



# New Town Recommendations Report

June 15, 2026

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Task Force gratefully acknowledges the support and guidance provided by **Howard County Government**, including staff from the **Department of Planning and Zoning, Department of Housing and Community Development, and consultants from Johnson, Mirmiran, and Thompson (JMT)**, and all other County agencies who offered technical expertise, historical context, and administrative support throughout the process. Their assistance was instrumental in facilitating meetings, preparing background materials, and ensuring that the Task Force's work was informed, transparent, and responsive to County objectives.

Special thanks are extended to the **Task Force members**, whose diverse professional backgrounds, lived experiences, and thoughtful deliberations shaped the analysis and recommendations contained in this report. Their willingness to engage in constructive dialogue, evaluate complex issues, and seek balanced solutions made this work possible.

The Task Force also acknowledges the **residents, community organizations, stakeholders, and members of the public** who provided input through meetings, comments, and ongoing engagement. Their insights helped ground the Task Force's discussions in lived experience and reinforced the importance of preserving Columbia's character while planning for its future.

Finally, the Task Force recognizes the vision of Columbia's founders and planners, whose original principles continue to inform and inspire this work. This report seeks to honor that legacy while offering clear, principled recommendations to ensure the New Town zoning framework remains effective, relevant, and resilient for generations to come. The members of the New Town Task Force, Howard County Government staff, and staff from JMT, the consultant firm, are listed below.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*HoCo By Design*, Howard County's 20-year General Plan adopted in 2023, establishes a framework for growth that is "equitable, predictable, sustainable, and achievable while preserving the County's distinctive character". *HoCo by Design* describes Columbia, with over 14,000 acres and 28,000 parcels—as having a unique sense of place that its residents want to preserve, enhance, and strengthen. — The Plan recommends a focused evaluation of the New Town (NT) zoning district, the zoning district that defines most of Columbia, to ensure its legacy planning model continues to support contemporary needs. To fulfill this directive, the County Executive established the New Town Task Force in May 2025 to evaluate Section 125 of the zoning code and determine whether the existing regulatory structure effectively carries forward Columbia's planned community framework while supporting the General Plan's long-range goals.

The Executive Order (2025-09) defined the Task Force's scope, directing it to assess the NT zoning district, identify challenges and opportunities, and recommend updates that "modernize the zoning district, enhance its flexibility, and better align it with the objectives of *HoCo By Design*". Private covenants were excluded from review because they are "not administered, enforced, or amendable by Howard County."

Over fourteen months, the New Town Task Force members, appointed by County Council and the County Executive, conducted a comprehensive review of the NT zoning district and its character-defining elements to determine whether the existing structure could move Columbia forward "in a clear, consistent manner that reflects the original vision of the planned community" while supporting long-range goals. This work included evaluating Section 125, development processes, and planning frameworks; reviewing public input; and analyzing detailed comparisons with peer planned communities—Greenbelt, Maryland; Reston, Virginia; and Montgomery Village, Maryland—each offering insight into how New Towns evolve over time.

Stakeholder interviews provided additional grounding. Participants widely affirmed Columbia's strengths—diversity, open space, access to amenities—while noting that legacy policies should be reexamined "to determine their continued relevance and applicability to future conditions and community needs."

The Task Force organized its evaluation using the Preserve, Strengthen, Enhance, Transform (PSET) framework, which offered a consistent method for determining the appropriate level of regulatory change. This approach helped distinguish what should remain unchanged, what requires clarification or improvement, and what may need more significant transformation.

Through this structured process, the New Town Task Force identified 28 initial recommendations, several of which were later divided into multiple parts, resulting in 32 recommendations for final consideration. After additional discussion and review of the Technical Survey results, the **Task Force voted to advance 27 recommendations** to the County for further research and evaluation. As the report concludes, these recommendations "reflect a thoughtful and pragmatic approach to carry New Town Columbia into the future" and fulfill the objectives of the Executive Orders.

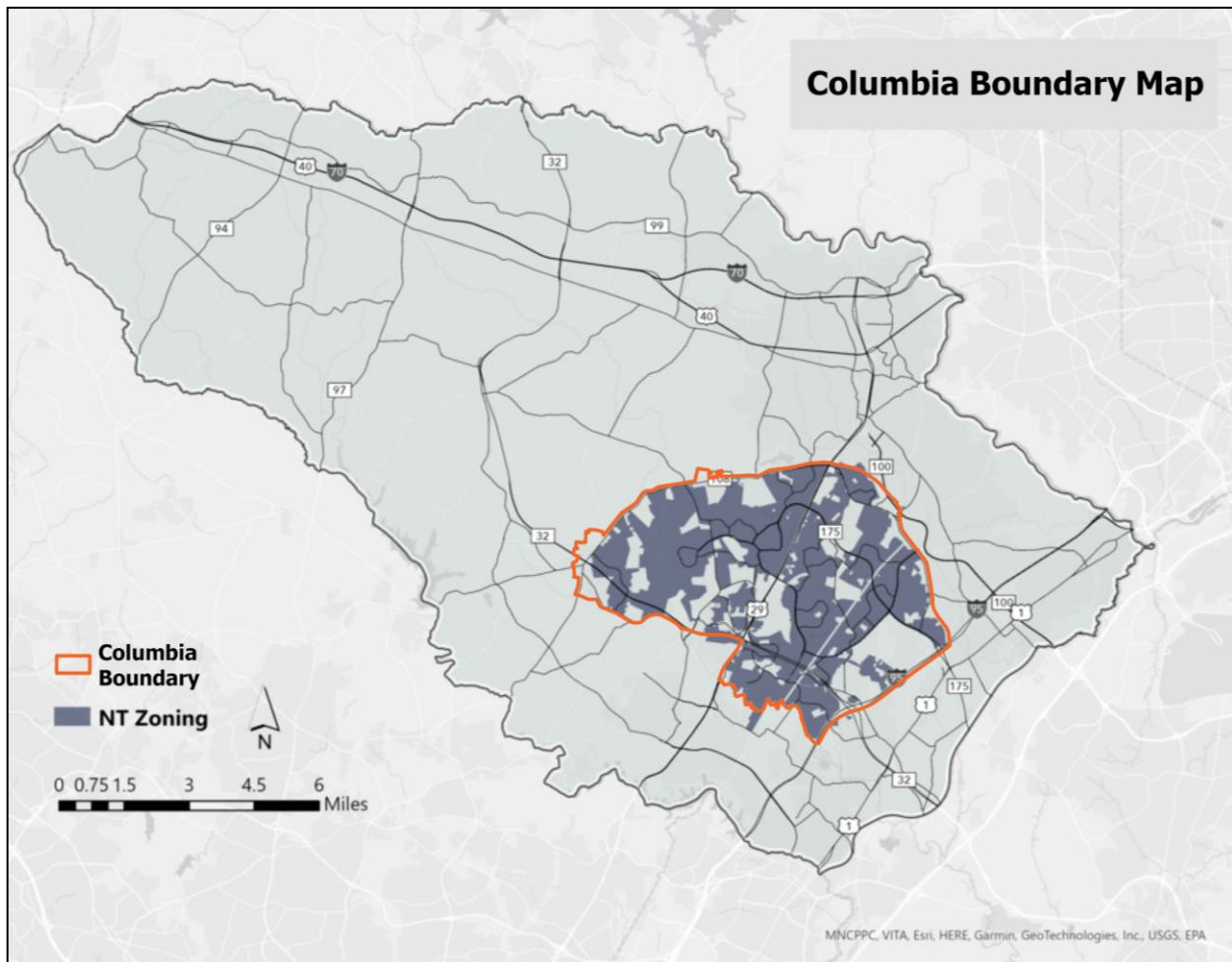
The full report documents the Task Force's process, research foundation, and final recommendations, providing a clear path for modernizing Columbia's NT zoning framework while preserving the foundational principles that have defined its success. Incorporating the work of the New Town Task Force and this Recommendations Report into changes to the NT Zoning code will require formal action by the Howard County Council.

# INTRODUCTION

Columbia was a carefully “planned community” over 60 years ago and is frequently cited as one of the best places to live in the country. Columbia is the County’s only New Town district (NT), which was adopted in 1965 and is comprised of over 14,000 acres and 28,000 parcels. Founded by James Rouse as a private New Town, with construction beginning in 1966, Columbia remains an unincorporated, master-planned community encompassing approximately 14,000 acres in Howard County, Maryland. Conceived during a period of significant post-war suburban expansion, Columbia was designed to address the social, environmental, and economic limitations of conventional suburban development. Figure 2 below shows Columbia’s location in the county.



*Figure 1: People Tree Sculpture, Columbia, MD*



*Figure 2: Columbia Boundary Map*

The Garden City movement was an early 20th-century urban planning approach that aimed to create self-contained communities combining the benefits of city life with access to green space, surrounded by a permanent rural belt. Inspired by the Garden City movement, James

Rouse described Columbia as a “Garden for the Growing of People,” emphasizing both physical design and social development. The community was organized into a hierarchy that grouped three or four neighborhoods at a time into villages, each anchored by a village center containing retail, educational, civic, religious, and recreational uses. These nine villages were in turn organized around a centrally located Town Center (itself a village), envisioned as Columbia’s commercial and employment core.

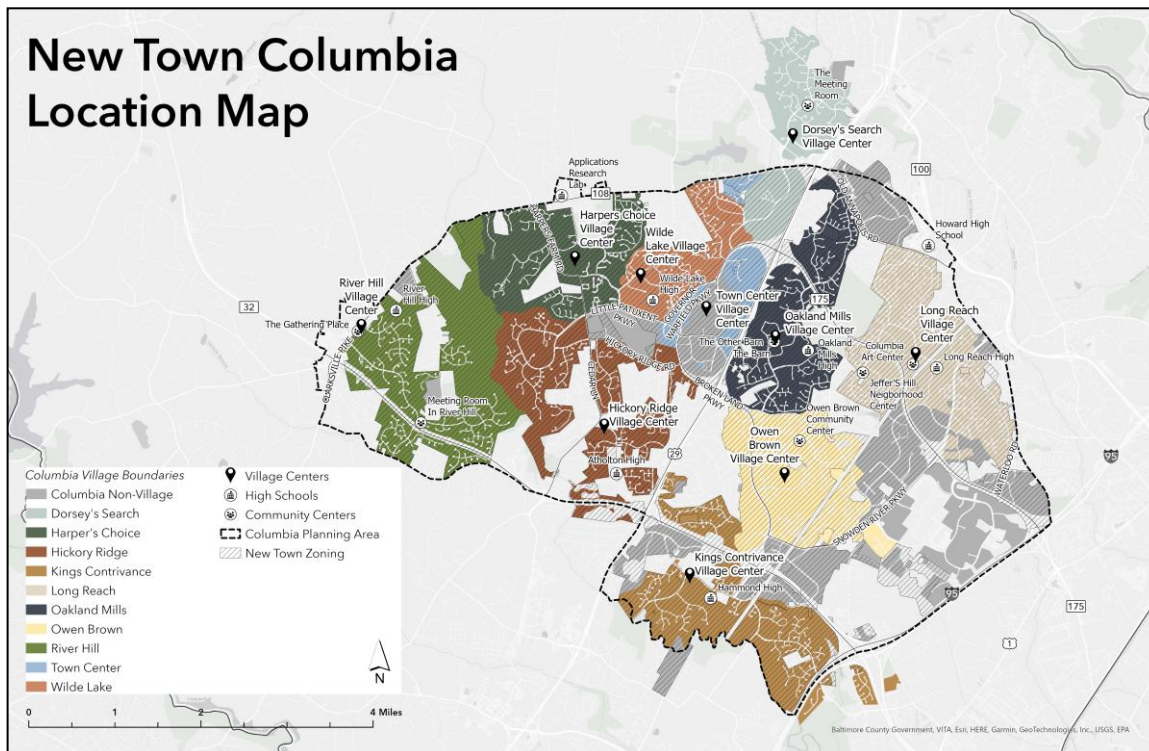


Figure 3: New Town Columbia Location Map illustrating individual Villages

## Why a Renewed Look at New Town Columbia

NT zoning regulations were adopted in 1965 and remained relatively unchanged until 2009 and 2010 when changes were made to address village center redevelopment and Downtown revitalization. The NT Zoning District uses a layered, plan-driven regulatory structure that guides development through a sequence of approvals; beginning with the Preliminary Development Plan and followed by more detailed plans that regulate land uses, densities, transportation networks, and open space. This framework was designed to support Columbia’s master-planned vision by allowing flexibility while still ensuring coordinated growth. A task force review of these character-defining elements would provide an opportunity to ensure that the regulatory structure is calibrated to successfully carry forward New Town zoning.

Additionally, *HoCo By Design*, Howard County’s 20-year General Plan, was adopted in October 2023 as a forward-thinking growth and conservation plan. The Plan responds to evolving economic conditions, demographic trends, environmental considerations, and social

priorities, and articulates a comprehensive framework for land use, mobility, housing, environmental protection, public facilities, and economic development. The central objective of *HoCo By Design* is to guide future growth in a manner that is equitable, predictable, sustainable, and achievable while preserving the County’s distinctive character.

*HoCo By Design* called for prioritizing character and design in future development while recognizing that Howard County has unique areas. New Town Columbia is one of those unique areas which residents want to preserve, enhance, and strengthen.

The first General Plan policy within the Quality by Design (QBD) chapter called for the County to “Create a task force that is appointed by County Council and the County Executive to evaluate and make recommendations on how to carry forward New Town’s planned community framework” (QBD-1.4). The intent of evaluating the legacy regulatory framework of New Town was to ensure it remains aligned with contemporary planning objectives and community values; meaning current expectations for walkability, sustainability, housing diversity, equitable access to amenities, environmental stewardship, and high-quality urban design that reflect how residents live and work today. The establishment of the New Town Task Force achieves this directive, serving as a mechanism to review the NT zoning district and its character-defining elements and assess whether the existing zoning structure continues to effectively support the General Plan’s long-range goals.

In May 2025, the Howard County Executive established the New Town Task Force to undertake a structured review of the New Town Zoning District (Section 125 of the Howard County Zoning Regulations), a foundational regulatory framework governing much of the development within Columbia.

The selected individuals, appointed by Council members and the County Executive, evaluated and made recommendations on the following:

1. how to carry forward New Town’s planned community framework and
2. modifications to zoning regulations and development process.

***“The New Town Task Force is a vital component to ensuring the Columbia of tomorrow is informed by a community-first approach.”***

***Source: County Executive Dr. Calvin Ball***

Through a defined process of study, discussion, and stakeholder input, the 22-member Task Force was charged with evaluating the effectiveness of the existing zoning model and identifying potential opportunities for modernization in a written report. This report documents

the Task Force's process, including its guiding assumptions, analytical approach, and deliberations, and provides a foundation for subsequent policy recommendations.

## New Town Executive Orders

The New Town Task Force was formally established by Executive Order of the Howard County Executive in May 2025 and subsequently refined through two amended Executive Orders with one issued in June 2025 and the other in May 2026. Collectively, these Executive Orders (2025-09, 2025-10, and 2026-06) defined the composition, scope, and responsibilities of the Task Force. The Task Force was constituted as a multi-disciplinary body, composed of community representatives, development and design professionals, and individuals with planning and policy expertise, to ensure a comprehensive and balanced review process. Copies of the Executive Orders are in Appendix A.

Pursuant to the Executive Orders, the Task Force was charged with the following:

*evaluating Section 125 of the Howard County Zoning Code, the New Town Zoning District originally adopted in 1965, by examining its defining features, regulatory structure, and ongoing effectiveness. The Task Force was directed to identify challenges, opportunities, and areas for improvement, and to develop recommendations intended to modernize the zoning district, enhance its flexibility, and better align it with the objectives of HoCo By Design and the long-term interests of the Columbia community.*

### ***Scope Limitation: Private Covenants***

Private covenants—including homeowners' association declarations, architectural guidelines, and deed restrictions—are contractual instruments between private parties and are not administered, enforced, or amendable by Howard County if the County is not a party to these agreements.

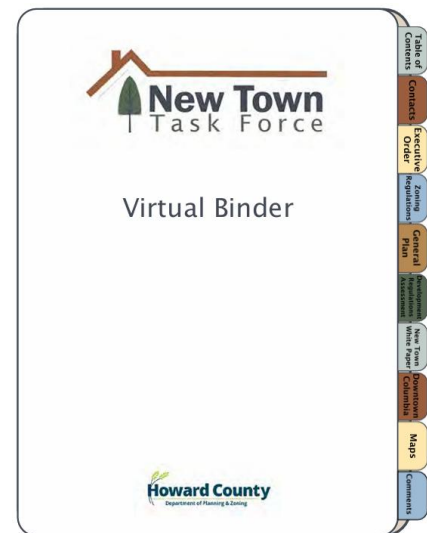
Accordingly, the New Town Task Force did not consider or include discussion of private covenants in its deliberations or recommendations. This exclusion ensures that all Task Force recommendations are within County jurisdiction and capable of implementation through County action.

# RESEARCH

To support the New Town Task Force’s evaluation of Columbia’s New Town framework, a focused research effort was completed that included comparative case studies and a review of relevant plans and reference materials, all of which were compiled and provided to Task Force members through virtual binders. The virtual binder was updated regularly as comments were received and made available to the public on the Task Force’s website. A link to the Virtual Binder is located in Appendix B and additional information regarding its contents is below in this section.

As part of this effort, three additional New Town-style communities were examined alongside Columbia, each originally developed around a distinct vision and planning purpose. While these communities differ in form and context, all were founded on the principle of creating a well-integrated, fully functioning “planned” community that combines housing, services, employment, public space, and amenities. These communities were also similar to Columbia in both their development objectives and the scale of their planned communities.

Peer communities reviewed include Reston, Virginia, which pairs suburban neighborhoods with a vibrant mixed-use town center; Greenbelt, Maryland, a historic planned community emphasizing public space and civic identity; and Montgomery Village, Maryland, a diverse community characterized by varied housing options and active neighborhood life. Over time, the core goals of these planned communities have largely been realized. However, they have also evolved within changing demographic, economic, technological, and policy contexts. Advances in planning practices, shifts in lifestyle preferences, and broader modernization trends have influenced how these communities’ function today, resulting in places that remain highly desirable, distinctive, and adaptable. Columbia, Maryland is nationally recognized for its integrated approach to land use, amenities, and community design within a suburban setting.



*Figure 4: Cover of the Virtual Binder provided to all New Town Task Force members and linked on the project website for public access*

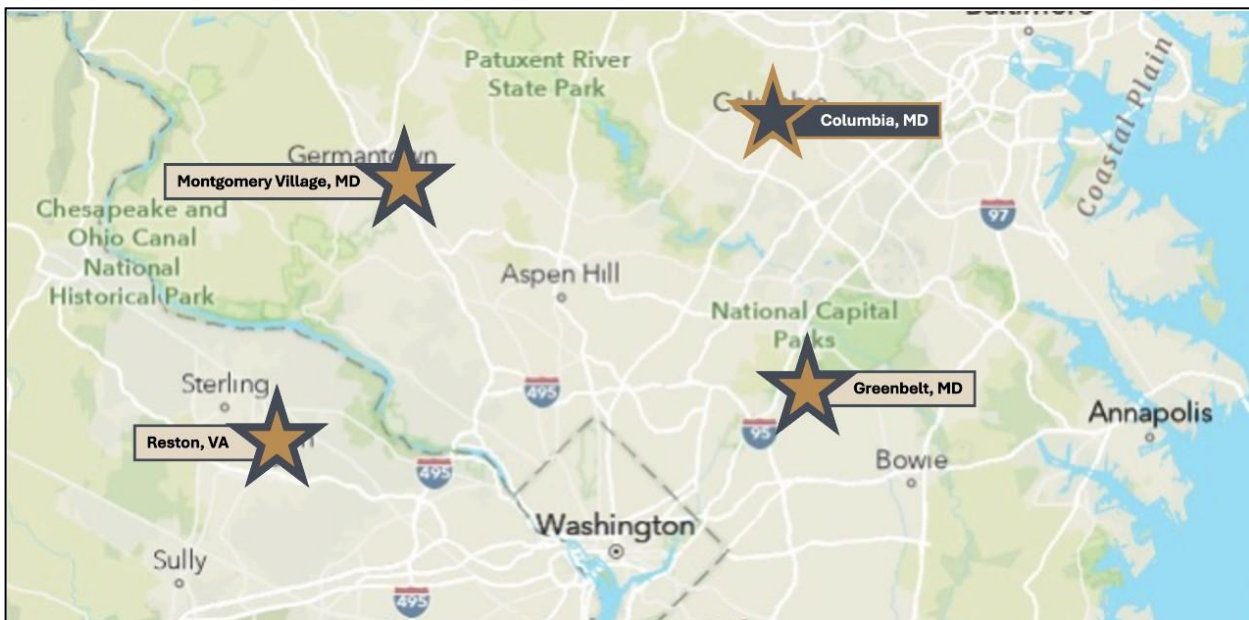


Figure 5: Map of Columbia, MD and the Peer Communities of Greenbelt, MD; Reston, VA; and Montgomery Village, MD

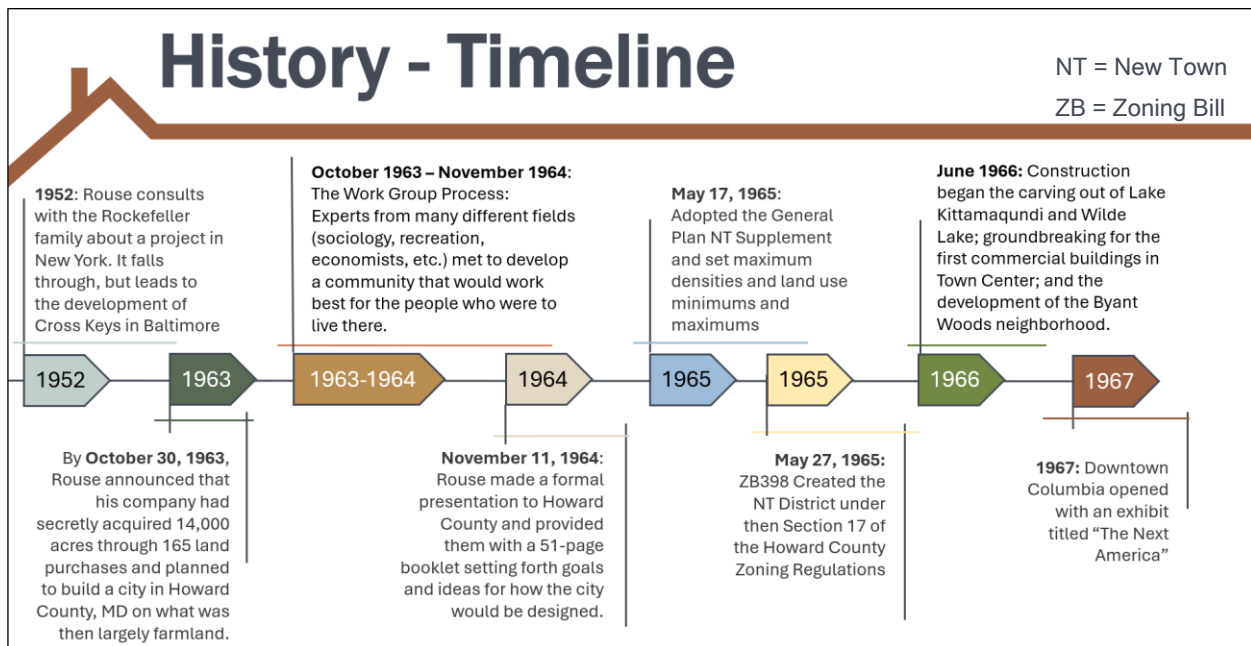
A detailed comparison of Columbia and these peer communities—drawing from zoning frameworks, planning objectives, governance structures, and community outcomes—is presented in the following narrative and summary tables. This research provided a shared factual foundation for Task Force discussions and informed the development of recommendations.

## Columbia, Maryland

### *Background & History of New Town Columbia*

Developer James Rouse articulated four explicit goals by which the success of Columbia could be evaluated over time:

- To build a complete city.
- To respect the land.
- To provide for the growth of people; and
- To make a profit.



*Figure 6: Timeline History of the Development of New Town Columbia*

These goals established a framework that balanced economic viability with environmental stewardship and social well-being. Columbia's enduring identity as a nationally recognized planned community reflects the longevity of these founding principles, even as the community has evolved in response to changing demographics, market conditions, and policy priorities.

Columbia's adaptation has been characterized by incremental evolution within a strong original framework. While the village structure, open space system, and emphasis on mixed uses remain defining features, Columbia has adjusted to shifts in demographics, housing demand, and regional growth pressures. Over time, increased emphasis has been placed on reinvesting in aging commercial areas, modernizing residential development patterns, and accommodating a greater mix of uses—particularly within and around the Town Center after the adoption of the 2010 Downtown Columbia Plan.

Columbia Town Center, initially envisioned as a suburban commercial core, has evolved into a more urban, mixed-use environment with taller buildings, expanded employment uses, and enhanced public spaces. At the same time, preservation of open space, pathways, and village identity has remained a consistent priority. Columbia's unincorporated status and reliance on zoning, covenants, and quasi-public institutions have required ongoing coordination among County government, private entities, and community organizations to manage change while honoring the original principles of Columbia.

The Original Petitioner, James Rouse's Howard Research and Development Corporation (HRD), initially operated as the petitioner under the New Town zoning framework and managed development in Columbia for over fifty years. In 2004, HRD became a subsidiary of General Growth Properties (GGP) following GGP's acquisition of the Rouse Company and its

development arm. Later, as part of GGP's 2009 Chapter 11 reorganization, HRD's parent company was spun off into The Howard Hughes Corporation in November 2010, ultimately evolving into today's Howard Hughes Holdings.

## Case Studies

### *New Towns in Maryland and Virginia - Comparative Case Studies*

To inform the New Town Task Force's evaluation of Columbia's planning and zoning framework, three New Town-style communities in Maryland and Virginia were examined alongside Columbia. Each represents a distinct approach to master-planned community development, shaped by its historical context, founding vision, and governance structure. Together, these case studies provide longitudinal insight into how New Town principles have been implemented, adapted, and sustained over time.

New Town planning principles emphasize the creation of self-contained, comprehensively planned communities designed to balance residential, commercial, employment, and recreational uses. These principles promote walkability, equitable access to amenities, integration of open space, a mix of housing types and price points, and the clustering of activity centers to reduce auto dependence. They also prioritize long-term governance structures capable of adapting to changing community needs. Together, these elements support the development of places that function as complete communities rather than conventional subdivisions or single-use districts.

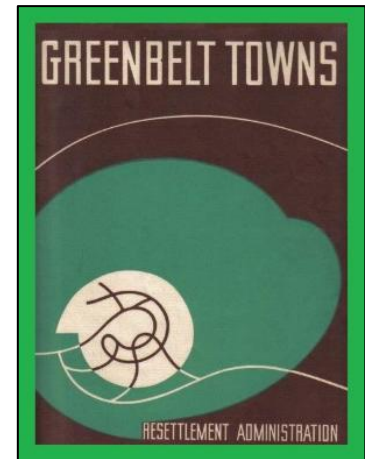
Throughout the Task Force's deliberations, the selected case studies served as a recurring reference point to inform discussion and evaluate how comparable communities have addressed key planning and regulatory elements. The Task Force used these examples to test assumptions, explore alternative approaches, and identify practical strategies relevant to Columbia's New Town context. Detailed descriptions, comparative analyses, and supporting materials for each case study are documented in the Task Force meeting materials, which are provided in Appendix C.

#### *Greenbelt, Maryland*

Greenbelt, Maryland was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Resettlement Administration as part of the federal "Greenbelt Towns" program and began construction in 1935 on approximately 4,000 acres in Prince George's County. Greenbelt was one of three such towns developed nationwide at that time, alongside Greenhills near Cincinnati, Ohio, and Greendale near Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The Greenbelt towns were created to address multiple federal objectives during the Great Depression, including providing work relief for the unemployed, delivering affordable housing for low-income workers, and serving as experimental models for future town planning in the United States. Greenbelt's planned design emphasized superblocks, interconnected pedestrian pathways, shared open spaces, and a strong civic core.

In 1952, the federal government sold Greenbelt to a resident formed cooperative, now known as Greenbelt Homes, Inc. Today, the cooperative owns and manages approximately 1,600 housing units, along with common areas and surrounding woodlands. This governance structure has played a significant role in preserving Greenbelt's historic character, emphasizing collective stewardship and long-term affordability.



*Figure 7: Greenbelt Towns Movement under the "Resettlement Administration"*

Greenbelt's adaptation has been shaped primarily by its historic significance and cooperative ownership model. Following its transfer from federal ownership to a resident-controlled cooperative in the early 1950s, the pace and nature of change became more controlled and preservation-oriented. Rather than large-scale redevelopment, Greenbelt has focused on maintaining affordability, rehabilitating existing housing stock, and preserving its distinctive physical layout and open space system.

Later phases of development outside the original historic core introduced more conventional suburban forms, reflecting broader regional growth patterns. However, the original Greenbelt community has remained relatively stable, with adaptation occurring through reinvestment, modernization of infrastructure, and incremental updates to meet contemporary living standards while safeguarding historic and social values.

### *Reston, Virginia*

Founded by Robert E. Simon as a private New Town, with construction commencing in 1964, Reston is a planned community of approximately 7,000 acres located in western Fairfax County, Virginia, within the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region.

Simon’s vision for Reston was formally articulated in the community’s 1962 Master Plan, which placed a strong emphasis on walkability, access to amenities, and the integration of residential and employment uses. Reston was designed to enable residents to live, work, and recreate within the same community, reducing dependence on long-distance commuting. Notably, Reston was also conceived as an inclusive community open to people of all ages, incomes, races, and ethnicities, making it the first intentionally integrated community in Virginia.

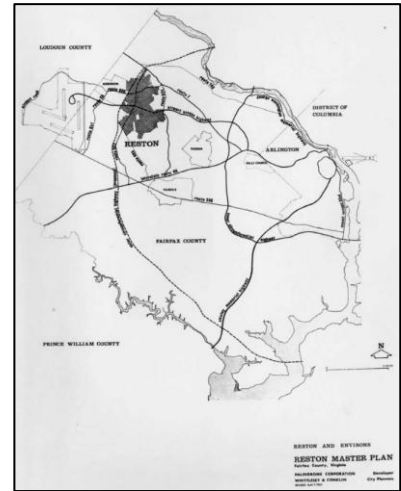
This vision was captured succinctly in the community’s enduring motto: *“Live, Work, Play.”* To guide implementation and measure success, Simon established seven core goals:

1. Variety of housing to accommodate different income levels and household types.
2. Beauty, expressed through architectural quality and integration with natural landscapes.
3. Recreation, including neighborhood-based pools and athletic facilities.
4. Childcare facilities to support families and workforce participation.
5. Community centers to foster civic life and social interaction.
6. Garden plots to encourage outdoor activity and community engagement; and
7. Job opportunities within the community to support economic self-sufficiency.

Over time, Reston has maintained fidelity to these principles while adapting to evolving market demands, most notably through the development of Reston Town Center as a regional mixed-use destination.

Reston’s evolution reflects a deliberate shift toward urbanization at key nodes, balanced by stable residential neighborhoods. Early planning emphasized proximity between housing and employment, but regional economic growth and transportation investments—most notably Metrorail—accelerated changes in form and intensity. Reston Town Center emerged as a dense, mixed-use focal point with significant office, residential, retail, and cultural uses, transforming Reston into a regional employment destination.

At the neighborhood scale, Reston largely retained its original character, including extensive open space, pedestrian networks, and recreational amenities. Governance mechanisms, particularly the Reston Association and Fairfax County planning policies, play a central role in managing redevelopment and ensuring that new master planned growth aligns with the community’s founding goals of inclusivity, access to amenities, and environmental quality.



*Figure 8: Reston, VA 1962 Master Plan Map, source: The Reston Historic Trust*

### *Montgomery Village, Maryland*

Montgomery Village is a 2,435-acre planned community developed by the Kettler Brothers beginning in 1966 in Montgomery County, Maryland. Its development was guided by both “new town” principles and Montgomery County’s General Plan, which designated the Gaithersburg area as a “corridor city” intended to concentrate growth along major transportation routes.

The Kettlers’ vision combined elements of corridor city planning with the broader New Town ideal of creating self-contained, comprehensively planned communities.

Montgomery Village was purposefully designed from inception, largely on previously undeveloped land, with an emphasis on a mix of housing types, neighborhood-scale amenities, and a strong network of community facilities. While less centralized than Columbia or Reston, Montgomery Village reflects a pragmatic adaptation of New Town concepts within a county-driven growth management framework.

Montgomery Village has adapted through flexibility within a county-coordinated growth framework. As market conditions and housing preferences evolved, Montgomery Village expanded its range of housing types and adjusted development patterns to remain competitive within the regional market. While it did not develop a single dominant town center comparable to Columbia or Reston, it strengthened neighborhood-based amenities, recreational facilities, and community services.

The community’s governance and partnership model—working within Montgomery County’s corridor city and growth management strategies—has allowed Montgomery Village to respond to broader planning initiatives, transportation investments, and demographic changes. Over time, adaptation has focused on reinvestment, community branding, and maintaining a balance between residential stability and gradual change.



*Figure 9: Kettler Brothers discussing Montgomery Village plans, source: [montgomeryvillage.com](http://montgomeryvillage.com)*

## **Virtual Binder – Materials Summary**

The New Town Task Force Virtual Binder serves as the central reference repository supporting the Task Force’s work, providing foundational context, governing direction, and background resources related to the planning, zoning, and long-term stewardship of Columbia as a New Town. The materials are intended to establish a shared understanding among Task Force members and the public regarding Columbia’s origins, regulatory structure, and evolving planning framework. Materials included in the Virtual Binder are:

- Relevant points of contact

- Executive Orders
- Section 125 of the Howard County Zoning Regulations
- *HoCo by Design* (2023)
- Development Regulations Assessment (2019)
- Columbia Association New Town White Paper (2014)
- Downtown Columbia Plan (2010)
- Relevant maps
- Comments received

### *Task Force Purpose and Governance*

The binder includes materials describing the establishment, role, and charge of the New Town Task Force, including relevant County leadership direction and Executive Orders. These documents outline the Task Force’s advisory role, its scope of review, and expectations for producing informed, forward-looking recommendations to guide future policy, zoning, and implementation decisions affecting Columbia.

### *Historical Context and New Town Framework*

Background materials summarize the planning principles and regulatory framework that shaped Columbia’s establishment as a New Town. This includes an overview of New Town Zoning, its original intent, and its role in implementing James Rouse’s vision of a planned, inclusive, and amenity-rich community. These resources provide historical perspective necessary to evaluate the continued relevance of legacy policies in contemporary and future conditions.

### *Comprehensive and Long-Range Planning Documents*

The binder includes reference materials to key County and Columbia-specific planning efforts, including *HoCo by Design* and *A Vision for Columbia*. These plans articulate community values, growth management objectives, land use direction, transportation strategies, environmental stewardship goals, and equity considerations that frame the Task Force’s discussions and recommendations.

### *Regulatory and Implementation Resources*

Supporting documents address how planning and zoning policies are implemented, reviewed, and amended over time. These materials help clarify the roles of County agencies, property owners, and other stakeholders in the development and redevelopment process, and provide a basis for evaluating opportunities to improve clarity, transparency, and usability of existing processes.

## *Meeting and Engagement Materials*

The Virtual Binder also houses agendas, presentations, and related materials from Task Force meetings and engagement activities. These resources document the progression of Task Force discussions, summarize information presented by County staff and consultants, and support transparency and public access to the Task Force's work.



*Figure 10: Sarah Latimer (Howard County) Reviewing available resources in the Virtual Binder with the Task Force Members*

# PROCESS OVERVIEW

The development of this 2026 New Town Recommendations Report followed a structured, iterative process designed to ensure that final recommendations were informed by stakeholder input, aligned with a shared vision, and grounded in a clear evaluative framework. The process began with stakeholder interviews to gather perspectives, identify issues, and understand priorities. Insights from these interviews informed the development of an overarching vision against which potential strategies and actions could be assessed.

Each major element was then evaluated to determine whether it should be preserved, strengthened, enhanced, or transformed in order to best support the long-term goals of the project. This evaluation provided a consistent framework for decision-making and helped clarify areas requiring focused investment or change. Based on this analysis, a set of actionable and measurable recommendations was developed to guide future implementation.

This work was completed as follows:

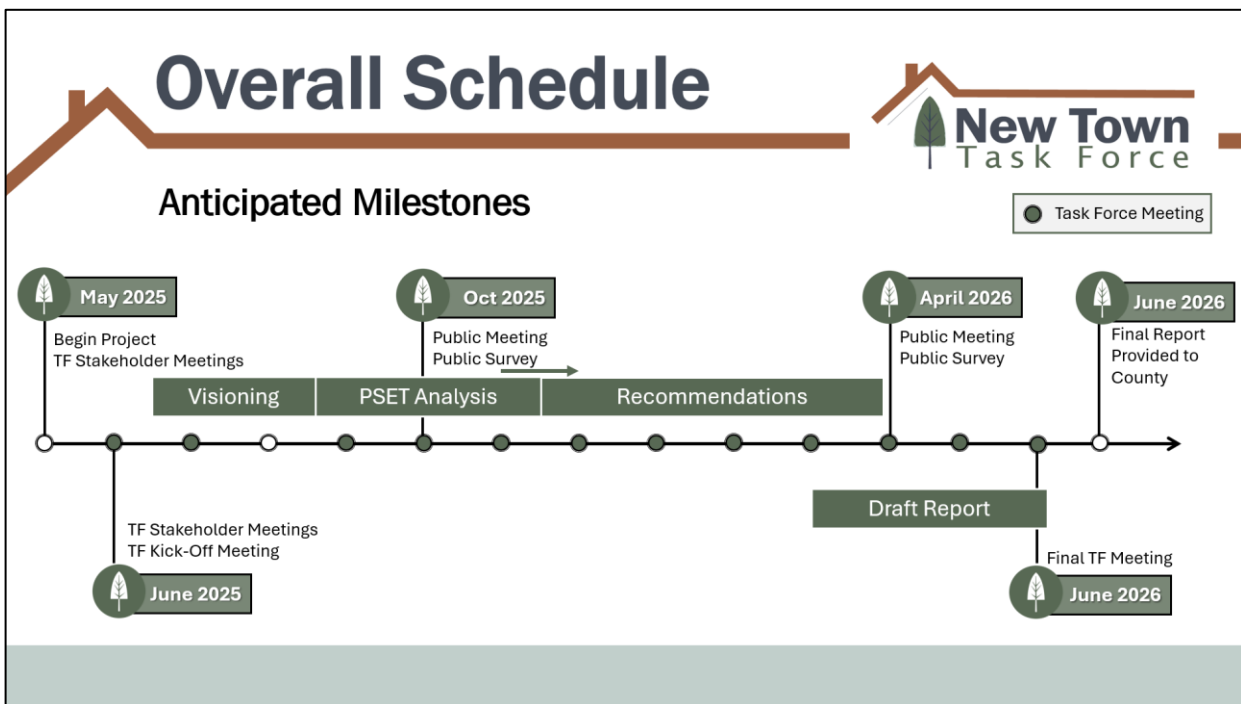


Figure 11: Schedule for the New Town Task Force Activities

## Recommendations

The purpose of the New Town Task Force recommendations was to establish a clear, implementable path forward for modernizing the New Town zoning framework while preserving the foundational principles that have defined New Towns’ success. The recommendations were intended to translate the Task Force’s research, stakeholder input, case studies, and meeting discussions into actionable policy direction for the County’s

Department of Planning and Zoning to evaluate. Recommendations of the Task Force in this report provide guidance for additional work and studies to be completed to understand the total implications and do not constitute zoning code changes. Any changes to the zoning code will require County Council approval following a public engagement / comment period.

## Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder meetings were convened at the outset to inform and strengthen the New Town Task Force’s evaluation of the New Town zoning framework by incorporating practical, on-the-ground perspectives. These meetings were designed to gather input from individuals, community members, and organizations with direct experience in planning, developing, administering, and living in New Town communities. Stakeholder meetings included discussions with the Task Force members individually as well as different community members suggested by the Task Force members.



**25**  
*Interviews*  
*Conducted*

The structured stakeholder interview discussions informed interviewees of the development of the Task Force’s work program and recommendations. A total of 25 conversations were held with Task Force members and community stakeholders. Each discussion averaged approximately 48 minutes in duration, allowing for detailed and meaningful dialogue.

The interviews followed a consistent “meet and greet” framework designed to understand participants’ perspectives, experiences, and aspirations for Columbia. Core discussion questions explored motivations for accepting the appointment, participants’ personal and professional relationships to Columbia, familiarity with existing planning and policy frameworks (including New Town Zoning, *HoCo by Design*, and *A Vision for Columbia*), and perceptions of Columbia’s strengths and challenges. Participants were also asked to identify what may be missing in Columbia, articulate their vision for the community over the next 20, 30, and 50 years, describe expectations for the Task Force’s work, and suggest additional stakeholders for future engagement. Specific questions asked are as follows:

- Why did you say yes to the appointment?
- What is your relationship to Columbia?
- Are you familiar with New Town Zoning? *HoCo by Design*? *A Vision for Columbia*?
- What are the top three things that you appreciate?
- What are the top three things that give you cause for concern?
- Is anything missing in Columbia?
- What is your vision for Columbia in 20 year, 30 years, 50 years from now?
- What is your expectation for the work of this committee?

Several consistent themes emerged from the discussions. Participants widely expressed that Columbia remains a great place to live and work and voiced strong appreciation for the community's founding principles. Diversity and inclusion were repeatedly cited as valued concepts, though perspectives were mixed regarding the extent to which these principles are fully realized today. Green space and open space were identified as defining and highly valued features of Columbia, accompanied by recognition that these should be more clearly defined and understood as distinct types of space. Proximity to amenities was also viewed positively; however, participants expressed mixed views on the ease and equity of access to those amenities.

*Participants widely expressed that Columbia remains a great place to live and work. Diversity and inclusion were repeatedly cited as valued concepts.*

Additional themes included a desire for enhanced transit options, tempered by recognition of the practical challenges associated with implementation. Participants also highlighted the need for a more clearly defined and transparent review process for change, clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities among agencies and property owners, and simplification of development and redevelopment processes to be more navigable for the “everyday” user. A recurring observation was that the factors and policies that shaped Columbia's original development should be reexamined to determine their continued relevance and applicability to future conditions and community needs.

A summary of the stakeholder meetings is located in Appendix D.

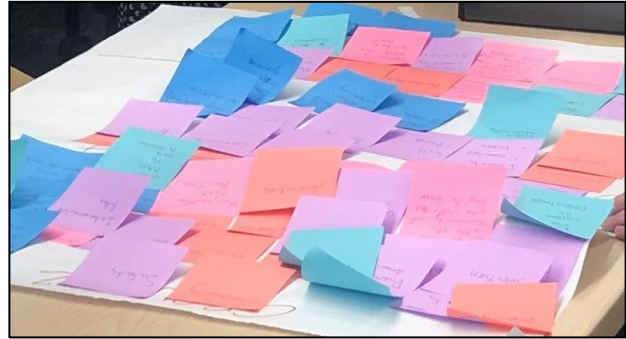
## Visioning Exercise

The visioning exercise conducted during the early Task Force meetings established a shared understanding of Columbia New Town's desired future and grounded the group's work in common priorities. It created a forward-looking framework identifying what should be preserved, strengthened, enhanced, or transformed as the Task Force developed its review and recommendations under the Executive Orders.

Rather than replacing existing County or Columbia Association vision statements, the exercise provided a unified framework for evaluating future zoning recommendations. The project team emphasized its role as a common “barometer,” rooted in Columbia's identity, values, and aspirations, to guide assessment of potential zoning changes.

The process began with a facilitated discussion on identity and branding, clarifying that while a logo is not itself a brand, visual symbols can evoke and reinforce the underlying identity of a place. Examples were shared to illustrate how imagery reflects collective values, culminating with discussion of Columbia's iconic sculpture, the People Tree. This framing set the stage for a broader exploration of what defines Columbia today and what characteristics should shape its future.

The Task Force completed an exercise focused on character and identity and discussed why they live, work, play, and learn in Columbia; what differentiates Columbia from other communities; and how Columbia's identity could be strengthened going forward. Recurring themes included nature and the environment, a strong sense of community, diversity and integration, access to amenities, and intentional planning. Participants identified Columbia's open spaces, lakes, and green infrastructure as defining features, along with its planned community structure and longstanding emphasis on inclusivity.



*Figure 12: Result of Task Force activity collecting themes on character and identity from everyone*

Building on this discussion, the project team reviewed existing County and Columbia Association vision statements, highlighting their shared values and points of alignment. Task Force members also reflected on results from a previously completed word-cloud exercise, which visually illustrated the most frequently submitted concepts and priorities. These materials informed a second round of discussions identifying key words, phrases, and themes that could inform a unifying vision framework.

During these sessions, completed in June and July 2025, participants discussed the balance between honoring Columbia's founding principles and embracing future needs. Topics included connection—among people, land, and processes; the role of housing, growth, and redevelopment; maintaining flexibility within New Town Zoning; and ensuring that Columbia remains inclusive, vibrant, and responsive across generations. Some participants emphasized caution in advancing prescriptive vision statements too early, while others stressed the importance of clarity to guide zoning decisions. Throughout the dialogue, there was broad agreement that the vision should support inclusivity, diversity, and integration without undermining the flexibility and intentionality that originally defined Columbia.

Collective output reinforced themes of people and community, diversity and inclusivity, open and green space, connectivity, and resiliency. Participants underscored the importance of embracing the future while respecting Columbia's history, values, and uniqueness as a planned, integrated community.

The combined visioning output affirms Columbia as a distinctive place defined by strong community connections, diversity, access to nature, and thoughtful planning. This vision framework served as a guiding reference for the Task Force, ensuring that future zoning recommendations are evaluated against shared principles that both honor Columbia's legacy and support its continued evolution.

### *Task Force Vision:*

- *People and Community, Diversity and Inclusivity, Open Space and green space aid in maintaining the spirit of Columbia.*
- *Embrace the future while honoring the values that Columbia was based upon.*
- *Columbia is a place that needs to value its uniqueness / based on its history*

## **Preserve, Strengthen, Enhance, and Transform Framework**

The Preserve, Strengthen, Enhance, and Transform (PSET) framework provides a structured lens for evaluating existing New Town regulations and community conditions in Columbia. It recognizes the enduring strengths of the New Town model while identifying where updates are needed to address contemporary needs.

### *Role of the Framework in the Task Force Process*

The PSET framework functions as a decision-support and prioritization tool, helping the Task Force distinguish between:

- What **should remain unchanged** and be preserved
- What **should be improved, strengthened, enhanced, or clarified**, and
- What **requires transformative changes** substantive rethinking?

Organizing recommendations within this structure supports a balanced, transparent approach to updating Section 125 of the Howard County Zoning Code, avoiding both wholesale replacement and piecemeal revisions. This method aligns with broader planning practices that use similar tiered frameworks to guide equitable and adaptive community planning.

Between September and December 2025, the Task Force conducted a detailed review of Section 125, evaluating each major topic through the PSET lens. Originally used in *HoCo By*

*Design*, the framework orders potential actions from “least change” to “most change.” It enabled the Task Force to assess the effectiveness of existing regulations while balancing Columbia’s foundational planning principles with evolving community conditions and modern planning practices.

Over time, the framework evolved from an organizational tool into a core method for shaping recommendations and determining the appropriate level of regulatory change. Major Section 125 topics evaluated through PSET included:

- Creating another New Town District
- Defining Credited Open Space
- Incorporating MIHU regulations
- Managing density caps
- Evaluating district structure
- Simplifying regulations and processes
- Redefining apartment land use
- Reviewing the Original Petitioner role
- Expanding uses, materials, and design guidance

### *Preserve*

The Task Force determined that many core elements of the New Town model remain successful and should be preserved. These elements include the village and neighborhood structure, the integration of open space and pathways, the balance of residential, employment, civic, and recreational uses, and the overarching emphasis on quality of life and long-term community stewardship.

Preservation was established as the baseline assumption for all recommendations. The Task Force agreed that modernization efforts should protect these foundational principles and ensure that regulatory updates do not erode Columbia’s identity or original planning intent.

### *Strengthen*

The Task Force identified several areas where existing regulations are sound in concept but weakened by ambiguity, administrative complexity, or outdated provisions. Strengthening focuses on clarifying intent, improving predictability, and reducing procedural friction within Section 125.

Recommendations in this category are intended to make the code function more effectively as originally designed, supporting reinvestment and continued stewardship without expanding the scope or altering the fundamental structure of the New Town zoning framework.

### *Enhance*

Enhancement emerged as a primary mechanism for incremental modernization. The Task Force recognized that Columbia has evolved over time and that regulations must respond to changes in development patterns, demographics, sustainability objectives, accessibility standards, and reinvestment needs.

Enhancements are intended to introduce flexibility, improve alignment with contemporary planning practices, and facilitate adaptive reuse and reinvestment while remaining consistent with the original New Town vision. This category serves as a bridge between preservation and more significant change, allowing the code to mature alongside the community.

### *Transform*

Transformation was acknowledged as necessary in limited and clearly defined circumstances. The Task Force concluded that transformative changes should be applied selectively and only where existing provisions no longer function as intended or actively inhibit long-term adaptability, equity, or reinvestment.

Transformative recommendations are expected to be evidence-based, narrowly scoped, and directly tied to maintaining the long-term viability of the New Town model.

### *PSET Outcome*

Collectively, the application of the PSET framework enabled the Task Force to distinguish between differing levels of regulatory change in a disciplined and defensible manner. The framework ensured that:

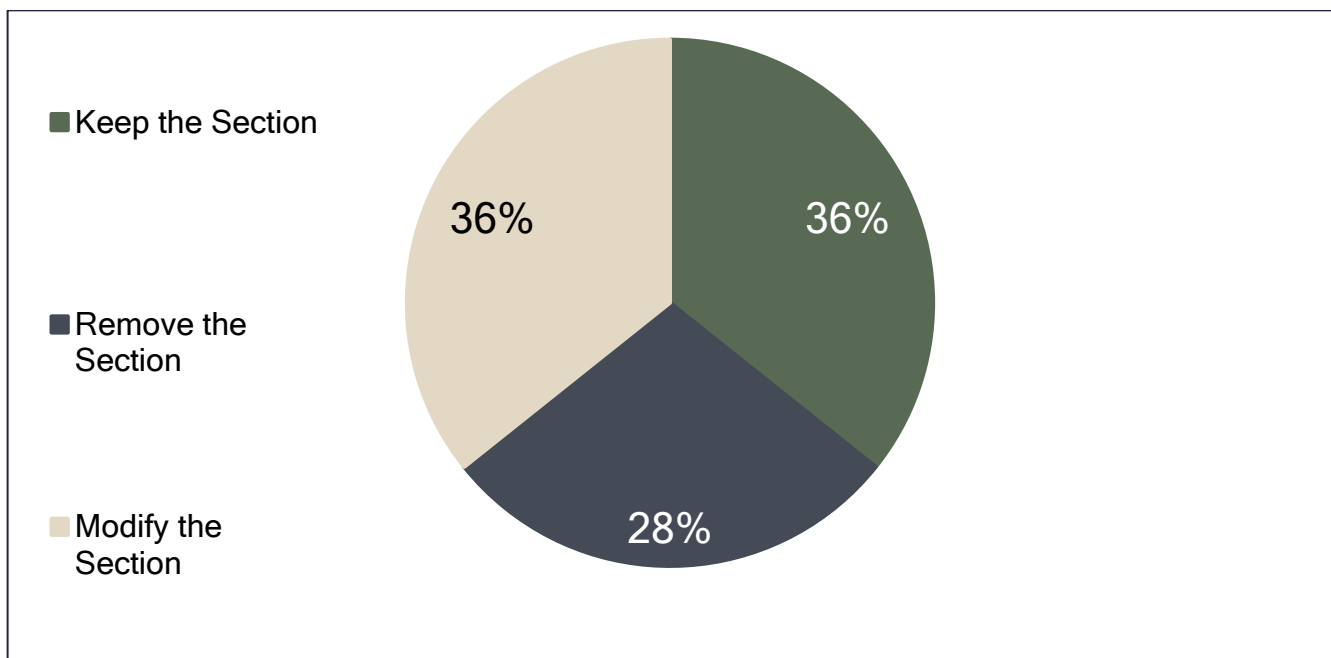
- Preservation of New Town principles remained central to all recommendations.
- Most changes fall within the strengthen and enhance categories rather than transformation.
- Transformative changes are justified, targeted, and aligned with long-term planning objectives; and
- The rationale for regulatory updates is transparent, proportional, and clearly communicated.

The PSET framework ultimately served as the organizing structure for the Task Force's recommendations, supporting a balanced approach that protects Columbia's planning legacy while ensuring its continued relevance and resilience. The New Town Task Force's major discussion themes and outcome for the framework with respect to the individual elements reviewed are outlined by topic below.

### *Creating another New Town District*

During the meeting, Task Force members explored whether the New Town zoning model—originally created in 1965 for Columbia requiring a minimum of 2,500 contiguous acres—should be considered for application elsewhere in Howard County, either through a new district or a modified framework. The discussion recognized that while this element is within Section 125 of the zoning code, the Task Force’s formal charge is limited to evaluating and recommending updates to the existing New Town District, not designating new geographic areas.

*Figure 13: Should we keep, remove, or modify the section of the zoning regulations that guide the creation of a New Town District?*



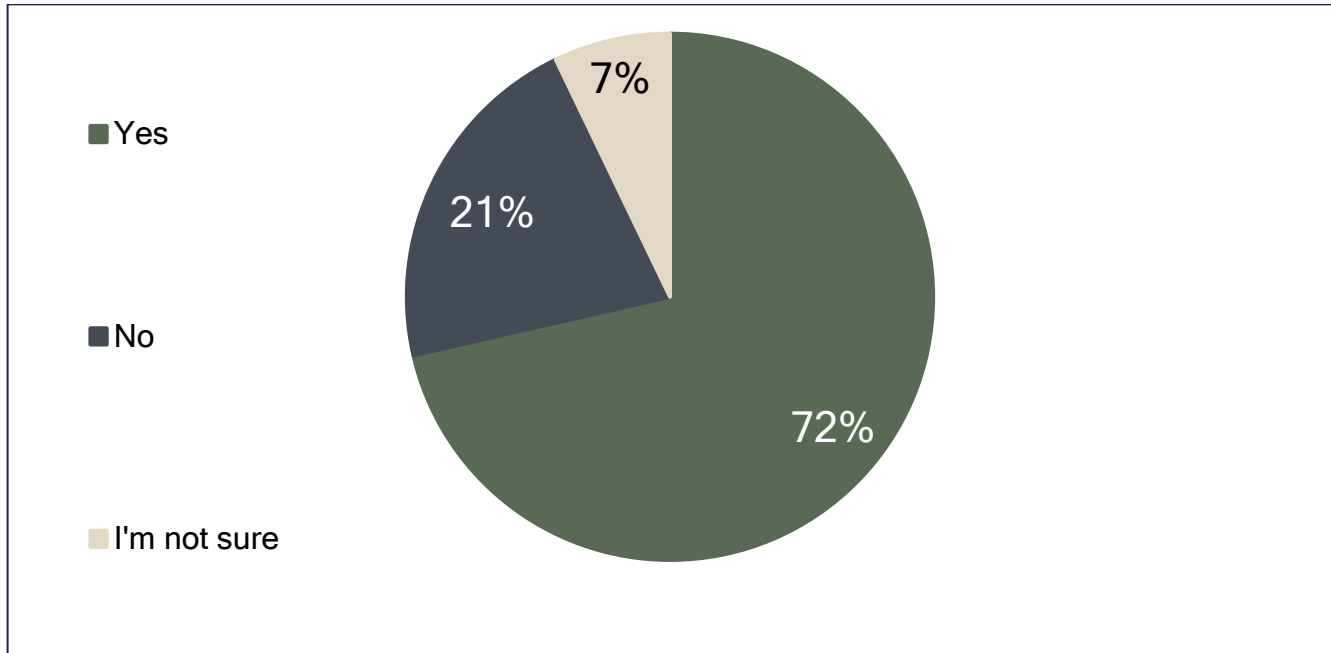
### *Defining Credited Open Space*

The Task Force engaged in an initial, conceptual discussion about how open space is defined and understood within the New Town zoning framework. The defining open space conversation focused on whether the existing concept of open space in New Town zoning still reflects current practices, community expectations, and environmental goals, or whether it requires clarification or modernization. Members emphasized that open space is a core organizing principle of Columbia’s New Town model, not merely a residual land category.

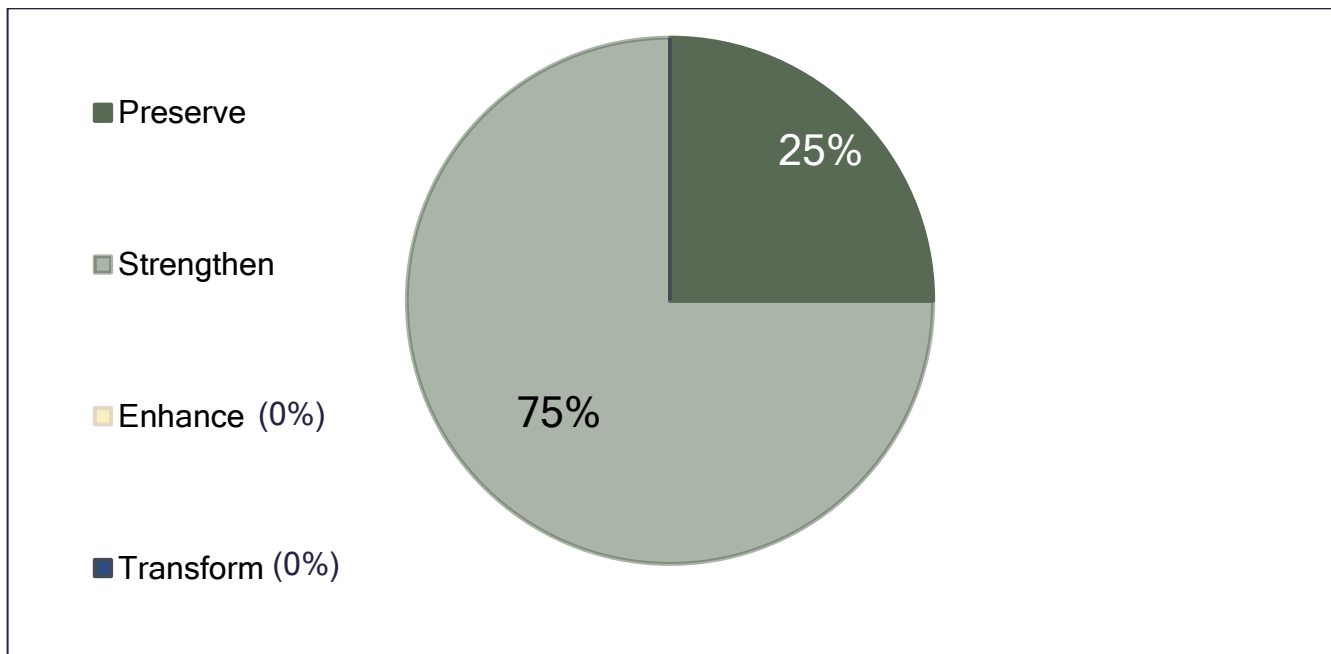
Task Force members repeatedly characterized open space as a deliberate and functional component of the New Town design, intended to shape neighborhoods, connect villages, and balance development intensity. Participants highlighted that this role distinguishes New Town zoning from conventional zoning approaches, where open space is often treated as ancillary

or mitigation-based. The discussion focused on the current usage of Open Space and how open space is counted and credited within the zoning code.

*Figure 14: Does the definition of credited open space in the New Town zoning code reflect its current uses?*



*Figure 15: Should we preserve, strengthen, enhance, or transform the definition of Credited Open Space in New Town Zoning?*



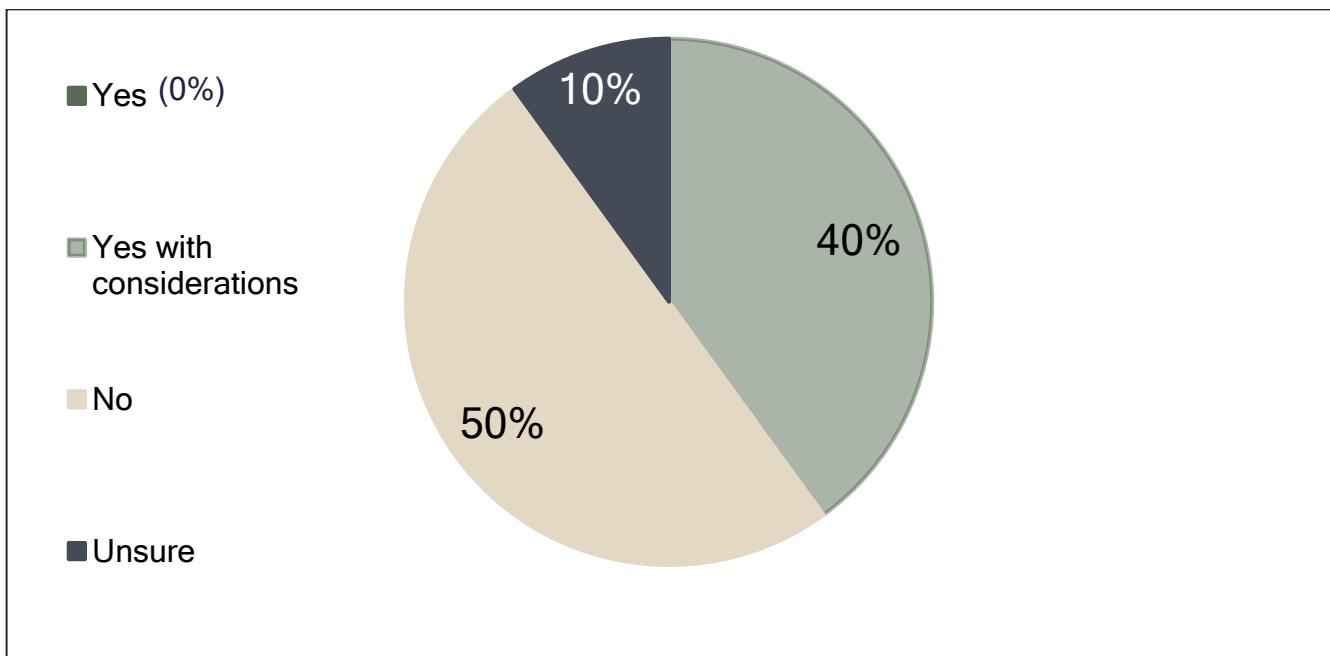
### *Incorporating Moderate Income Housing Units (MIHU) Regulations*

MIHU was introduced as one of several cross-cutting policy considerations—alongside density, open space, and community design—that would require deeper evaluation as the Task Force progressed through the PSET process. Members acknowledged that MIHU requirements exist countywide, but that their application to New Town zoning raises distinct questions because of New Town’s plan-based, comprehensive approach.

Task Force members discussed whether MIHU regulations, which are typically applied through parcel-level zoning requirements, align with the master-planned and comprehensive nature of New Town zoning. Some participants noted that New Town already integrates housing diversity through village planning and long-term density management, prompting questions about how MIHU requirements would function within that broader framework.

The discussion also recognized MIHU as a tool that advances countywide equity and affordability objectives, consistent with *HoCo By Design*. Members emphasized that any future consideration of MIHU in New Town should balance affordability goals with Columbia’s original intent of providing a mix of housing types across villages, rather than concentrating affordable units in limited locations.

*Figure 16: Should MIHU requirements apply to New Town Zoning?*



### *Managing Density Caps*

The Task Force’s discussion on managing density caps centered on the long-standing district-wide density cap of 2.5 dwelling units per acre, not including Downtown Columbia, established in the New Town zoning regulations. This cap has historically functioned as a

foundational growth-management tool for Columbia, allowing flexibility at the neighborhood and village level while maintaining an overall development limit across the New Town District.

Task Force members widely acknowledged that the 2.5 dwelling units per acre cap has served as an effective backstop, enabling Columbia to evolve over time while maintaining predictability and long-term planning stability. Members noted that the cap supports comprehensive planning at scale, rather than parcel-by-parcel development and redevelopment.

The Task Force discussed whether density should continue to be managed primarily:

- At the district-wide level, or
- Through village-specific or sub-area caps.

Participants noted that the current framework allows density to be strategically shifted within the district over time, which has supported reinvestment in activity centers while preserving lower-intensity areas. Concerns were raised that introducing rigid village-level caps could reduce adaptability and complicate long-term planning.

Members consistently linked density management to infrastructure capacity, including transportation, schools, utilities, and parks. The discussion emphasized that any change to the density cap would need to be evaluated in tandem with capital planning and adequacy standards.

*Figure 17: Should we amend the density cap of 2.5 dwelling units per acre across the entire district?*

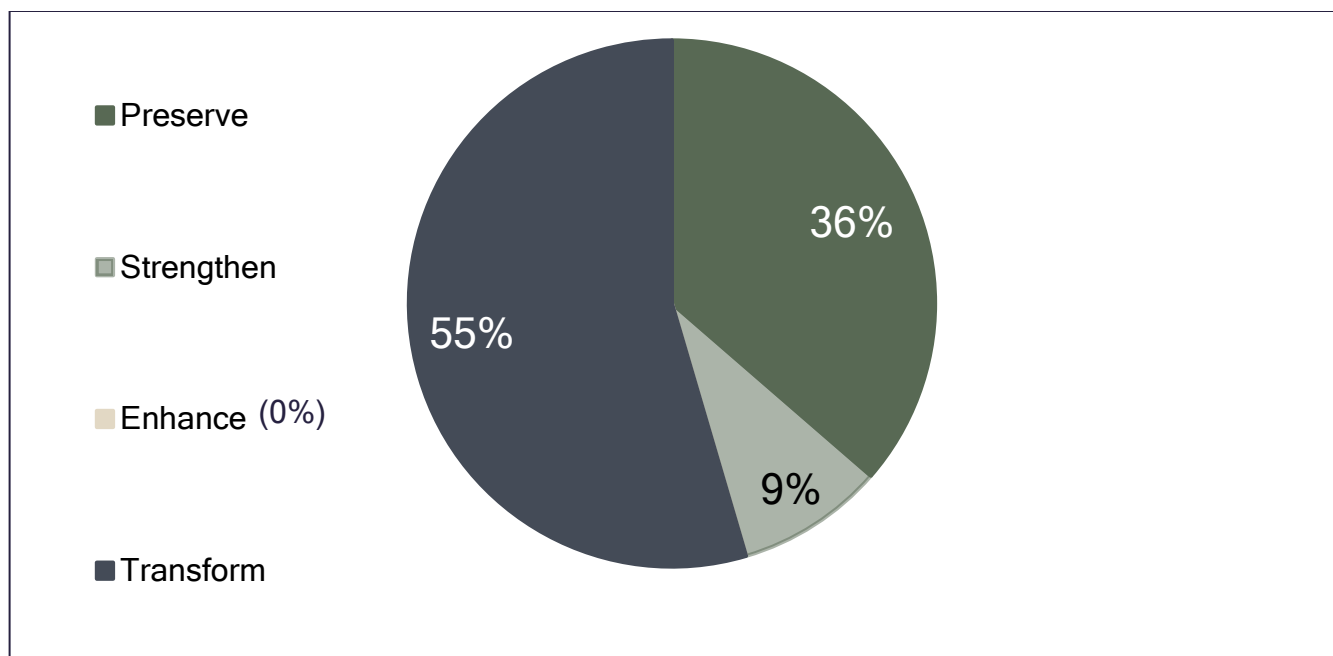
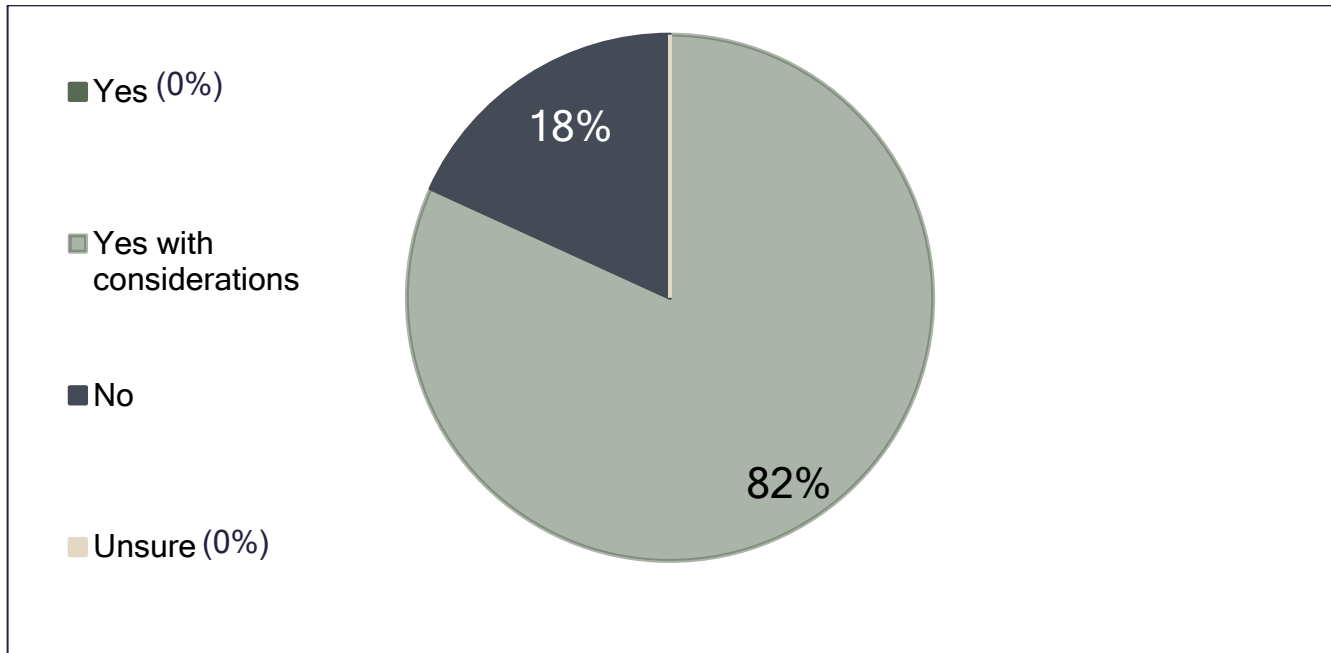


Figure 18: Should we amend the density cap across villages?



### Evaluating New Town District Structure

A consistent theme across the discussion was recognition that the core structure of New Town zoning has performed as intended. Members noted that the framework’s emphasis on:

- District-wide planning,
  - Village-level implementation, and
  - Long-range flexibility
- has enabled Columbia to adapt over decades while maintaining coherent community form.

Many participants expressed that structural stability has been a key strength of New Town zoning, distinguishing it from conventional parcel-based zoning approaches and allowing coordinated evolution rather than incremental fragmentation.

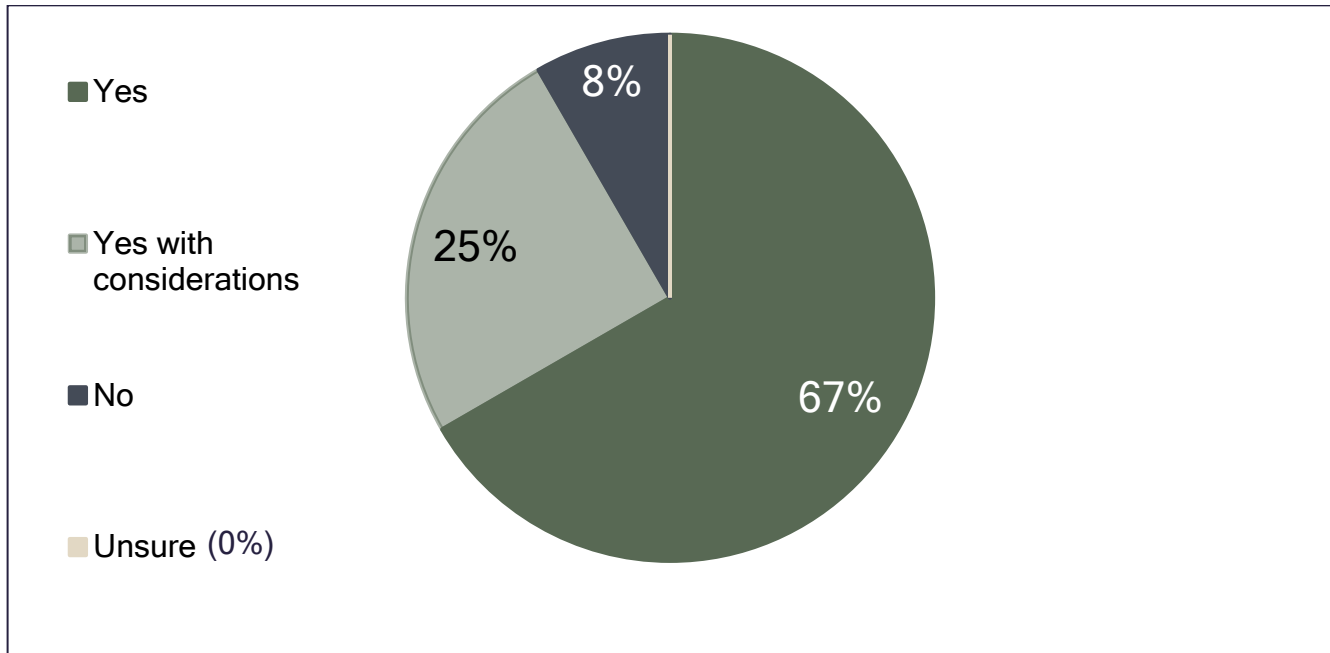
Task Force members clearly differentiated between:

- The overall structure of New Town zoning, and
- The specific regulatory tools and provisions operating within it.

The discussion emphasized that challenges facing New Town today—such as redevelopment, housing affordability, and evolving mobility needs—are less about the structural framework itself and more about whether individual components (e.g., density caps, MIHU application, open space definitions, petitioner roles) need refinement.

This distinction helped frame the consensus that modernization does not necessarily require a total restructuring.

Figure 19: Should the structure of New Town District change?



### *Simplification of Regulations and Processes*

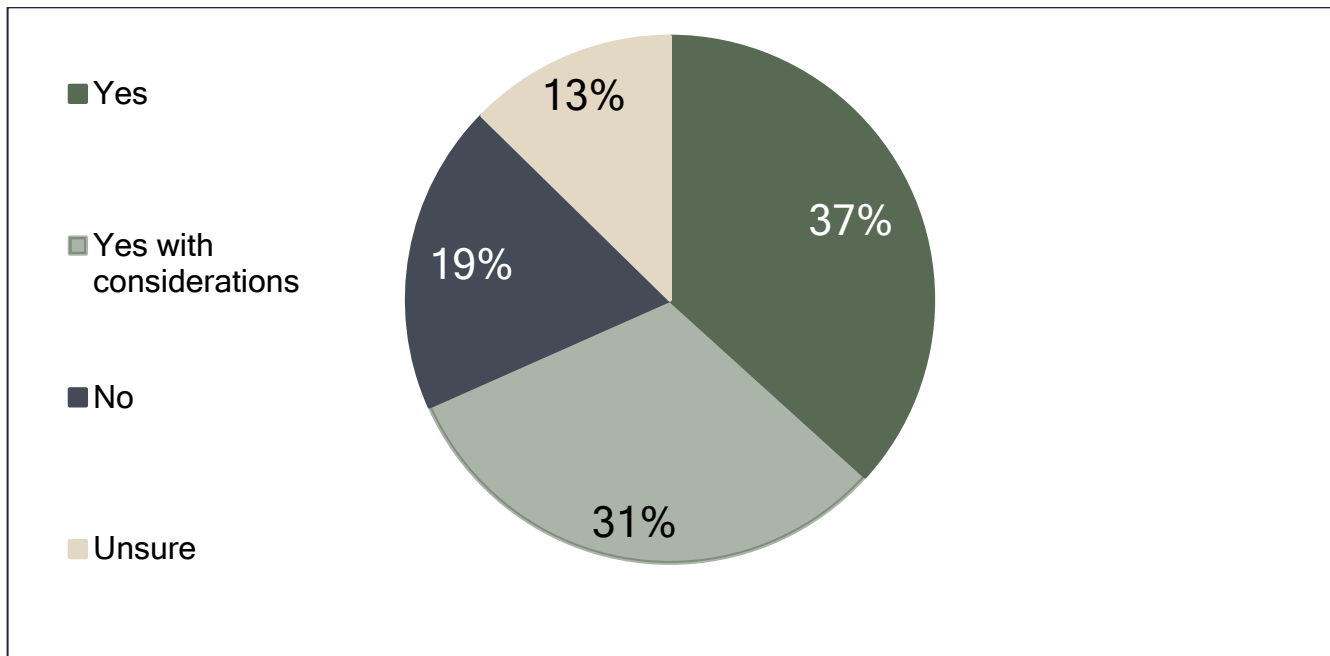
Task Force members consistently emphasized the need to simplify New Town regulations and implementation processes while preserving the core, Final Development Plan-based structure that distinguishes New Town zoning.

Members noted that New Town regulations have become increasingly complex over time, making them difficult to navigate for residents, applicants, and even practitioners. Simplification was seen as necessary to improve transparency, predictability, and public understanding.

The Task Force discussed streamlining approval processes by clarifying roles, responsibilities, and decision points, particularly where overlapping plans, amendments, or interpretations create confusion or delay.

Participants identified opportunities to eliminate duplicative or outdated provisions that no longer reflect current planning practice, while retaining flexibility achieved through comprehensive, district-wide planning rather than parcel-by-parcel review.

Figure 20: Should the regulations and processes for development, redevelopment, and/or amendments be simplified?



### *Redefining Apartment Land Use*

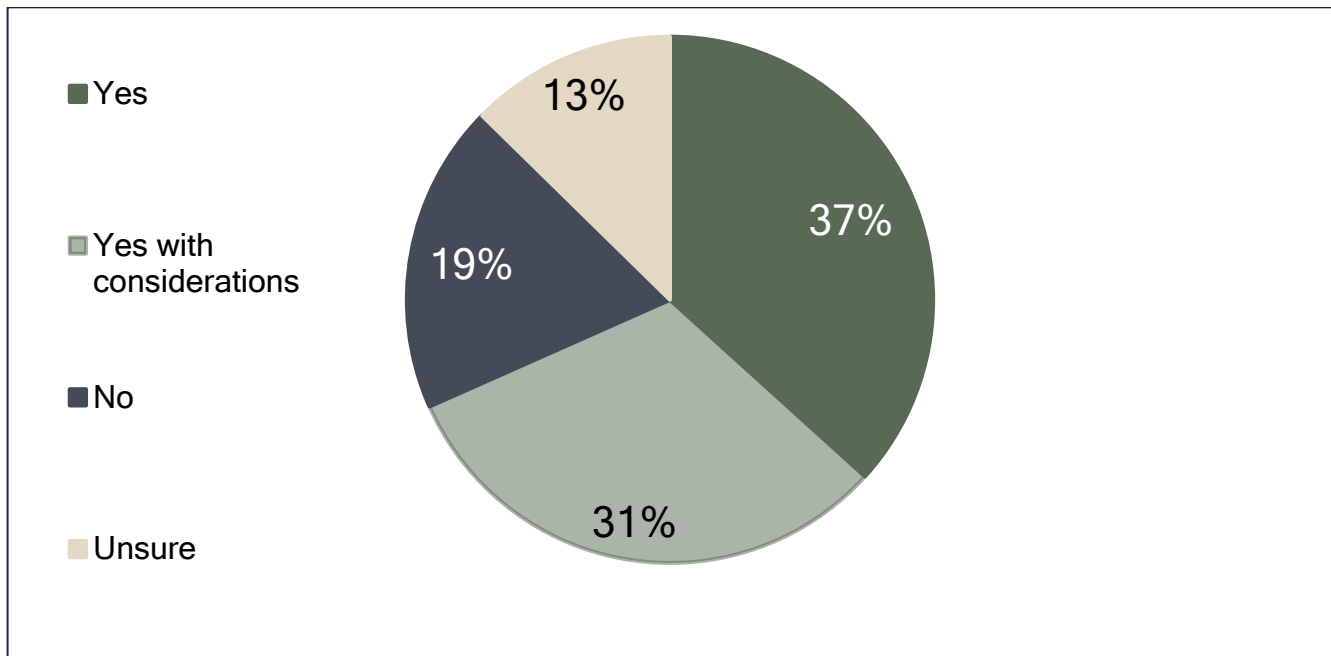
Task Force members discussed whether the existing apartment land-use framework in New Town zoning should be clarified or modernized to better reflect current housing types, market conditions, and community goals.

Members noted that New Town's apartment definition includes single family attached housing in the zoning code which does not consistently reflect today's more dense housing forms, including mixed-use buildings, missing-middle typologies, and multifamily development integrated into activity centers. This raised concerns that existing definitions may be overly rigid or unclear.

Task Force members identified confusion around how apartment land uses are defined, categorized, and evaluated through the plan approval process. Redefining apartment use was seen as a way to improve clarity for applicants, residents, and decision makers, reducing uncertainty without increasing regulation.

Participants linked apartment definitions to broader discussions on affordability and housing choice, noting that clearer land-use definitions could better support a diverse range of unit types and household needs within New Town.

*Figure 21: Should the apartment land use be adjusted to align with other county zoning definitions?*



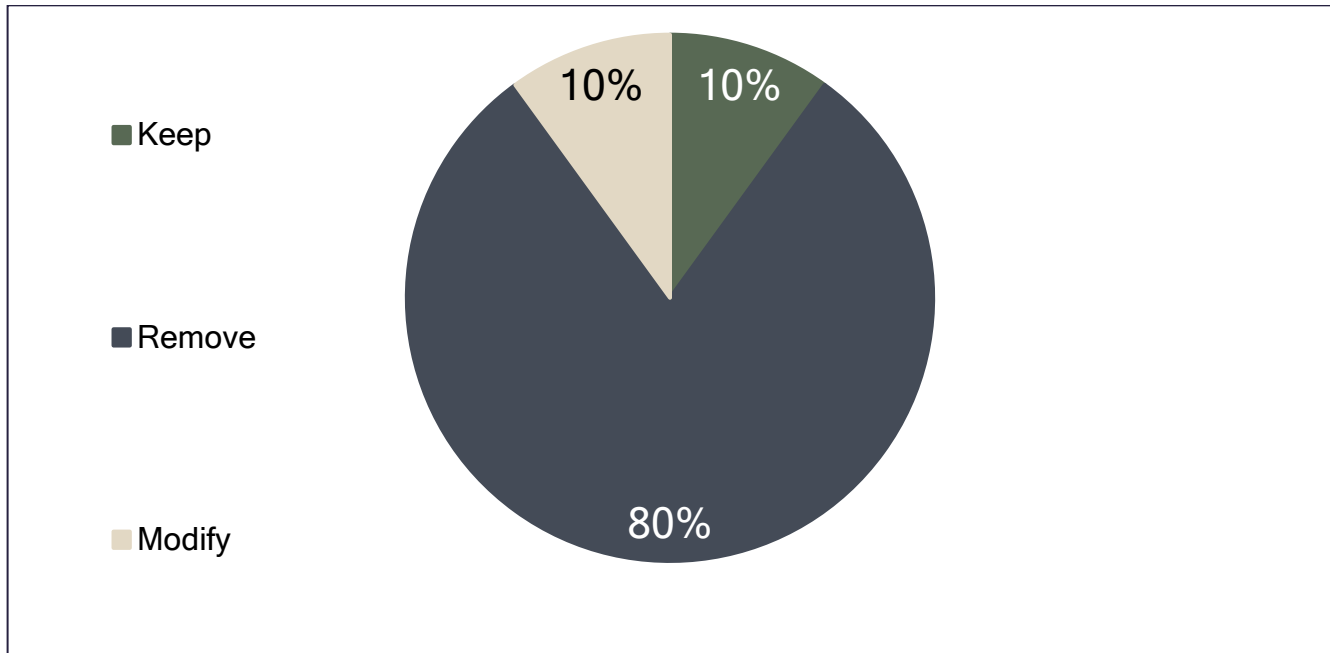
### *Reviewing Original Petitioner Role*

Members acknowledged that the Original Petitioner role was central to the original New Town model, providing a mechanism for coordinated, district-wide planning, long-term implementation, and stewardship across multiple decades. The role, which grants authority to the Original Petitioner to expand the NT district and allow amendments of commercial Final Development Plans to go before Planning Board, was viewed as instrumental in achieving Columbia's comprehensive and cohesive development.

The discussion recognized that conditions have changed significantly since the establishment of New Town zoning. Fragmented ownership, redevelopment dynamics, and increased public involvement have altered how planning decisions are made, prompting members to question whether the Original Petitioner role functions as originally intended.

The discussion balanced the value of having a single coordinating entity against concerns about concentrated authority. Members debated whether the role continues to provide beneficial flexibility and cohesion, or whether it could limit broader participation or adaptability in redevelopment scenarios.

*Figure 22: Should we keep, remove, or modify the role of the original petitioner?*



### *Expansion of uses and materials, and design guidance in New Town Zoning*

Task Force members discussed whether the New Town zoning regulations should be updated to expand allowable uses and modernize materials and design guidance, in order to better reflect current development practices, community expectations, and long-term planning goals.

Members noted that existing use categories in New Town zoning do not always align with current development trends, such as mixed-use buildings, missing-middle housing types, age-restricted housing, and flexible live-work environments. Expanding permitted uses was viewed as a way to support continued reinvestment and adaptability, particularly in village centers and redevelopment areas.

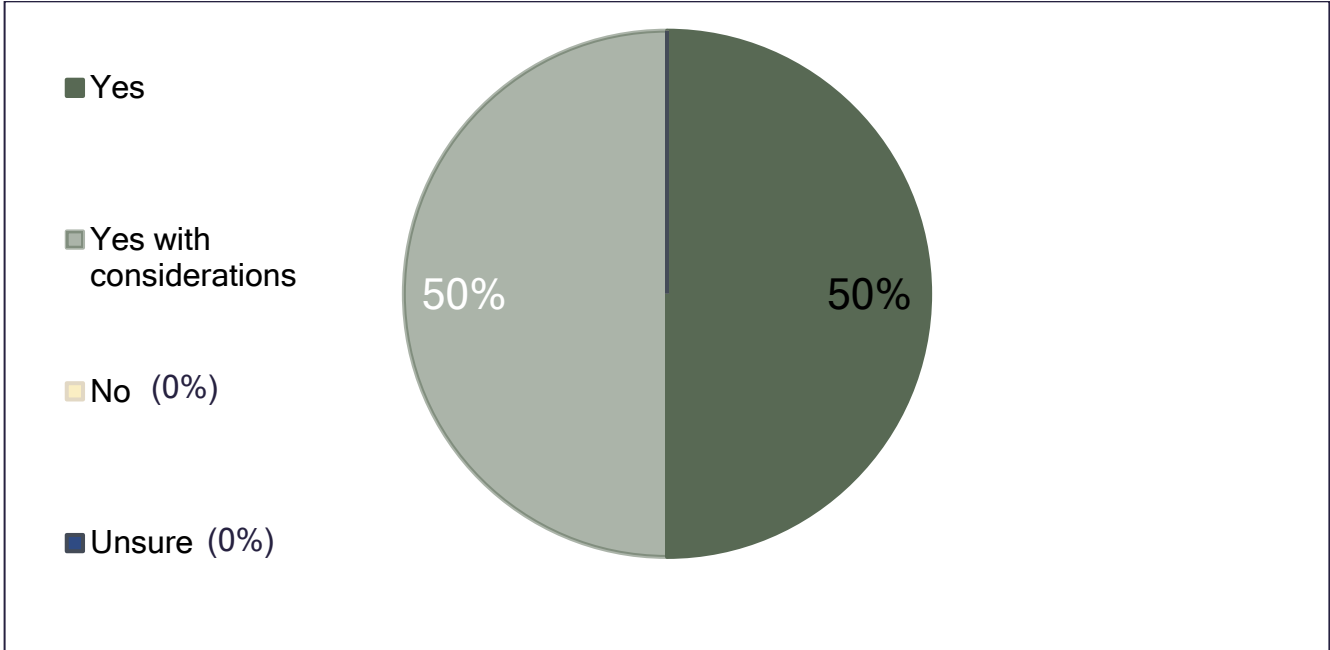
Task Force members identified opportunities to modernize design provisions to better reflect contemporary building materials, sustainability practices, accessibility standards, and universal design principles. Participants noted that current guidance can be perceived as outdated or incomplete when applied to modern construction methods.

Redefining and expanding uses, along with updated design guidance, was consistently framed as a way to reduce ambiguity and interpretation issues for applicants, reviewers, and the public. Clearer standards were seen as essential to streamlining review processes while maintaining high design quality.

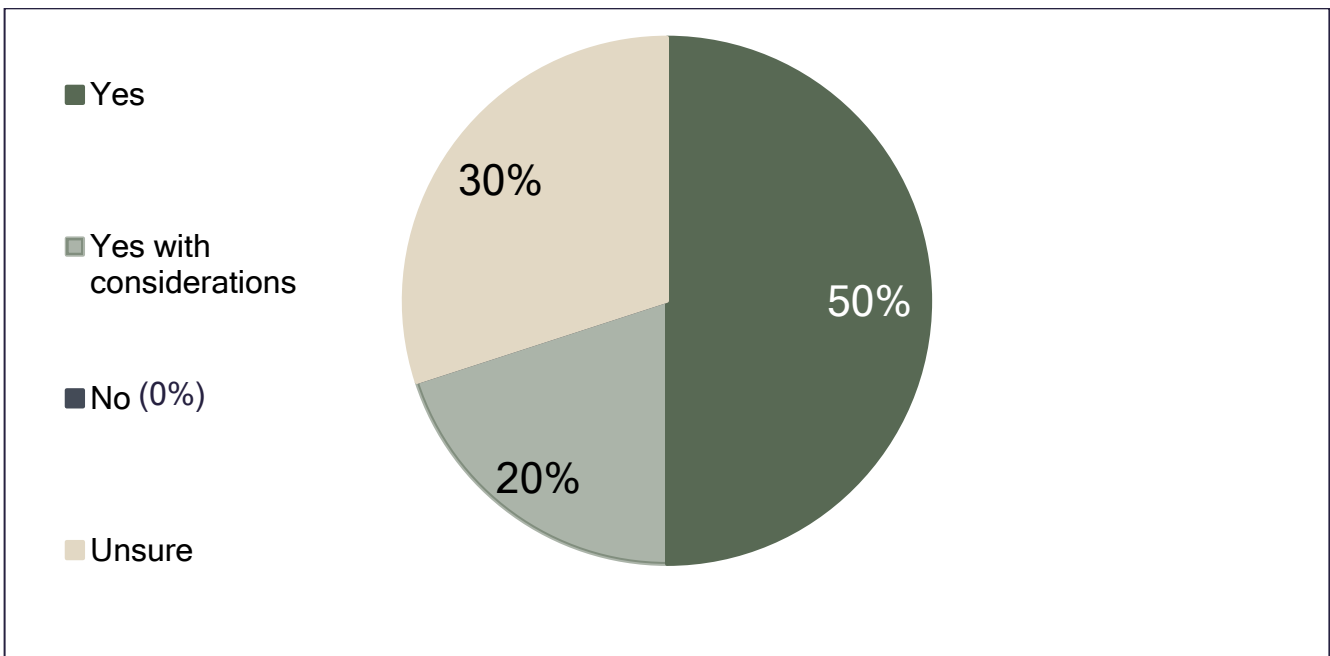
Members stressed that expanded uses and materials should reinforce—not erode—New Town’s defining characteristics, including human-scale design, integration with open space,

and cohesive neighborhood identity. The goal was to enable innovation without losing the qualities that make New Town distinctive.

*Figure 23: Should there be an enhancement or expansion of the uses (i.e., Age Restricted Adult Housing/Missing Middle/Mixed Use)?*



*Figure 24: Should there be an enhancement or expansion of material allowances and design guidance (i.e., Universal Design, Accessibility, Sustainable Materials, Design Guidance generally) in the New Town Zoning code?*



## Public Engagement Input – Phase 1

An initial public meeting was conducted to introduce the project, outline the overall process, and solicit early input from the community. Presentation materials were prepared and shared, and a formal presentation was delivered during in-person public meeting sessions on October 20, 2025, and a virtual meeting on October 21, 2025. These meetings provided the public with an opportunity to ask questions, gain a deeper understanding of the New Town Task Force process, and offer comments and suggestions regarding elements of the New Town Zoning District that may warrant consideration for change.



*Figure 25: JMT's Jennifer Ray presenting during the in-person public meeting held on October 20, 2025*

In addition to the public meetings, an online community survey was developed and widely distributed to further broaden participation and capture feedback from a diverse range of stakeholders. The survey was designed to gather input on potential updates to Columbia's zoning code, with a specific focus on the New Town Zoning District. Survey questions were informed by major themes emerging from initial meet-and-greet sessions and the first two meetings of the New Town Task Force (NTTF).

The survey results were used to validate and refine the visioning exercises completed by the NTTF and to inform development of the Task Force's recommendations to the County. The survey was launched on October 6, 2025, and closed on November 3, 2025, at 11:59 p.m. During this period, the survey was promoted through multiple channels, including the County website (NTTF webpage), email distribution, Public Meeting No. 1, and outreach at County offices.

A total of 399 responses were received. A comprehensive summary of survey responses and findings is provided in Appendix E.

# DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the findings of the Preserve, Strengthen, Enhance, and Transform (PSET) analysis and informed by input received through community engagement activities, the Task Force prepared an initial draft set of recommendations for discussion. This draft consisted of 48 preliminary recommendations, developed to reflect recurring themes, identified challenges, and opportunities for refinement within the New Town zoning framework. These draft recommendations were presented to the Task Force for review, discussion, and further refinement and are summarized in Tables 1 - 10 with the corresponding meeting materials presented located in Appendix C.

Based on these initial discussions, recommendations that achieved general concurrence among Task Force members, as well as those identified as requiring additional consideration, were carried forward for broader public input and were identified with unique numbers. Collectively, these recommendations were shared through subsequent public meetings and the Technical Survey to solicit feedback, test assumptions, and inform further refinement before preparation of the final recommendations.

**Table 1: Draft Recommendations for Creating another New Town District**

Draft Recommendation for Discussion	Concurrence Building
Reduce the acreage requirement to create a New New Town.	Majority No
Remove the section on creating a New New Town.	Majority No
Maintain the original petitioner's ability to expand or restrict a New Town district.	<i>To be discussed in coordination with Original Petitioner Role</i>

*Table 1 References:*

- *Zoning Code Section Reference: 125.0.A.3 and 125.0.B*
- *Discussed during the September 2025 PSET Meeting and January 2026 Recommendations Meeting*

**Table 2: Draft Recommendations for Preliminary Development Plan (PDP / Comprehensive Sketch Plan (CSP) / Final Development Plan (FDP) Structure**

Draft Recommendation for Discussion	Concurrence Building
Re-structure New Town zoning to align with existing land uses in Columbia under new Euclidean zoning.	Majority No
Maintain its current overall structure but seek to simplify the approval and development processes within New Town Zoning District.	Majority Yes
Create a master plan for Columbia in order to establish a community vision that guides future development.	Majority No
Standardize requirements by land use types across the FDPs.	<i>Majority Yes, Needs more discussion</i>
Remove CSP's as a step in the development process.	<i>Needs more discussion</i>
Remove the New Town district by creating a New Town Overlay in order to regulate open space, design, and character; and zone properties with similar land uses under existing County Euclidian zoning districts.	Majority No
Consider implementing performance-based, incentive, or form-based zoning districts within Columbia.	Majority No
Consolidate the FDPs and their requirements to create a table of permitted uses by area.	Majority Yes
Expand the types of uses that can be approved administratively through DPZ.	<i>Needs more discussion</i>
Identify most effective opportunities for public engagement and maintain them as a priority throughout the development process.	<i>Needs more discussion</i>

*Table 2 References:*

- *Zoning Code Section Reference: 125.0*
- *Discussed during the November 2025 PSET Meeting and February 2026 Recommendations Meeting*

**Table 3: Draft Recommendations for Defining Credited Open Space**

Draft Recommendation for Discussion	Concurrence Building
Define open space in the New Town Zoning District to provide greater clarity of uses and align with other county zoning district definitions.	<i>Needs more discussion</i>
Maintain the current definition of open space in Section 125.0.A.8.e.	<i>Needs more discussion</i>
Maintain required 36% open space.	Majority Yes
Ensure permanent protection of currently established credited open space areas.	Majority No, with further discussion for environmental stewardship consideration directions to be provided

*Table 3 References:*

- *Zoning Code Section Reference: 125.0.A.8.e*
- *Discussed during the September 2025 PSET Meeting and February 2026 Recommendations Meeting*

**Table 4: Apartments Definition**

Draft Recommendation for Discussion	Concurrence Building
Maintain the Apartments' definition as it is currently constructed in Section 125.	Majority No
Adjust the definition of apartments to align with other county zoning district definitions.	<i>Needs more discussion</i>
Create a new land use category for single family attached housing types.	Majority Yes
Create a new land use category for diverse housing types, including missing middle housing types.	<i>Needs more discussion</i>

*Table 4 References:*

- *Zoning Code Section Reference: 125.0.A.4 and 125.0.A.5.b*
- *Discussed during the September 2025 PSET Meeting and February 2026 Recommendations Meeting*

**Table 5: Original Petitioner**

Draft Recommendation for Discussion	Concurrence Building
Remove the role of original petitioner to amend commercial FDPs.	Majority Yes
The county should review the potential for the Planning Board or another entity to take up the role of original petitioner.	<i>Needs more discussion</i>

*Table 5 References:*

- *Zoning Code Section Reference: 125.0.F.1*
- *Discussed during the December 2025 PSET Meeting and February 2026 Recommendations Meeting*

**Table 6: Downtown and Village Center Simplification**

Draft Recommendation for Discussion	Concurrence Building
Maintain the existing major and minor village center redevelopment process.	Majority No
Maintain village board involvement in the village center redevelopment process.	Majority No
Simplify the development process for Village Center Redevelopment.	Majority Yes, Needs more discussion
Simplify the development process for Downtown Columbia redevelopment.	Majority Yes, Needs more discussion
Reduce the number of public meetings required for redevelopment processes.	Majority Yes, Needs more discussion

*Table 6 References:*

- *Zoning Code Section Reference: 125.0.E, H, I (downtown), Section 125.0.J (major VC), 125.0.K (minor VC)*
- *Discussed during the November 2025 NTTF Meeting*

**Table 7: Density Cap Requirements**

Draft Recommendation for Discussion	Concurrence Building
Maintain the density cap of 2.5 dwelling units across the entire New Town Zoning District.	Majority Yes
Remove the New Town wide density cap.	Majority No
Raise the density cap of 2.5 dwelling units across the entire New Town Zoning District.	Majority No
Consider density caps by village.	Majority No
Consider excluding village centers from the New Town wide density cap.	Majority Yes

*Table 7 References:*

- *Zoning Code Section Reference: 125.0.A.4*
- *Discussed during the October 2025 PSET Meeting and March 2026 Recommendations Meeting*

**Table 8: Land Use Percentage Requirements**

Draft Recommendation for Discussion	Concurrence Building
Evaluate and consider adjusting the land use percentage requirements, outside of open space uses, in order to accommodate more diverse housing types.	Majority Yes
Remove land use percentage requirements for New Town overall.	Majority No

*Table 8 References:*

- *Zoning Code Section Reference: 125.0.A.8.a*
- *Discussed during the October 2025 PSET Meeting and March 2026 Recommendations Meeting*

**Table 9: MIHU Requirements**

Draft Recommendation for Discussion	Concurrence Building
Encourage diversity of housing types throughout the New Town district.	Majority Yes
Incentivize, rather than require, the provision of MIHUs.	Majority Yes
Add requirement to include MIHUs in new development and redevelopment in the New Town Zoning District.	Majority No
Maintain the existing exemption from MIHUs in New Town.	Majority Yes

*Table 9 References:*

- *Zoning Code Section Reference: Title 13 Subtitle 402*
- *Discussed during the October 2025 PSET Meeting and March 2026 Recommendations Meeting*

**Table 10: Expansion of Uses, Materials, and Design Guidance**

Draft Recommendation for Discussion	Concurrence Building
Evaluate the expansion of the Design Advisory Panel role to review projects in New Town.	Majority Yes
Explore the creation of pattern books to incentivize the use of modern and sustainable building materials.	Majority Yes
Incentivize and encourage universal design and accessibility in New Town zoning.	Majority Yes

*Table 10 References:*

- *Zoning Code Section Reference: Title 13 Subtitle 402*
- *Discussed during the October 2025 PSET Meeting and March 2026 Recommendations Meeting*

## Public Engagement Input – Phase 2

A second public meeting was held to receive community input on the recommendations developed. Only those recommendations that received a “majority yes” consensus, or those that still required further discussion by the Task Force, were moved forward for overall consideration from the community.

Presentation materials were again prepared and shared, and a formal presentation was delivered during in-person public meeting sessions on April 8, 2026, and a virtual meeting on April 9, 2026.

In addition to the public meetings, a Technical Survey was developed, all attendees at the meetings and stakeholders were encouraged to participate. The survey was designed to gain a better understanding of the community’s input regarding the draft recommendations from the Task Force.

The survey results were used in discussion in developing the final recommendations for this effort. The survey was launched on April 6, 2026, and closed on April 21, 2026, at 11:59 p.m.

A total of 35 responses were received. A comprehensive summary of survey responses and findings is provided in Appendix F.



Figure 26: JMT's Jennifer Ray presenting during the second in-person public meeting held on April 8, 2026

# FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The New Town Task Force focused on finalizing and contextualizing its recommendations following nearly a year of analysis, public engagement, and iterative deliberation. The discussion emphasized that the recommendations were intended to carry forward the New Town model, not replace it, and to align with the County's adopted *HoCo By Design* General Plan goals.

Task Force members consistently reinforced that the final recommendations reflect a strategy of targeted refinement rather than structural overhaul. The New Town framework was affirmed as fundamentally sound, with the recommendations focused on modernizing outdated provisions, clarifying intent, and improving usability.

The Task Force revisited the importance of maintaining New Town's hallmark flexibility while improving clarity and predictability for applicants, residents, and decision-makers. Final recommendations were discussed as tools to streamline processes, reduce ambiguity, and support reinvestment without compromising community character.

Members highlighted how feedback from the Fall 2025 and April 2026 public meetings and surveys informed refinements to the draft recommendations. The discussion underscored that community input was used to validate priorities, clarify concerns, and adjust language rather than to reopen foundational policy debates.



*Figure 27: Task Force members voting on recommendations*

During the Task Force's recommendation meetings, Greg DesRoches introduced a motion on member recusal, stating: "I move that all New Town Task Force members who may directly or indirectly financially benefit from any proposed change to New Town Zoning made by this Task Force or otherwise have what might be considered a conflict of interest, recuse themselves and refrain from voting on any Task Force recommendations that may now or in the future place them in conflict." The motion was seconded by Brian England and failed with 4 in support and 10 opposed.

The final New Town Task Force meeting provided an opportunity to review all documentation and recommendations holistically with respect to the initial vision set forth by the Task Force. With this review, additional guidance was incorporated into recommendations pertaining to

the density cap and open space. In addition, Greg DesRoches introduced a motion for County staff to request an addendum to the Executive Order, stating: “Department of Planning and Zoning staff are to request the County Executive provide an addendum to the New Town Task Force such that the "Final Report" of the New Town Task Force - including any Dissent generated by one or more members of this Task Force - be delivered only as "Proposed Recommendations" to all Columbia Village Boards for review, consideration and response until May 1, 2027, at which time, the Report, Dissents, if any, and Responses, if any, be incorporated into the Final Report and be delivered to the County Executive and County Council as the actual Final Report of the Task Force.” The motion was seconded by Brian England and failed with 5 in support and 7 opposed.

The final recommendations by the Task Force are listed below with a consolidated table including in Appendix H.

### *Creating Another New Town District*

#### Recommendation 1 *Passes*

**Recommendation 1: Maintain an original petitioner’s ability to create a New Town district.**

Motion made by Renee DuBois and seconded by Greg DesRoches. Motion PASSES with eight in favor and four opposed.

### *PDP/CSP/FDP Structure*

#### Recommendation 2 *Passes*

**Recommendation 2: Seek to simplify the approval and development process within New Town district.**

Motion made by Tim May and seconded by Brian England. Motion PASSES with eleven in favor and two opposed.

#### Recommendation 3 *Passes*

**Recommendation 3: Standardize requirements by land use types across the FDPs.**

Motion made by Nicole Campbell and seconded by Fran LoPresti. Motion PASSES with thirteen in favor and one opposed.

#### Recommendation 4 *Passes*

**Recommendation 4: Remove CSPs as a step in the development process.**

Motion made by Nicole Campbell and seconded by Tim May. Motion PASSES with eight in favor and five opposed.

Recommendation 5A  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 5A:** Consolidate similar FDPs and their requirements.

Motion made by Nicole Campbell and seconded by Fran LoPresti. Motion PASSES with ten in favor and three opposed.

Recommendation 5B  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 5B:** Create a table of permitted uses by area for the FDPs.

Motion made by Nicole Campbell and seconded by Brian England. Motion PASSES with eleven in favor and two opposed.

Recommendation 6  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 6:** Expand the types of uses that can be approved administratively by DPZ.

Motion made by Ryan Hermann and seconded by Michael Golibersuch. Motion PASSES with seven in favor and four opposed.

Recommendation 7  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 7:** Identify most effective opportunities for public engagement and maintain them as a priority throughout the development process.

Motion made by Nicole Campbell and seconded by Sharon Cooper-Kerr. Motion PASSES with thirteen in favor and zero opposed.

*Defining Credited Open Space*

Recommendation 8A  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 8A:** Define open space in the New Town Zoning District to provide greater clarity of uses.

Motion made by Nicole Campbell and seconded by Tim May. Motion PASSES with nine in favor and one opposed.

Recommendation 8A  
Defining Language  
**Passes**

**Additional defining language:** It is further recommended to ensure the 36% open space requirement includes a definition of open space which recognizes the full range of recreational, environmental, cultural, and community-serving functions currently allowed including membership-based facilities and services which are found to promote the social welfare of the community.

Motion made by Brady Greer and seconded by Joan Lancos. Motion PASSES with eleven in favor and zero opposed.

Recommendation 8A  
Defining Language  
**Passes**

**Additional defining language:** It is further recommended that for the purposes of defined open space, including all sites considered environmentally sensitive or deemed conservation areas, installation of pedestrian and bicycle pathways, boardwalks, and linear parks shall be permitted as long as they are integrated into an open space master plan and meet applicable environmental standards.

Motion made by Renee DuBois and seconded by Karin Emery.  
Motion PASSES with eleven in favor and zero opposed.

Recommendation 8B  
**Fails**

**Recommendation 8B:** Align credited open space definition with other county zoning district definitions.

No motion was made. Motion fails.

Recommendation 9  
**Fails**

**Recommendation 9:** Maintain the current definition of open space in Section 125.0.A.8.e

Motion made by Ryan Hermann and seconded by Fran LoPresti.  
Motion fails with three in favor and six opposed.

Recommendation 10  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 10:** Maintain required 36% open space.

Motion made by Fran LoPresti and seconded by Renee DuBois.  
Motion PASSES with ten in favor and zero opposed.

Recommendation 11  
**Fails**

**Recommendation 11:** Ensure permanent protection of currently established credited open space areas.

No motion was made. Motion fails.

*Apartments Definition*

Recommendation 12  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 12:** Adjust the definition of apartments to align with other county zoning district definitions.

Motion made by Tim May and seconded by Ryan Hermann.  
Motion PASSES with seven in favor and three opposed.

Recommendation 13  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 13:** Create a new land use category for single family attached housing types.

Motion made by Fran LoPresti and seconded by Nicole Campbell.  
Motion PASSES with eight in favor and three opposed.

Recommendation 14  
Passes

**Recommendation 14:** Create a new land use category for diverse housing types, including missing middle housing types.

Motion made by Fran LoPresti and seconded by Sharon Cooper-Kerr. Motion PASSES with eight in favor and one opposed.

*Original Petitioner*

Recommendation 15  
Passes

**Recommendation 15:** Remove the role of the original petitioner to amend commercial FDPs.

Motion made by Nicole Campbell and seconded by Michael Golibersuch. Motion PASSES with eleven in favor and one opposed.

Recommendation 16  
Passes

**Recommendation 16:** If the role of the Original Petitioner is retained, then the County should review the potential for the Planning Board or another neutral entity to take up the role of the Original Petitioner.

It is further recommended that there is a review of prior reports in identifying the neutral entity for this role.

Motion made by Michael Golibersuch and seconded by Sharon Cooper-Kerr. Motion PASSES with ten in favor and three opposed.

*Downtown and Village Center Simplification*

Recommendation 17  
Passes

**Recommendation 17:** Simplify the development process for Village Center redevelopment.

Motion made by Ryan Hermann and seconded by Nicole Campbell. Motion PASSES with twelve in favor and one opposed.

Recommendation 18  
Passes

**Recommendation 18:** Simplify the development process for Downtown Columbia redevelopment.

Motion made by Nicole Campbell and seconded by Ryan Hermann. Motion PASSES with twelve in favor and one opposed.

Recommendation 19  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 19:** Reduce the number of public meetings required for redevelopment processes.

It is further recommended that public meetings are made more useful and informative for the public. Also, evaluate technology use for more efficiency.

Motion made by Nicole Campbell and seconded by Fran LoPresti. Motion PASSES with twelve in favor and one opposed.

*Density Cap Requirements*

Recommendation 20  
**Fails**

**Recommendation 20:** Maintain the density cap of 2.5 dwelling units per acre as is.

Motion made by Fran LoPresti and seconded Karin Emery. Motion FAILS with six in favor and nine opposed.

Recommendation 20A  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 20A:** It is recommended that the density cap for New Town should be evaluated to allow for new denser types of housing (as envisioned in “the General Plan”), for its conformance with covenants, and to identify the impacts to the residents of New Town Columbia.

Motion made by Fran LoPresti and seconded by Karin Emery. Motion PASSES with nine in favor and three opposed.

Recommendation 21  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 21:** Consider excluding village centers from the New Town wide density cap.

Motion made by Joan Lancos and seconded by Ian Kennedy. Motion PASSES with eleven in favor and two opposed.

*Land Use Percentage Requirements*

Recommendation 22  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 22:** Evaluate and consider adjusting the land use percentage requirements, outside of open space uses, in order to accommodate more diverse housing types.

Motion made by Joan Lancos and seconded by Sharon Cooper-Kerr. Motion PASSES with ten in favor and three opposed.

## *Moderate Income Housing Unit (MIHU) Requirements*

Recommendation 23  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 23: Encourage diversity of housing types throughout the New Town district.**

Motion made by Ryan Hermann and seconded by Brady Greer. Motion PASSES with ten in favor and two opposed.

Recommendation 24  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 24: Incentivize, rather than require, the provision of MIHUs.**

Motion made by Ryan Hermann and seconded by Brady Greer. Motion PASSES with nine in favor and one opposed.

Recommendation 25  
**Fails**

**Recommendation 25: Maintain the existing exemption from MIHUs in New Town.**

Motion made by Ryan Hermann and seconded by Fran LoPresti. Motion FAILS with six in favor and six opposed. With a tied vote, the motion fails because there is not a majority vote to pass.

## *Expansion of Uses, Materials, and Design Guidance*

Recommendation 26  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 26: Evaluate the expansion of the Design Advisory Panel role to review projects in New Town.**

Motion made by Michael Golibersuch and seconded by Nicole Campbell. Motion PASSES with eight in favor and four opposed.

Recommendation 27  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 27: Explore the creation of pattern books to incentivize the use of modern and sustainable materials. It is further recommended to consider fast track of approvals if a pattern book is followed to allow for a more simplified process.**

Motion made by Tim May and seconded by Nicole Campbell. Motion PASSES with eleven in favor and one opposed.

Recommendation 28A  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 28A: Incentivize and encourage universal design in New Town zoning.**

Motion made by Fran LoPresti and seconded by Greg DesRoches. Motion PASSES with twelve in favor and zero opposed.

Recommendation 28B  
**Passes**

**Recommendation 28B:** Incentivize and encourage accessibility in New Town zoning

Motion made by Fran LoPresti and seconded by Greg DesRoches. Motion PASSES with eleven in favor and zero opposed.

# CONCLUSION

The New Town Task Force undertook a fourteen-month effort to review the NT zoning district and its character-defining elements and assess whether the existing zoning structure could move Columbia forward in a clear, consistent manner that reflects the original vision of the planned community while effectively supporting the General Plan's long-range goals. The Task Force evaluated key topics related to County controlled zoning regulations for the NT zoning district, development processes, and planning frameworks, including Section 125 of the Howard County Zoning Code. The Task Force made recommendations in this report drawing from reviewing the code as it is codified today and public input. Additionally, the Task Force reviewed detailed comparisons of Columbia and other peer communities—drawing from their zoning frameworks, planning objectives, governance structures, evolution/adaptation, and community outcomes.

Through these efforts, the Task Force identified 28 recommendations that moved forward to final consideration through additional discussions and with the results from the Technical Survey. Through this process, several of the recommendations were separated into multiple parts for a resulting 32 recommendations to be voted upon. **The New Town Task Force completed the objectives of the Executive Orders and are moving 27 recommendations forward to the County for additional research and consideration.** These resulting 27 recommendations reflect a thoughtful and pragmatic approach to carrying New Town Columbia into the future. This report outlines the Task Force's final recommendations.

The New Town Task Force completed the objectives of the Executive Orders and have moved 27 recommendations forward to the County in this report for additional research and consideration. Below are highlights from the Recommendations Report and they include:

- consideration should be given to targeted NT zoning refinements rather than a structural overhaul as the zoning framework is sound. Any zoning changes should consider focusing on modernizing outdated provisions, clarifying intent, and improving usability;
- NT zoning flexibility should be maintained while improving clarity and predictability for future applicants, residents, and decision makers; and
- the County should evaluate ways to streamline the NT zoning processes to reduce ambiguity, and support reinvestment without compromising community character.

The recommendations made in this report reflect a thoughtful and pragmatic approach to carry New Town Columbia well into the future.

