

Message from Director Lynda Eisenberg

March 2026

Dear Community Member,

The days are growing longer and the first signs of spring are finally here! Our team here at the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) is digging into our 2026 projects and we are already advancing many of our priorities.



The newly updated 2026 Landscape Manual, our first comprehensive update since 1998, is now available for review on our website. This milestone reflects the hard work of our staff and strong collaboration with county partners and community members.

Join us for the next New Town Task Force public meetings: in person on Wednesday, April 8th and virtually on Thursday, April 9th. The New Town Task Force is reviewing current New Town zoning regulations and shaping recommendations that will guide land use across much of Columbia.

We are also excited to launch the Zoning Use Informational Map (ZUIM), an intuitive, interactive tool that makes it easier than ever to understand what can be built, and where, in the County.

As this is an election year, don't forget to review upcoming Zoning Blackout Dates and related restrictions under County Code Section 16.211.

You'll also find seasonal insights from our Resource and Conservation Division, plus we celebrate Deputy Director, Chad Edmondson's retirement after 25.5 years of dedicated service with the county.

We hope that enjoy the read!



LANDSCAPE MANUAL



It may look like a technical update, but [Howard County's newly adopted Landscape Manual](#) is really about shaping how our community feels, functions, and grows in the years ahead.

As development continues, landscaping plays a bigger role than ever, not just in how places look, but in how they perform. The updated manual reflects this shift, offering clear, modern guidance that supports more resilient, attractive, and environmentally responsible design across Howard County.

Used by residents, developers, and design professionals, the manual outlines how landscape plans should be prepared and what standards new development must meet. But beyond requirements, it emphasizes smarter, more intentional choices, from preserving existing vegetation to integrating natural systems into everyday spaces.

Key elements of the updated manual include guidance to:

- Preserve existing trees and minimize unnecessary clearing during development
- Create buffers that soften transitions and screen incompatible land uses
- Design parking lots with shade trees and planted areas to reduce heat and improve usability
- Support pollinators and biodiversity through thoughtful plant selection
- Incorporate landscaping that improves stormwater management and reduces runoff
- Promote healthier environments through air quality benefits, cooling, and soil integrity
- Ensure long-term success with clear planting, soil preparation, and maintenance standards

This update reflects a strong, collaborative effort across the County. Staff from multiple departments worked alongside focus groups and community members to share ideas, practical experience, and local knowledge. Their input helped shape a manual that responds to real needs and priorities, and their collective commitment to a healthier, more vibrant built environment is evident throughout.

The result is a manual that not only sets standards but also helps guide better outcomes, making every project an opportunity to contribute to a greener, more resilient community. [Explore the new 2026 Landscape Manual](#) for technical guidance on recommended plants, trees, and more.

NTTF PUBLIC MEETING



SECOND PUBLIC MEETING

Share your thoughts on the draft recommendations developed by the New Town Task Force.

In-Person Option

Wednesday, April 8, 2026
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Presentation will be given at 6pm followed by Q&A

The same presentation will be repeated at 7pm and followed by another Q&A

East Columbia 50+ Center
6610 Cradlerock Way
Columbia, MD 21045

[Register for in-person option](#)

Virtual Option

Thursday, April 9, 2026
12:00 PM – 2:00 PM
Webex (Virtual)

Presentation will be given at 12 pm followed by Q&A

The same presentation will be repeated at 1 pm and followed by another Q&A

This meeting will be recorded and posted to the New Town Task Force Website

[Register for virtual option by visiting our website](#)

To fulfill the goals of Howard County's General Plan, HoCo By Design, [a Task Force has been developed](#) to identify potential zoning recommendations for the Columbia area within the New Town Zoning District (Section 125.0). The feedback gathered will serve to aid in the development of the final recommendations to the County.

Join us at the Public Meeting to learn more about this important work

ZONING BLACKOUT DATES

APRIL — 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
		01	02	03
06	07	08	09	10
13	14	15	16	17
20	21	22	23	24
27	28	29	30	01

2026 is an election year in Howard County and that includes our County Council. During an election year, Howard County Code Section 16.211 stipulates that incumbent Councilmembers shall not take final action on any Zoning Regulation Amendment or Zoning Map Amendment after the date of the primary election, until the newly elected County Council members have qualified and taken office. The primary election date this year is **June 23, 2026**.

The rules dictated by the code will impact two areas of zoning: zoning map amendments and zoning regulation amendments. To provide sufficient time for any written decisions to be drafted and signed by the Zoning Board, the Zoning Board plans to conclude decision-making on **Zoning Map Amendment** cases toward the **end of April**.

The last complete legislative session before the primary election begins is May 4, 2026. Proposed **Zoning Regulation Amendments** would need to be **pre-**

filed no later than April 23, 2026, to be included in the May legislative session.

Any cases that are not concluded within these deadlines could be deferred until the next County Council takes office in December and begins to schedule Zoning Board meetings in 2027.

Updates related to the election year can be [reviewed on the Howard County Council's website](#).

The GIN



3rd in a series about the Green Infrastructure Network, GIN

The sights and sounds of spring are arriving across the County and the natural areas within the Green Infrastructure Network offer many opportunities for residents to experience the seasonal wonders first-hand.

Wood frogs and spring peepers can be heard echoing across the wetlands in West Friendship Park, and perennial wildflowers such as bloodroot, skunk cabbage and spring beauty are blooming in the floodplains in Patapsco Valley and Patuxent River State Parks. Red Maple trees are flowering along Cattail Creek, which will soon be followed by the magenta flowers of the eastern redbuds and the white flowering dogwoods.

Resident birds such as the eastern bluebird are returning to prepare their nesting sites for the year. American woodcocks can be seen performing their quirky “sky dance” breeding display during dawn and dusk at the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area (MPEA). Migratory birds rely on the natural areas within the Green Infrastructure Network for food and a place to rest along their seasonal journeys. Canada geese can be seen feeding around the lake at Centennial Park and raptors such as hawks, kestrels and eagles are returning to their hunting grounds at the David Force Natural Resource Area.

The Green Infrastructure Network plays a critical role in supporting seasonal wildlife migrations across the County. Each spring, amphibians such as spotted

salamanders and wood frogs migrate through the County's forests to reach vernal pools. These seasonal wetlands offer a breeding habitat that is free of fish predators, which is critical to the life cycles of many native amphibians. The Green Infrastructure Network links significant forests, wetlands and meadows throughout the County, which provide crucial connections that allow our native wildlife to move, adapt and survive.

Natural areas within the Green Infrastructure Network are a top priority for conservation, reforestation and natural resource management in the County. Preservation of the Network is critical to ensure these seasonal wonders are protected and supported for future generations.

[For more information on the Green Infrastructure Network Plan, visit Live Green Howard.](#)

Zoning Use Informational Map

What can be built where in the County? It's one of the most common, and most important, questions residents, business owners, and developers ask. Yet the answer is often buried in lengthy zoning codes, technical tables, and cross-referenced regulations that can be difficult to navigate.

The Zoning Use Informational Map (ZUIM) was created to change that, giving the public a faster, clearer way to understand how land can be used across Howard County.

The ZUIM was created to make that information easier to access and understand. By translating dense code into clear, familiar categories, such as single-family residential, grocery store, or gas station, and pairing them with an interactive map, the tool makes zoning far more accessible.

Built using Microsoft Power BI and enhanced with mapping technology from Esri, the ZUIM allows users to search, filter, and instantly view permitted, conditional, and accessory uses across the County. Instead of navigating complex legal text, users can explore zoning visually and quickly identify where different uses are allowed.

The project reflects one of DPZ's core commitments: public service and transparency. The ZUIM empowers residents and stakeholders to access zoning information directly, supporting more informed conversations and decisions about land use.

Development of the tool began in earnest in fall 2025 as the County began preparing for a future comprehensive zoning process. In addition to serving the public, the ZUIM provides elected officials, County staff, and other stakeholders with a clearer way to visualize and understand zoning during this critical planning effort.

By turning complex regulations into an intuitive, interactive experience, the ZUIM helps make zoning clearer, more transparent, and more accessible for everyone. [Explore the ZUIM today](#) and discover what zoning looks like throughout Howard County.

Employee Spotlight



RETIREMENT

Chad Edmondson, Deputy Director

How many years have you been with Howard County Government and what positions have you held? Don't take this the wrong way, but it feels like forever. I spent time at DPZ when I was young because my mom worked here. I can't say that I knew back then that I would work here, but it has felt a little bit like home. I left for a short period of time to work in the private sector, but altogether I've been with Howard County for 25.5 years. I started out as a Plan Reviewer, then moved up to Chief Engineer, and in 2025 I stepped in as Deputy Director for the Engineering and Land Development divisions.

What have you appreciated the most about your time at Howard County? It has to be the team. I have been really lucky to have great people around me. This job is a team effort and consistently I have been surrounded with people that have always been willing to work with me and help get things done. The one thing that I know for sure in this career is that it is always about the team around you—you can't do it alone.

What are you going to miss the most about DPZ? The people first and foremost. But the basement gym is a close second. I am really going to miss my lunchtime workout and having the place to myself. It has always been my way to work out some stress and recalibrate for the afternoon.

What's been your favorite project you've been a part of? While at the County I enjoyed working on Maple Lawn Farms with one particular engineer at GLW. When I was with Harms and Associates earlier in my career I got to work on The Arundel Mills Mall and that was a great experience.

What's an interesting fact about you? I am not a very good loser.

What are you most looking forward to with retirement? Just playing*! And when my granddaughter gets a little older, playing a sport with her.

***Editor's Note:** "Playing" for Chad could mean pickleball, volleyball, mountain biking, stand-up paddleboard, billiards, or scuba diving. Basically, if it's a game of competition—sign him up.

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