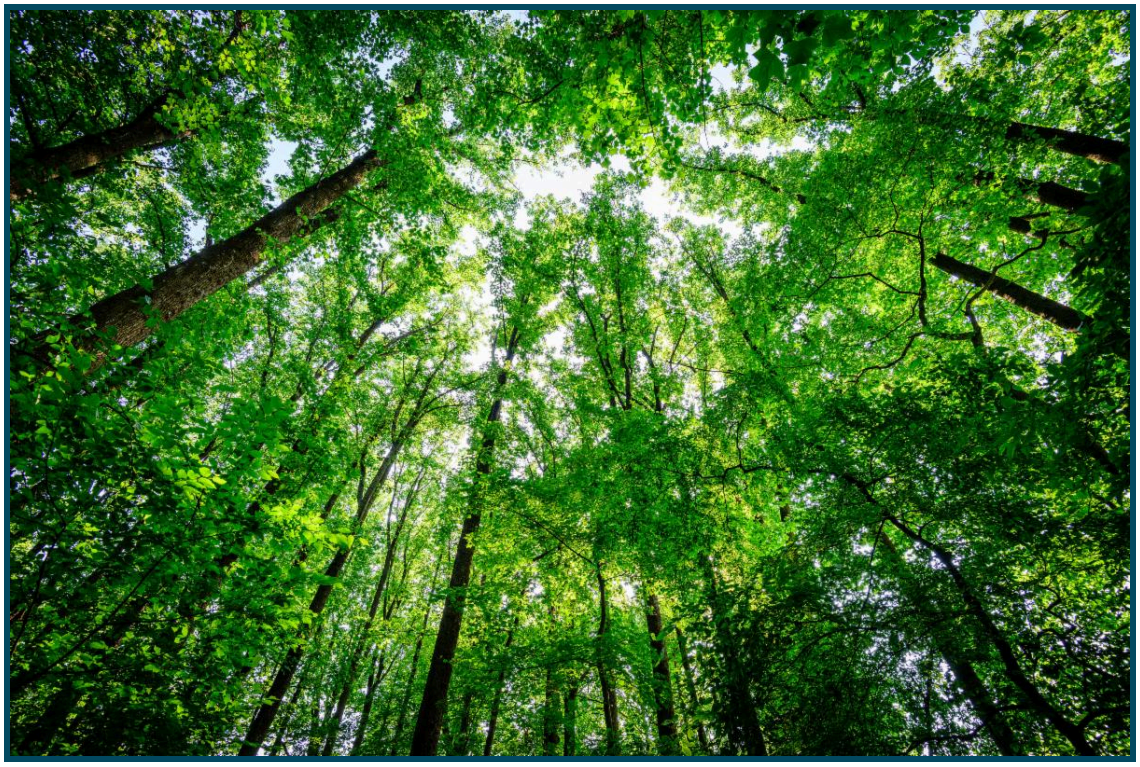
Use and Occupancy permits issued in 2025 totaled 572, the lowest in more than a decade, further reinforcing the trend of slowing development. Looking ahead, new development will be driven primarily by redevelopment projects and strategic infill on vacant or underutilized land within established communities. This approach allows the county to accommodate future growth where appropriate to meet market demand while preserving neighborhood character.

Non-residential development also experienced a decline between 2021 and 2025 across all sectors including retail, office/service, manufacturer/industry, government & institution, and other commercial categories.

While development has slowed, land preservation efforts continue to expand. Today, 41% of the County land is permanently preserved with more than 66,000 acres protected through conservation easements, parks, and open space.

In addition to development and preservation metrics, the DMS includes reporting required under state law through the *Smart, Green, and Growing* legislation. This reporting for Howard County provides a breakdown of lot density for residential housing built throughout the year along with major infrastructure projects, public facilities, and roadway improvements, among other required metrics.

SEEING THE FOREST THROUGH THE TREES



One of Howard County's greatest assets is our preserved land, much of which is covered by forests. These forests provide the shade we crave on hot summer days, create habitat for our diverse wildlife, and contribute to the natural beauty that enhances our parks, open spaces, and neighborhoods.

Forests are also vital to Maryland's environmental health, economy, and quality of life. According to the 2022 Technical Study of Changes in Maryland's Forest Cover and Tree Canopy Study, forests cover as much as 42% of the state. Recognizing their importance, Maryland has strengthened its commitment to protecting and expanding forest resources through updates to the Forest Conservation Act (Section 5-1607) effective July 1, 2026.

The updated Act maintains forest retention as the highest priority, requiring that all reasonable options for preserving existing forests be fully explored before clearing is considered and before replacement planting is used as mitigation.

Forests located in areas that provide critical environmental benefits are prioritized for retention. These include:

1. Howard County Green Infrastructure Network
2. 100-year floodplain.
3. Stream buffers.
4. Forested wetlands and wetland buffers.
5. Critical habitat areas and forest corridors for wildlife movement.

A complete list of priority areas for forest retention can be found on our forest conservation website.

In addition to strengthening protections for existing forests, the updated Forest Conservation Act enhances public notification requirements and requires planting within any unforested stream buffers. To support transparency, Howard County's Priority Areas for Forest Retention website includes a list of all projects proposing forest clearing within priority retention areas. Project details and opportunities for public feedback will be updated regularly by the Department of Planning and Zoning.

To support the production of housing in areas of the County targeted for redevelopment, the update also includes an afforestation exemption and reduced mitigation requirements for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and multi-family housing projects. These projects will need to provide mitigation for any forest cleared but will not be required to plant new forests on a site where there is no existing forest cover.

By working together with the state, we can strengthen, and expand our existing forests, and safeguard environmentally sensitive areas as part of responsible growth and development. Preserving our forests today helps ensure a healthier, more resilient and beautiful community for generations to come.

REGISTRATION CLOSES SUNDAY



Don't miss your chance to register for our fall Department of Planning and Zoning's (DPZ) award-winning planning course, **PlanHoward Academy** Registration closes this Sunday at 11:59pm.

Taught by professional planners and attorneys, during this free, five-week course, participants will have the opportunity to take part in hands-on learning exercises and in-class instruction focused on the underpinnings of land development in Howard County.

Participants will learn how the planning, zoning, and land development process works, and the plans, policies, and procedures that help shape and grow our county. Apply today at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PHAFall26app.

For more information visit the PlanHoward Academy website https://www.howardcountymd.gov/planning-zoning/planhoward-academy

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NEW TOWN TASK FORCE

New Town Task Force Publishes Final Report

After 14 months of study, discussion, and community input, the New Town Task Force has released its final report, completing a comprehensive review of the zoning framework that guides development throughout much of Columbia.

Appointed by the Executive and County Council, the 22-member Task Force was charged with evaluating and making recommendations on how the current New Town zoning structure can continue to support Columbia's long-term vision, as defined by the 2023 General Plan, HoCo By Design, while providing a clear, consistent path for future growth and development.

The Task Force examined the New Town district's character-defining elements, development review processes, planning frameworks, and Section 125 regulations. Members also reviewed public feedback and studied comparable planned communities—including Greenbelt, Maryland; Reston, Virginia; and Montgomery Village, Maryland—to better understand how similar zoning models have adapted over time.

Based on its findings, the Task Force approved 27 recommendations aimed at strengthening and modernizing the New Town framework. The recommendations address a range of topics, including final development plans, preservation of open space, housing diversity, and design guidance.

The final report, which details the Task Force's guiding assumptions, analytical approach, findings, and recommendations, is available for public review on the New Town Task Force website.

NEXT STEPS FOR GATEWAY



The next major step toward realizing the long-term vision for the Gateway Innovation District is now underway.

Following the recent adoption of the Gateway Master Plan, DPZ has launched a six-month financial feasibility study to help turn that vision into a reality. Working with our consultant team, WGI, Inc., the study will look at how the 1,100-acre area can evolve into a vibrant mixed-use destination that supports jobs, housing, innovation, and community amenities.

The study will evaluate different development scenarios to better understand what can realistically be built, and what strategies will best support long-term growth. It will also examine zoning updates, incentives, infrastructure improvements, and public investments that could help support new housing, employment, and open spaces, while ensuring existing businesses continue to thrive.

Special attention will be given to the “Woonerf,” the Master Plan’s signature shared street and public gathering space envisioned as a central connector through the district. The County will explore how it can be implemented and improved over time.

Stakeholder input will remain part of the process, with property owners, businesses, and other stakeholders invited to share feedback along the way.

Guiding the effort is consultant WGI, Inc., a nationally recognized engineering, planning, and professional services firm with more than fifty years of experience helping communities turn ambitious visions into achievable results.

The study is expected to be completed in about six months and will help lay the groundwork for future zoning decisions in the Gateway Innovation District.

LAND PRESERVATION, PARKS, AND RECREATION PLANS



Help Shape the Future of Our Parks and Open Spaces

Every five years the Maryland Department of Natural Resources requires communities participating in the state's Open Space Program to update their Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan (LPPRP). The County's most recent plan was completed in 2022, and work on the 2027 update is now officially underway.

Led by Howard County's Department of Recreation and Parks, and in partnership with the Department of Planning and Zoning, the LPPRP serves as a roadmap for how the county will preserve, manage, and invest in parks, open spaces, recreational facilities, and programs over the next five years. The plan will guide future decisions and ensure that improvements to these areas align with the County's General Plan, HoCo By Design.

Whether you visit neighborhood parks, walk local pathways, enjoy recreation programs, or simply value protected open space, your feedback matters. Community members are encouraged to share how they use the County's parks, facilities, and programs and what they would like to see in the future by completing a short survey.

To learn more about the Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan (LPPRP), visit the Department of Recreation and Parks website: https://www.howardcountymd.gov/recreation-parks/land-preservation-parks-and-recreation-plans-lpprp

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BOARDS & COMMISSIONS



Design Advisory Panel Seeks Committee Members

Are you a licensed architect, landscape architect, or civil engineer looking to make a lasting impact in Howard County? The Department of Planning and Zoning is seeking qualified professionals to serve on the Design Advisory Panel (DAP).

As a DAP member, your expertise generally provides guidance to developers and fellow design professionals early in the planning process. These recommendations help to create attractive, well-designed projects that blend with the surrounding area, support revitalization efforts, and contribute to long-term property values and community character.

The Design Advisory Panel meets virtually via WebEx at 7:00 p.m., generally on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month. If interested, please send an email to planning@howardcountymd.gov.

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, or **construction**, and have a demonstrated interest in the preservation of historic areas of the County - please consider serving on the Historic Preservation Commission.

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 two members, one of whom must live or own property in the Lawyers Hill Historic District. Architectural experience/knowledge preferred but not required.

The Multimodal Transportation Board

As a favor to our friends at the Office of Transportation, we are sharing a request for board members for their **Multimodal Transportation Board (MTB)**. The MTB advises the County Executive and County Administration on transportation policies, priorities, and projects and advises on strategies that align with the County's Complete Streets policy, long-range transportation plans, and regional priorities.

The Board is comprised of nine members, each of whom shall be experienced, interested in, or a user of at least one of the following:

- Public transit, including fixed-route or paratransit;
- Bicycle transportation;
- Pedestrian transportation;
- Road networks that promote all modes of transportation; or
- Transportation demand management.

To be eligible for consideration, candidates must be Howard County residents, qualify under at least one of the required categories, and be able to attend Board meetings, which are held in a hybrid format on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 3:00 p.m.

If you know a neighbor, colleague, or community member who would be a good fit, please feel free to share the application information.

Interested applicants should complete an application online by visiting the County's "Boards and Commissions Application" online form and selecting "Multimodal Transportation Board" in the form. Eligible applicants are submitted to the County Executive for consideration. If approved, the appointment is forwarded to the County Council for confirmation. For any questions regarding the application process, please email ApplyBC@howardcountymd.gov.

For more information about the MTB, visit the County's Boards & Commissions "Multimodal Transportation Board" webpage.

This email is being sent to keep you informed of the latest news at Howard County's Department of Planning and Zoning. ***If you do not wish to receive these updates from DPZ****, reply to this email or email* ***planning@howardcountymd.gov*** *to be removed from this list.*

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