Howard County
Department of Planning & Zoning

DPZ Digest

Message from Director Lynda Eisenberg

November 2026



Dear Community Member,

Fall is in the air, and before we know it, we'll be welcoming a new Administration, a new Council, and a new year! While the seasons may be changing, our work at the Department of Planning and Zoning is moving full steam ahead. From advancing key projects to laying the groundwork for new initiatives, our team has a lot of work in progress, and we are excited to share what's happening with you.

We are continuing to work with our consultant team on updates to the Design Manuals for both Route 1 and Route 40. You'll find updates on both efforts in this newsletter, along with an upcoming opportunity for the community to weigh in on the Route 1 work.

We are also making progress on the County's first Cottage Cluster plan. As a new housing opportunity for the County, this initiative will bring architects and developers together to explore fresh concepts and creative solutions.

In addition, our partners at the Department of Public Works (DPW) recently hosted an information session on FEMA's new flood maps, and we are sharing that information here to help keep you informed.

Finally, we have a couple of staff updates to share including a fond farewell to Ken Short, our longtime architectural historian, as he retires. His knowledge and contributions will be greatly missed, but we are happy to see him and his family embark on a new chapter filled with travel and adventure.

Thank you for your continued interest, engagement, and support! Have a safe, and happy fall.

Lynda Eisenberg

ROUTE 1 & ROUTE 40 DESIGN MANUAL UPDATES





Here's What's Next for the Route 1 and Route 40 Design Manual updates!

What will the future of our County's corridors look and feel like in the years to come? The planning is moving forward, and community input has helped shape the direction.

The Department of Planning and Zoning, working alongside our consultant team, has reviewed feedback from community surveys and six focus groups with internal and external stakeholders. These conversations have helped inform updates to the design manuals for Route1 and Route 40, with an emphasis on complete streets, better connectivity, and creating a sense a place and character unique to each area.

So what's on the horizon?

Route 1: Draft anticipated fall/winter 2026
The updated Route 1 Design Manual is taking shape! A draft is expected in fall/winter 2026, followed by a public open house where the community can learn about the proposed updates. Additional opportunities for public feedback will also be available. Stay tuned for details!

Route 40: Work begins in early 2027
The Route 40 Design Manual update is expected to kick off in early 2027. Sign up for the project list to follow along as this next phase gets underway.

COTTAGE CLUSTER CORNER



What does it take to turn a new housing idea into a community that works? Howard County's first Cottage Cluster proposal for Age Restricted Adult Housing Cottage Clusters, (Council Bill (CB) 25-2026 – Zoning Regulation Amendment (ZRA) 224), is giving residents an opportunity to find out.

Unanimously approved by the County Council in June, Cottage Clusters introduce a new housing concept to Howard County, with the goal of helping address the state's housing shortage while offering seniors another way to remain in the community as their needs change. It's an opportunity to explore what housing can look like when homes are designed around a different set of needs, priorities, and possibilities.

Howard County's first proposal, The Cottages at Patuxent Branch, presented by Waverly Real Estate Group, is now moving through the early review process. The initial design was reviewed by the Design Advisory Panel August 12th, when the committee recommended that the plans be substantially reworked. When a revised proposal returned on October 14th, it reflected significant improvements. The design is not yet complete, but the progress illustrates an important part of the process: **new ideas take shape through feedback, thoughtful reconsideration, and a willingness to improve.**

For residents following along, there is something valuable happening beyond the review of a single development. We are seeing the planning process in action: how an idea is tested against real-world constraints, how design decisions are reconsidered, and how architects work to balance the needs of future residents with available space, local regulations, and project budgets. Cottage Clusters may be a new concept for Howard County, but the idea of grouping smaller homes around shared spaces has a long history. Over the past century, housing construction in the United States has largely favored other types of development, leaving fewer contemporary examples for communities and designers to draw from. Exploring this approach locally means asking questions, learning as we go, and determining what makes sense for our community.

Why does it matter? Because our community's housing needs are not one-size-fits-all. Some residents are looking for a home that better fits their needs as they grow older. Others may find that traditional single-family homes or larger

apartment buildings do not offer the right combination of space, independence, and affordability. These gaps are often described as "missing middle housing", housing options that serve people whose needs fall **between** the choices most commonly available.

Age-restricted Cottage Clusters are just on example of an alternative option, and Howard County is still in the early stages of exploring their potential. This first proposal will not answer every question, nor is every new concept guaranteed to be the right fit. But examining new possibilities gives the community a chance to understand the options, consider the trade-offs, and learn what it takes to create housing that responds to changing needs.

One of the keys to making any new option successful is feedback and there are numerous ways that the planning process provides space for community input.

To better understand the Cottage Cluster process, our Major Subdivision Flowchart provides a hierarchy for the various steps that may take place and highlights the opportunities for public input. View the Major Subdivision Flowchart on the County's website.

HATS OFF TO THE GRADUATES



On Tuesday, October 20th, the Department of Planning and Zoning's (DPZ) award-winning planning course, **PlanHoward Academy** celebrated the 12th graduating class since its inception in 2017. Over five weeks, more than 30 students participated in hands-on learning exercises and classroom instruction exploring the fundamentals of land development and zoning in Howard County.

Led by professional planners and attorneys, the free course gives participants an inside look at how planning, zoning, and land development work, and how the plans, policies, and procedures guiding these processes help shape our County's future.

Howard County Executive, Dr. Calvin Ball joined the celebration to present official certificates to the graduates, recognizing a new group of informed and civically engaged community members. With a deeper understanding of the planning process, graduates are better equipped to participate in conversations about Howard County's future and help their neighbors understand the decisions that shape their community.

With this latest graduating class, PlanHoward Academy has engaged 336 residents, including five elected officials, more than 150 Homeowners Association members, and more than 30 board or commission members, including three Planning Board members. This growing network of informed citizens reflects the course's lasting impact and its role in building a stronger, more connected community.

As PlanHoward Academy concludes another successful session, DPZs goal extends beyond graduation: to foster informed community dialogue and empower residents to play an active role in shaping the future of Howard County.

For more information, or to join our interest list, visit the PlanHoward Academy website https://www.howardcountymd.gov/planning-zoning/planhoward-academy

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ALUMNI EDITION



The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) brought the **PlanHoward Academy** community back together for its first ever Alumni Night on Tuesday, October 27th! More than 25 graduates participated in an evening designed to build on the success of the award-winning planning course by creating opportunities for continued learning, connection, and civic engagement.

Several DPZ partner agencies including the Office of Transportation, Department of Housing and Community Development, and Department of General Services led presentations highlighting how their work informs the planning process.

This first-ever Alumni Night provided graduates an opportunity to reconnect with former classmates, meet fellow residents, exchange ideas, and expand their community networks. By bringing alumni together beyond the five-week course, DPZ hopes to expand graduates' knowledge and encourage continued involvement in the planning process.

PlanHoward Academy may conclude at graduation, but the learning (and the connections that strengthen our community) continue long after.

For more information, or to join our interest list, visit the PlanHoward Academy website https://www.howardcountymd.gov/planning-zoning/planhoward-academy

Elkridge's Path to Becoming a Maryland Sustainable Community



In August, DPZ applied to the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development seeking Elkridge's designation as a Sustainable Community.

If approved, Elkridge will become Howard County's fourth state-designated Sustainable Community. This recognition is a threshold for various state funding programs that support revitalization, like the Community Legacy and Marland Façade Improvement Programs.

An interagency panel, led by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, will review Elkridge's application. From there, the Governor's Smart Growth Subcabinet will review for final approval.

Updates regarding the status of Elkridge's application will be included in a future issue of the Ball Bulletin as well as this quarterly newsletter.

GATEWAY UPDATE

DPZ continues working with our consultant team, WGI, Inc., on our study of zoning approaches, redevelopment feasibility, and public infrastructure and amenities.

Since launching the approximately six-month study in July, the team has toured the Gateway area, presented to the Columbia Gateway Association, and undertaken a series of stakeholder interviews to better understand current conditions and trends. This information will inform the consultant's work on a financial feasibility model, incentive evaluation, zoning framework, and best practices assessment – all of which is meant to pick up where the Gateway Master Plan left off and set the stage for future zoning decisions. The next major step toward realizing the long-term vision for the Gateway Innovation District is now underway.

NEW FLOOD MAPS

Howard County's Department of Public Works held a public information session on Wednesday, October 7th to share updates on recent Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and County floodplain maps. Here's what residents need to know about flood risks, insurance, and how to determine whether their property is affected.

What are Flood Maps?
Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), developed by FEMA, identify areas at risk of flooding. These maps help communities plan development, improve infrastructure, and reduce flood risks.

Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs), often called "100-year floodplains" have a **1% chance of flooding in any given year.**

Is Your Property Affected?
Letters were mailed to property owners whose land falls partly or entirely within the updated 100-year floodplain. Please note that receipt of the letter does not mean that the property owner must purchase flood insurance. The purpose of the letter was to help property owners understand their potential flood risk so they can make an informed decision about flood insurance and property protection.

Residents can use the County's Digital Flood Insurance Rate Map to view floodplain boundaries near their property.

What is the National Flood Insurance Program?
Managed by FEMA, the NFIP makes federally backed flood insurance available to property owners in participating communities through participating insurance providers.

Most standard homeowners insurance policies **do not** cover flood damage. Knowing your property's flood risk can help you determine whether additional protection is needed. Flood insurance is generally required for homes in FEMA-designated high-risk areas when purchased with a federally backed mortgage.

Why Does County Participation Matter?
Howard County's participation in the NFIP helps make flood insurance available to residents and supports eligibility for certain federal disaster assistance programs.

In September 2026, County Administration pre-filed CB61-2026 with County Council to update code provisions for alignment with NFIP requirements. Council approval is expected by early November 2026.

In addition, the County's Class 5 Rating in FEMA's Community Rating System (CRS) provides eligible residents and property owners with a 25% discount on flood insurance premiums.

Flood insurance is available through participating insurance providers Contact your insurance agent to discuss coverage. New policies generally have a 30-day waiting period, so plan ahead.

Can I Appeal my Floodplain Designation?
Yes. Property owners who wish to appeal their floodplain designation can email: stormwater@HowardCountymd.gov. Please not that an appeal must be based on the submittal of technical or scientific data that shows why the currently proposed floodplain modeling and/or mapping is incorrect.

Where Can I Learn More?

- Floodplain information can be found on the County's "Flood Protection" website.
- Questions? Email DoIFlood@HowardCountyMD.gov.

DPZ STAFF UPDATES



HAPPY RETIREMENT KEN!

After more than 20 years of dedicated service to Howard County's Department of Planning & Zoning Resource Conservation Division, Ken Short retired at the end of July. Ken leaves behind a remarkable legacy of preserving and documenting our County's architectural heritage.

As Howard County's only architectural historian, Ken brought a depth of knowledge, skill, and experience that made him an invaluable resource to DPZ, other County agencies including Recreation and Parks, Public Works, and General Services, as well as the Maryland Historical Trust. His expertise in local history, architecture, and historic building construction helped ensure that the stories behind our historic places were understood, documented, and preserved for future generations.

Throughout his career, Ken prepared nominations for historic properties to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places and completed hundreds of historic resource inventories for the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties. He also played an important role in the county-wide effort to document historic buildings before demolition, ensuring that their architectural and historical significance was recorded. His close working relationship with the Maryland Historical Trust reflected a shared commitment to historic preservation, with Ken both collaborating on documentation efforts and assisting with fieldwork.

Ken had a particular gift for reading buildings, recognizing changes made over time, identifying architectural details, and understanding the influences that shaped local structures. Through careful fieldwork, he measured buildings, created detailed floor plans, and documented architectural features with a level of skill and attention that few possess.

Ken's contributions have left a lasting mark on the County's historic preservation efforts. His knowledge, dedication, and willingness to share his expertise will be greatly missed by his colleagues and the many people and agencies who benefitted from his work.

Thank you, Ken, for more than two decades of service and the care you brought to preserving our shared history. We wish you all the best in your retirement and in the next chapter ahead.

Safe travels!

NEW STAFF



WELCOME TIM BARROWS

DPZ's Division of Land Development is thrilled to welcome **Tim Barrows** on board as its newest **Planning Specialist I**.

A recent graduate of the University of Maryland, College Park's Master of Community Planning Program, Tim managed to pack a lot of experience into his time at UMCP. As a research assistant for UMD's Water Emergency Team (a community-driven initiative) he helped expand partnerships and collected field data; enjoyed a role as a Planning Intern for the Parking Authority of Baltimore City; and was a graduate assistant for Prince George's County's Planning Department.

An avid learner, Tim has eagerly embraced the opportunity to master the ins and outs of land development project review since joining DPZ in August. When he isn't diving into plans, he is likely sharpening his skills in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, exploring his creative side through amateur film photography, or finding a little peace among the plants he loves to nurture.

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