



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

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Voice/Relay

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Subject: Planning Board Recommendations on the HoCo By Design General Plan and Route 1 Corridor Plan

To: Christiana Mercer Rigby, Council Chair
Deb Jung, Council Vice Chair
Opel Jones, Council Member
Liz Walsh, Council Member
David Yungmann, Council Member

From: Ed Coleman, Chair, Howard County Planning Board

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etc

Date: March 13, 2023

Background

HoCo By Design is the County's proposed general plan, a long-range policy guide that informs decisions on land use, transportation, economic development, community character, natural resources, housing choices and infrastructure over the next twenty years. HoCo By Design aspires to improve upon its predecessor, PlanHoward 2030, with a four-pronged, aspirational approach towards greater equity, predictability, sustainability and achievability.

The Route 1 Corridor master planning initiative was launched in 2018 and subsequently woven into HoCo By Design. The proposed Route 1 Corridor Plan should be read as a supplement to the broader policies and implementing actions of HoCo By Design.

Process

Title 16, Subtitle 9, Section 16.900(j)(1)(iii) of the Howard County Code requires the Planning Board to prepare a recommendation and report to the County Council on proposed adoption of the County's general plan. The clause states that:

A bill proposing the adoption and amendment of the Comprehensive General Plan, regulations regarding the Planning and Zoning of the County, or the zoning map or zoning regulations shall not be added to the Council's legislative agenda until the County Council has received: a.) A final technical staff report and recommendation from the Department of Planning and Zoning; and b.) A recommendation and report from the Planning Board.

In accordance with the regulations, the Planning Board held a public hearing to consider HoCo By Design, the County's proposed general plan update, which include a Plan for the Route 1 Corridor on March 9, 2023. The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) posted its Technical Staff Report on HoCo By Design on the Planning Board webpage on February 23, 2023, two weeks prior to the Planning Board hearing.

At that meeting, DPZ staff presented an overview of HoCo By Design and the process used to develop the plan; including extensive public engagement and data analysis over a multi-year timeframe. DPZ also provided an overview of the Route 1 Corridor Plan and the process that led to its development.

The Planning Board members then received public testimony from 16 individuals and/or organizations and held a work session following public testimony. A recording of the proceeding is posted at: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/boards-commissions/planning-board>.

Planning Board Recommendations for HoCo By Design and the Route 1 Corridor Plan

During the work session, the Planning Board complimented the thoroughness of the plan and the process. They expressed appreciation for the edits the Department of Planning and Zoning made to the draft in direct response to public feedback, which was summarized in a table of plan changes.

Board members observed two primary issues raised by the community: housing and schools. They noted that community members expressed opposing viewpoints on residential growth, accessory dwelling units, missing middle housing, and expansion of the Planned Service Area (PSA). They recognized consensus around retaining industrial land along the Route 1 Corridor. For Gateway, they suggested that amenities, such as open space, should be identified through the upcoming master plan. They also noted that Gateway should be integrated with the rest of Columbia.

The Board discussed the housing allocation chart included in the Managing Growth chapter. They noted that multiple community members advocated for increasing the number of units in the chart to address housing demand, specifically in relation to the targets found in the Housing Opportunities Master Plan. One board member suggested that an increase to the total number of units should be accompanied by a percentage requirement for affordable units, and recommended 25%.

The Board also suggested that affordable housing should be dispersed to avoid concentration in any one area. They noted that significant expansion of the PSA would face substantial costs. The Board observed that the form and design of housing will be key to adding new housing types, such as missing middle and accessory dwelling units, in existing neighborhoods.

Board members discussed the challenges in addressing public schools through the general plan, since the document is meant to offer aspirational goals. They suggested that the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) task force, which meets following adoption of the general plan, would be best suited to evaluate concerns raised by community members. They also observed that prekindergarten programs, if located in facilities other than schools, could open up capacity in schools. The Board noted that new housing units built as a result of the general plan would not come online for many years, providing time for the school system to plan for facilities.

Based on the information presented, public testimony provided, and the Board's discussion, Mr. Coleman made a motion that the Board recommend the County Council approve HoCo By Design and that the Council increase the housing allocation units with an emphasis on providing affordable housing in line with the recommendations of the Housing Opportunities Master Plan. Mr. McAliley seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.