

## Message from Director Lynda Eisenberg

**October 2025**

Dear Community Member,  
Welcome to fall and what promises to be a busy season for the Department of Planning & Zoning (DPZ)!



We are continuing to focus on implementation of Howard County's General Plan with work on various **zoning regulation amendments**. Our new Chief, Julia Sauer (profiled below), is hard at work on those Amendments, but you can keep track of their progress with the [new table](#) Julia's team has incorporated on our website.

The **Gateway Master Plan** has been pre-filed with the County Council—a huge milestone for our team! Currently, they are preparing for work sessions with the Council before the plan goes to a vote in late fall.

Our award-winning **PlanHoward Academy** class is back this fall to educate 35 more Howard County residents on all things planning and zoning! If you are interested in applying to future sessions, be sure to check out our interest list linked below.

Wrapping things up we're going to take a moment to celebrate a few recent **awards**, and several of our **outstanding team members**.

We hope you enjoy reading!



## DPZ at Work



# **GATEWAY** master plan

## **Legislative Draft Filed With County Council**

Major steps were taken over the summer preparing the Gateway Master Plan's Legislative Draft for Council's review. Our Division of Comprehensive and Community Planning has masterfully taken the project from kickoff to filing with continuous stakeholder engagement throughout the nearly year-long process.

With the [Planning Board's recommendation](#) in mid-August, the Plan was pre-filed with the County Council. Prior to the Council's vote, work sessions will be held to address questions about the proposed plan. The Council is likely to vote on adoption of the Gateway Master Plan in October 2025.

# *Not* ZONING CODE ENFORCEMENT

Some complaints are **NOT** enforced by Zoning:



## Noise

**DO:** Call the police non-emergency number @ 3-1-1



## Street parking

**DO:** Email Howard County Police at HCPDTraffic@howardcountymd.gov



## Tall grass

**DO:** Contact the Howard County Health Department at howardcountymd.gov



## Signage

**DO:** File a complaint with Department of Inspections, Licenses, Permits via the Citizen Access portal at howardcountymd.gov



Report violations via the Zoning Complaint Form found at: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/planning-zoning/zoning>

## Outside the Zone

In our most recent newsletter we shared some common Zoning Code violations that get reported to DPZ. But how about issues that may be a nuisance, but are NOT handled by the Zoning Department?

Disturbances such as noise and issues with street parking should be directed toward Howard County Police. Have a neighbor who has let their grass get out of control? Contact the Howard County Health Department.

Signage has specific guidelines depending on whether they are advertisements, community signs, or required notices. Contact the Department of Inspections, Licenses, and Permits for more information or to file a complaint.

Most complaints can be made anonymously, but if you would like to be kept up to date on the complaint status, you will need to provide your name and contact information. Keeping Howard County a safe and welcoming place to live, work, and play takes all of us working together.



## Class is Back in Session

Department of Planning and Zoning's award-winning planning course is back! Our Division of Comprehensive and Community Planning is thrilled to be welcoming its newest class of 35 Howard County residents this fall.

PlanHoward Academy gives residents a closer look at the County's planning processes through interactive presentations, group discussions, role playing, and fun table exercises. Our free, five-week course includes in-class instruction, and take-home materials. Participants are able to learn how planning really works - and why their voices matter.

Connect with neighbors and build relationships with County staff and join our PlanHoward Academy [interest list](#) to stay informed. You will be notified when the next application period is open!



## Making a Big Splash for Conservation at Watermont Swim Club

This summer, the Department of Planning and the Howard County Conservancy pooled together to add 10 more acres to the County's innovative Purchased Conservation Easement Pilot Program.

The \$326,250 easement purchase, underwritten by a grant from Howard County Government to the Conservancy, includes more than eight acres of forest, wetlands, and two tributary streams within the Deep Run and Patapsco River watershed. The easement ensures the ten-acre parcel at 5819 Bellanca Drive will be protected from future subdivision and development and the existing environmental resources on site will be sustained in perpetuity.

Through the Program, Howard County provides funding to the Howard County Conservancy to administer the easement program, underwrite the acquisition costs of preservation easements on land owned by eligible non-profits and sustain the site's environmental resources through responsible monitoring and stewardship.

"This easement reinforces our comprehensive approach to smart land use, sustainable development and environmental conservation," said Lynda Eisenberg, Director of the Department of Planning & Zoning. "With each easement, the County and Howard County Conservancy strengthen the balance between development and preservation, consistent with the County's vision for responsible growth."

To date, over \$2.7 million has been invested in the easement program, which specifically targets non-profit property owners and provides financial incentives to permanently preserve environmentally significant properties. The Watermont acquisition brings the program's total to 80 acres preserved.

Under the County's partnership with the Howard County Conservancy, the latter holds easement and the responsibility for stewardship and enforcement of its environmental protections.

To learn more about the Purchased Conservation Easement Program, please visit the Howard County Conservancy's website:

<https://www.howardnature.org/conservation-easements/>.



## HoCo By Design Implementation



## Zoning in on Solutions

### Opening Doors with ADUs

Anne loves her neighborhood in Columbia, with the park down the street, the village center she's walked to for 30 years, and the neighbors who know her by name. But as living alone grows harder, she faces an impossible choice: leave her community or find something she can afford nearby.

Joe and Megan's son, Connor, graduated last year from University of Maryland and moved back home while he looked for a full-time job. Now employed, the reality of rising housing costs means Connor can't afford to move out of his parents' house.

There are hundreds of stories just like these all across Howard County as the nation grapples with a housing crisis. Challenges driven by soaring home prices, steep interest rates, and a shrinking supply of affordable options are reshaping communities and straining families across the state.

A backyard cottage, just steps from her daughter's kitchen window, has the potential to change everything for Anne. Turning his parents' detached garage into a new apartment provides Connor the opportunity for affordable independence. With updated zoning rules, more families like Anne and Connor's can keep loved ones close through Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). Accessory dwelling units are smaller, independent homes located on the same property as a primary residence.

Howard County is taking on this statewide effort by leading with drafted and proposed amendments to its zoning regulations that will facilitate the integration of ADUs into existing neighborhoods. The recently submitted petition for Howard County Zoning Regulation Amendment ([ZRA](#) [218](#)) streamlines and improves ADU regulations to make development more flexible and accessible.

The proposed zoning changes would open the door for a wider variety of accessory dwelling units (ADUs)—from small, detached cottages and garage apartments to basement units and in-law suites—across all single-family housing types, whether detached, semi-detached, or attached. By removing lot size requirements, easing owner-occupancy restrictions, and ensuring neighborhood character through setback standards, the legislation makes building and financing these homes more feasible. Together, these updates create practical pathways to expand affordable housing options and offer more flexibility for families and communities across the county.

The ADU Zoning Regulation Amendment will be reviewed at the Thursday, October 16th Planning Board meeting at 3430 Court House Drive in Ellicott City. Information regarding the meeting can be found at the [Planning Board's website](#) beginning October 2nd.



## Harvesting Possibilities Agribusiness Legislation Grows

Agriculture is one of the state's largest industries and a vital part of our local economy. But farmers today face serious challenges, from climate change and labor shortages to pests, diseases, and rising costs. Nearly 70% of primary farm operators now work a second job off the farm just to make ends meet.

Even with these obstacles, Howard County farmers have long been leaders in innovation and diversification. During the Department of Planning and Zoning's 3-year process developing Howard County's General Plan, HoCo By Design, residents voiced overwhelming support for protecting local farms and expanding agribusiness.

One exciting opportunity is agritourism, when farms invite people to come visit and learn about what they do through hands-on experiences, helping to create new income streams for farmers. Popular examples here in Howard County include petting farms, school programs, pumpkin picking, corn mazes, and

seasonal festivals. Farm breweries, wineries, and cideries remain popular attractions. "Farm stays," which offer overnight lodging on working farms that immerse visitors in rural life, are part of a growing trend and would be included in the updated Amendment.

HoCo By Design outlines several policy and Zoning regulation updates to expand agribusiness for local farmers. The Zoning Regulation Amendment (ZRA-217) reduces conflicts in current zoning, adds more precise definitions, and introduces new opportunities for agritourism. It will allow farms, particularly in the western part of the County, to expand beyond traditional uses and explore new ventures that keep them competitive. The updates will apply to several zoning districts (RC, RR, R-ED, R-20, R-12, R-SC, and R-VH), paving the way for fresh ideas and sustainable growth.

With these changes, the County is helping ensure that agriculture remains strong, adaptable, and central to our community, while giving residents and visitors more ways to enjoy and support local farms.

## The GIN



If you eavesdrop on DPZs Resource Conservation Division, you may be shocked to hear them mentioning GIN repeatedly. Don't be alarmed, they are merely discussing the Green Infrastructure Network—or "GIN" for short.

This is Howard County's natural support network made up of forests, streams, wetlands, parks, and other natural areas that all connect together. It provides animals and plants the space they need to move and to survive, helps to keep our ecosystems healthy, and makes the community better for all of us that call it home.

The network has two main parts:

- **Hubs:** large, integral natural areas like state and county parks that provide safe habitats and support for native plants and animals.
- **Corridors:** these are the "connecting paths" between hubs. Mostly made up of stream valleys or strips of forest that allow animals to move and migrate from one hub to another.

There are **48 Hubs** mapped in the GIN, including major County and State parks such as Patapsco Valley State Park, the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area, Patuxent River State Park and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) reservoirs along the Patuxent River.

An example of a local Corridor is the area along the Little Patuxent River in Ellicott City and Columbia, which provides a natural connection between Hubs such as the David Force Natural Resource Area, Centennial Park and Lake Kittamaqundi.

The network also includes interior forests (deeper parts of the forest, at least 300 feet from the edge), wetlands, floodplains, and special habitats for rare, threatened, or endangered species—as many as 105 right here in the county. Some of these areas are already protected as parks or as conservation land, but others are privately owned and undeveloped.

Want to learn more about the GIN? Next newsletter we will explore the General Plan for the GIN. In the meantime, feel free to dive into all things GIN on our [website](#).

## Awards & Recognition



Howard County won an unprecedented **83** National Association of Counties (NaCo) awards—over 60% of the total awards won by the state of Maryland. We are proud to announce that our incredible **DPZ team won 2 awards** this year!

Deputy Chief, Chad Edmondson, led a cross-department initiative along with Division of Inspections, Licenses and Permits and Office of Community Sustainability, to develop the Residential Electric Vehicle Charging process and [website](#).

While Peter Conrad, Retired Supervisor for Division of Public Service and Zoning, and Jeffrey DelMonico, Planning Specialist II, won for the [Historic Zoning Map](#) application.

Congratulations team - well done!

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## Celebrating Career Milestones

**Steve Rolls**, Planning Support Technician II for **Zoning & Public Service**, is celebrating **30 years of service** with Howard County! If you have ever visited our public service counter at the George Howard Building, you have likely met the legendary Steve.

Steve's vast institutional knowledge, along with his helpful and calm demeanor, enhances DPZ's customer service year-over-year.

Steve's excellence was recently noted county-wide with a nomination for **Employee of the Year!** We are thrilled to have him as part of the DPZ Team.

**Carrie Vogel** is celebrating **30 years** of service with Howard County! Her years of dedicated service with DPZ in the **Research Division** is most appreciated.

Carrie has been instrumental in DPZ's plans tracking process, APFO administration, GIS mapping analysis, and many other important research endeavors over the years.

Highly regarded by her DPZ colleagues, other county staff, and many Howard County constituents for her work products, helpful insights, attention to detail, and excellent customer service.

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## Employee Spotlight



## Q&A with Julia Sauer Division Chief, Public Service and Zoning

**Not many people outside the Department know that you have former and current family members that work here.** My mom and I worked in the Land Development Division together when I first started with the County. She's now retired, but my sister Laura (Boone) works in the Director's office of Planning & Zoning. She and I work in different areas, but we try to get together daily for lunch or a quick walk if the weather is nice.

**You have recently been promoted to Division Chief for Zoning and Public Service. What were you doing prior to that?** I've been with the Department since 2008. I started out as a Planning Support Tech II in Land Development. This was back before we adopted ProjectDox for electronic submissions and we were handling about 25 copies of all plans and distributing them to various agencies for review. It's much simpler now, but I certainly learned a lot. Recently, when the former Chief for Zoning and Public Service left earlier this year, I was asked to be the interim Chief, which I did while still continuing my work as a Planning Supervisor.

**What are you looking forward to doing in your role as, Chief of Zoning?** Building relationships, providing leadership, and promoting open communication are most important to me. I think the ultimate goal of public

service and Zoning administration is public service. So, working with staff to provide the best possible customer service we can provide.

Zoning is a unique division in that it really has 3 distinct areas: public service (answering questions from the public); zoning administration (which is regulation amendments, map Amendments, conditional uses, and petition review); and finally zoning code enforcement. Each of these areas has their own professionals and it's a diverse crew of experience from 2 to 30 years that make up the division. Collaboration will be an important component for us moving forward as we share that knowledge. We're going to continue to get better from here.

**You have a reputation for a high level of productivity and efficiency.**

**What's your secret?** It probably has something to do with all of the folders I have in Outlook! Since taking over as Chief my email has quadrupled. As much as I would love to get back to every single one, it's important for me to delegate. Learning what I can forward to my team to handle is ongoing, it's just going to come with time. I'm fortunate that we have a very strong team in our division and that will certainly reduce the learning curve on my end.

**So what's your typical approach to problem solving?** I try to simplify it. It's really getting to the meaning of it: What's the real problem? What is the goal of the request? Whether it's a procedural question or interpretation question, someone is seeking a resolution. How do we get there? So, trying to take a very basic approach to it. Part of it is collaborating. Talking with my team to learn if anyone has experience with this particular issue and can take the lead. Leaning on that institutional knowledge and using it to inform and educate all of us.

**Is there anything that people don't understand about your job that you wish that they did?** I think one of the main things is that we don't make the laws. We are tasked with interpreting them and implementing them as adopted by policymakers. Making interpretations of the regulations and following the process as it's written in the code. It can be challenging because sometimes these laws are antiquated, sometimes the processes are cumbersome. There can be a lot of gray area, especially in zoning law. The staff puts a lot of time and effort into determining the best way to satisfy the customer's need, while staying within the intent of the law. We are not here to stop someone from doing something or make it difficult for a customer. We are trying to implement the regulations while trying to get to the end goal. We are not rubber-stamping things for approval. There is a lot of thought that goes into some of these decisions and a lot of staff time. And that's what people don't see on the back end. We recognize that people want an immediate response to their question, but sometimes it's not that simple. We need to ensure that we are implementing the laws to the best of our ability. While we are not making the laws, we are doing the best we can with the resources that we have.

**What keeps you motivated?** I want to be looked at as someone who is a reliable source. I take pride in my job. I want to do it with integrity. I think what has made me successful is the people that I've worked with over the years. The supervisors that I've had from 17 years ago when I first started here and the people that took the time to help train me and mentor me.

**What do you do to relieve stress, to have fun?** Sports. I play volleyball and softball weekly, golf when the weather is good, and I typically shoot pool when the weather doesn't cooperate.

**And just for fun, what's something that you love? Olive, my Boxer.**

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