

Message from Director Lynda Eisenberg

January 2026

Dear Community Member,

2025 was a busy and rewarding year for our team. We advanced **10 major projects**, including approval of the Gateway Master Plan, electronic payments for zoning, several zoning regulation amendments, and an updated Landscape Manual.



We were honored with **two national awards**, awarded **\$104,000 for facade improvements** along Route 1, and actively preserved **96 acres of agricultural and environmental land**. One of our favorite milestones this year was **graduating 70 students** from PlanHoward Academy, a great reminder of how much interest there is in shaping the future of our county.

In 2026, we'll take on several exciting efforts including updating the Route 1 and Route 40 design manuals, continuing our award-winning PlanHoward Academy, and updating the Green Infrastructure Network plan.

None of this happens without strong partnerships and an engaged community. Thank you to everyone who worked alongside us in 2025. We're excited to build on this momentum as we head into the new year.



2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

10 MAJOR PROJECTS



Six divisions orchestrated ten major projects including:
Gateway Master Plan • Zoning online forms & payments • APFO Committee • New Town Task Force formation • Three Zoning Regulation Amendments • Updated the Landscape Manual • Graduated 70 students from PlanHoward Academies • Route 1/Route 40 Design Manual Updates



2

**NACO
AWARDS**



3

**ZONING REGULATION
AMENDMENTS**

\$104,000

**APPROVED FOR
ROUTE 1 TAX
CREDIT PROGRAM**



381



PLANS REVIEWED*

*This number may reflect multiple submissions and revisions and is not intended to imply total unique plan submissions.

Land Development Team Reaches New Heights

The Division of Land Development (DLD) within the Department of Planning and Zoning may be small in size, but its impact is anything but. This dedicated team of planners administers a wide-ranging portfolio that touches nearly every corner of our community. From guiding complex development proposals to leading special initiatives, such as the newly updated Landscape Manual, and

overseeing the Design Advisory Panel, DLD planners stay in constant motion, working day in and day out to facilitate compliance with our land development regulations.

In 2025 alone, the Division completed an impressive 381 plan reviews. While that number is noteworthy, the true significance lies not in the volume, but in the circumstances behind the work. This number may reflect multiple submissions and revisions requiring careful coordination, detailed analysis, and ongoing collaboration with applicants, agencies, and colleagues. Each review represented a commitment to detail, consistency, and the long-term vision of our community. It does not include the redline revisions, alternative compliance requests, necessary disturbance request, Planning Board reporting's and presentations, or special projects that staff are also involved in throughout the year.

DPZ BY THE NUMBERS

DPZ not only review development proposals for compliance with our regulations, but staff also investigate zoning complaints, process applications for work proposed in historic districts, and manage land preservation programs.

96

ACRES OF LAND
PRESERVED



140

HISTORIC PRESERVATION
COMMISSION APPLICATIONS



341

CODE ENFORCEMENT
CASES



70

GRADUATE STUDENTS
PLANHOWARD ACADEMY

The ABCs of DPZ

In 2025, DPZ's award-winning PlanHoward Academy returned, and our Division of Comprehensive and Community Planning successfully relaunched its exceptional spring and fall sessions.

Designed to demystify the planning, zoning, and land development process, PlanHoward Academy engaged 70 community residents in a free, five-week course that blends in-class instruction, hands-on learning exercises, take-home materials and homework. Led by professional planners and legal experts, the program delivers a thought-provoking, highly interactive curriculum that explores the foundations of land development and the decision-making process across the County.

Interested in attending a future PlanHoward Academy session? [Join our interest list](#) to be notified when applications open.



The GIN



Photo credit: Cheryl Farfaras

2nd in a series about the Green Infrastructure Network, GIN

You may be sharing Howard County with more neighbors than you think, and some of them have tails. Beyond backyards and walking trails, river otters slip through streams, flying squirrels glide between trees after dark, and coyotes quietly roam natural areas across the community. These animals are not visitors, they are residents, and they depend on healthy habitats to survive.

Many native plants and animals need very specific conditions to breed, feed, and thrive. Forest Interior Dwelling Species, such as pileated woodpeckers and barred owls, rely on large, unbroken stretches of forest. Deep inside these forests, the air stays cooler and moister, and the plant life is richer and more diverse. In contrast, forest edges are brighter and drier and often become overrun by invasive, non-native plants that push out native species.

As forests, wetlands, and meadows are cleared or divided by roads, farms, and development, these natural spaces shrink into small, isolated patches. This fragmentation makes survival difficult for species that depend on interior forest habitats. The impact is serious: 105 species of plants and animals in the county are currently listed by the State of Maryland as rare, threatened, or endangered.

To address this challenge, the county created the Green Infrastructure Network Plan. This plan focuses on conserving and strengthening an interconnected network of the largest and most ecologically important natural areas. By linking forests, wetlands, and meadows, the network reduces habitat fragmentation and allows wildlife and plants to move, adapt, and survive. These connections promote biodiversity and help nature function the way it should.

Land within and near the network receives top priority for preservation, parkland, open space, and natural resource management. It is also the highest priority area for forest protection and tree planting under the Forest Conservation Act. Protecting these spaces benefits everyone by supporting clean air and water, maintaining natural ecological processes, and offering places to explore, relax, and reconnect with nature.

The wildlife and the GIN need everyone's help to survive and flourish. You don't need to own a large forest to make a difference. Simple actions on your own property can strengthen the entire network. Planting trees, expanding wooded areas near streams or wetlands, reducing lawn space, and cutting back on fertilizers and pesticides all help. Choosing native plants, installing rain or pollinator gardens, removing invasive species, and adding bird or bat houses can turn any yard into valuable habitat.

When residents take small steps, they create big benefits. Together, we can protect the hidden wild neighbors that share our county and ensure they remain part of our community for generations to come.

For more information on the Green Infrastructure Network Plan, visit www.LiveGreenHoward.com.

Looking Ahead to 2026

Our team has hit the ground running in 2026, as DPZ continues to lay the groundwork for key initiatives to implement HoCo By Design and realize the

community's long-term vision. A few of our planned projects for the year include:

- Work with County agencies to track the implementation of 359 HoCo By Design's policy actions for the 2028 monitoring report
- Work with DPW and DILP to incorporate the new FEMA floodplain regulations into the Howard County code
- Evaluate forthcoming MDE stormwater management quantity and quality requirements and determine implementation strategy
- Complete the Route 1 and Route 40 Design Manual updates for consistency with HoCo By Design and Howard County Complete Street policies
- Update the Green Infrastructure Network Plan
- Engage residents in PlanHoward Academy 1-2 times/annually
- Further pursue purchased easements through the Agricultural Land Preservation Program
- Continue the Historic Cemetery Restoration Grant Program
- Expand the Department's capabilities to accept electronic submissions for all plan and application processing and payments
- Develop proposal for future zoning program that can guide Gateway's redevelopment into a mixed-use, sustainable community and accommodate priority industries that are an integral part of the innovation district vision.
- Partner with the Economic Development Authority and Finance to award \$250,000 in Route 1 Program tax credits
- Facilitate New Town Task Force to evaluate current zoning regulations and make recommendations on how to carry forward New Town's planned community framework
- Deliver DPZ's required annual Development Monitoring System Report
- Fulfill annual housing unit and population projections for county and regional agencies, including HCPSS, DPW, and the Baltimore Metropolitan Council

Building the Future



New Hires



IFEOMA COLLINS: Research's newest **Planning Specialist II** comes to DPZ from USDA where she worked for 6 years as a Data Analyst.

Ifeoma has already become an integral part of Research since starting at DPZ in October. Her Python skills enhance our planning analysis methodologies, providing more detailed breakdowns. The Howard County resident is looking forward to using her skills to improve her community.



ASHLEY MCAVOY: RCD was fortunate enough to hire another USDA alum in November. The Natural Resource Specialist (now **Planning Specialist II**) will be working with the Agriculture Land Preservation Program.

In her spare time, Ashley and her husband enjoy renovating their 155-year-old Baltimore County home—more proof she's a natural fit for RCD!

Promotions

JUSTIN TYLER

We are excited to announce the promotion of Justin Tyler, formerly a Planner II, to **Planning Supervisor** in our Zoning Division.

Justin, a lifelong Howard County resident, has jumped right in and taken the lead on updating and streamlining submission and petition processes for the department. He is enjoying his new supervisory role and sharing his experience and knowledge with his coworkers.

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