

Introduced \_\_\_\_\_  
Public Hearing \_\_\_\_\_  
Council Action \_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Action \_\_\_\_\_  
Effective Date \_\_\_\_\_

## County Council of Howard County, Maryland

2026 Legislative Session

Legislative Day No. 5

### Bill No. 24 -2026 (ZRA-222)

**Introduced by:** The Chairperson at the request of 10052 Washington Boulevard, LLC.

**SHORT TITLE:** Optional Design Projects – Route 1 Corridor

**AN ACT** amending the Howard County Zoning Regulations to change the definition of “Optional Design Project”; add a new subsection in Section 128.0 entitled “Optional Design Projects in Route 1 Corridor”; expanding eligibility for the Optional Design Project process to certain commercial properties along Route 1; adding additional use criteria; and generally related to the Optional Design Project process.

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Introduced and read first time \_\_\_\_\_, 2026. Ordered posted and hearing scheduled.

By order \_\_\_\_\_  
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

Having been posted and notice of time & place of hearing & title of Bill having been published according to Charter, the Bill was read for a second time at a public hearing on \_\_\_\_\_, 2026.

By order \_\_\_\_\_  
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

This Bill was read the third time on \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 and Passed \_\_\_\_, Passed with amendments \_\_\_\_\_, Failed \_\_\_\_\_.

By order \_\_\_\_\_  
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

Sealed with the County Seal and presented to the County Executive for approval this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 at \_\_\_ a.m./p.m.

By order \_\_\_\_\_  
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

Approved by the County Executive \_\_\_\_\_, 2026

\_\_\_\_\_  
Calvin Ball, County Executive

NOTE: [[text in brackets]] indicates deletions from existing law; TEXT IN SMALL CAPITALS indicates additions to existing law; ~~Strike-out~~ indicates material deleted by amendment; Underlining indicates material added by amendment.

1 **Section 1. Be It Enacted** by the County Council of Howard County, Maryland, that the Howard  
2 County Zoning Regulations are amended as follows:

3 *By amending:*

4 *Section 103.0.- “Definitions”*

5 *To amend the definition of “Optional Design Project”*

6  
7 *By adding:*

8 *Section 128.0. - “Supplementary Zoning District Regulations”*

9 *New Subsection P. - “Optional Design Projects in Route 1 Corridor”*

10  
11 **Howard County Zoning Regulations**

12 **Section 103.0 Definitions**

13 **O**

14 Optional Design Project: [[The equivalent of a Planned Unit Development in a CR Zoning  
15 District, an]] AN Optional Design Project is an alternative development proposal wherein the  
16 permitted land uses, the associated land use regulations, the development design, and other  
17 intended characteristics for the development site are initially drafted through a deliberative  
18 planning process between the developer and the Department of Planning and Zoning, and  
19 ultimately subject to final approval by the Planning Board.

20  
21 **Section 128.0 – Supplementary Zoning District Regulations**

22 **P. OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECTS IN ROUTE 1 CORRIDOR**

23 **1. PURPOSE AND APPLICABILITY.**

24 THE PURPOSE OF THIS SUBSECTION IS TO EXPAND THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PROCESS  
25 TO ALL COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES FRONTING U.S. ROUTE 1, WITH A TOTAL LOT AREA OF  
26 LESS THAN TEN (10) ACRES. THE INTENT OF THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PROCESS IS TO  
27 SERVE AS A CATALYST FOR REINVESTMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT ALONG THE ROUTE 1  
28 CORRIDOR BY ENCOURAGING INNOVATIVE, HIGH-QUALITY DESIGN AND COORDINATED SITE  
29 PLANNING. OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECTS PROMOTE INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT THAT

1 REFLECTS THE GOALS AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES OF THE ROUTE 1 CORRIDOR DESIGN  
2 MANUAL AND ADVANCES HOWARD COUNTY'S ADOPTED REVITALIZATION AND ECONOMIC  
3 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES. THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PROCESS PROVIDES FOR  
4 INDIVIDUALIZED AND COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF PROJECT PROPOSALS TO ENCOURAGE  
5 CREATIVE REDEVELOPMENT THAT RESPONDS TO SITE-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS AND CONTEXT,  
6 MINIMIZES ISOLATED OR DISCONNECTED BUILDINGS AND PAD SITES, AND ACHIEVES  
7 COHESIVE, CONTEXT SENSITIVE DESIGN OUTCOMES THAT ENHANCE THE CHARACTER AND  
8 FUNCTIONALITY OF THE ROUTE 1 CORRIDOR.

9  
10 2. CONDITIONS OF ELIGIBILITY.

11 THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PROCESS PRESCRIBED IN THIS SECTION SHALL BE  
12 PERMITTED ONLY WHEN THE PROPOSED PROJECT:

- 13 A. BRINGS THE SITE INTO CONFORMANCE WITH THE ROUTE 1 MANUAL AND  
14 CURRENT SITE DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS;
- 15 B. CONSISTS OF A PARCEL OR ASSEMBLAGE OF PARCELS HAVING A TOTAL LOT AREA  
16 OF LESS THAN TEN (10) ACRES;
- 17 C. FRONTS ON U.S. ROUTE 1; AND
- 18 D. SATISFIES THE PURPOSE SET FORTH IN SECTION 128.0.P.1.

19  
20 3. PROCEDURE FOR APPROVAL OF AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT.

21 PROJECTS THAT SATISFY THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS OF SECTION 128.0.P.2 MAY  
22 PROCEED UNDER THE FOLLOWING OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PROCESS:

- 23 A. THE OWNER OF AN INTEREST IN A TRACT OF LAND MAY SUBMIT AN APPLICATION  
24 FOR AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT. PRIOR TO PREPARING A SPECIFIC PLAN AND  
25 SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION, THE PETITIONER IS ENCOURAGED TO MEET WITH  
26 THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING ON AN INFORMAL BASIS TO  
27 DISCUSS THE OVERALL CONCEPT FOR THE INTENDED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT.
- 28 B. PRIOR TO FILING A FORMAL APPLICATION FOR AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT,  
29 THE PETITIONER SHALL PRESENT THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PLAN TO THE  
30 DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL FOR EVALUATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE  
31 PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED IN SECTION 16.1500 OF THE HOWARD COUNTY

1 CODE. THE DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL'S RECOMMENDATIONS SHALL BE  
2 INCLUDED IN THE TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT PRODUCED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF  
3 PLANNING AND ZONING AND FORWARDED TO THE PLANNING BOARD FOR ITS  
4 CONSIDERATION OF THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT.

5 C. THE FORMAL APPLICATION SHALL BE SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
6 PLANNING AND ZONING AND SHALL INCLUDE:

7 (1) AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PLAN WHICH INCLUDES SHEETS  
8 DEPICTING ALL EXISTING NATURAL AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENT FEATURES  
9 OF THE LAND AREA TO BE INCLUDED IN THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT,  
10 AND ALSO DEPICTING AND/OR LISTING, AS MAY BE APPROPRIATE, THE  
11 FOLLOWING FOR THE PROPOSED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT:

12 (A) A BOUNDARY SURVEY;

13 (B) PERMITTED USES;

14 (C) ACCESSORY USES;

15 (D) BUILDINGS;

16 (E) STRUCTURES;

17 (F) PARKING AREAS AND NUMBER OF PARKING SPACES;

18 (G) POINTS AND WIDTHS OF VEHICULAR INGRESS AND EGRESS;

19 (H) ON-SITE PEDESTRIAN-RELATED FEATURES AND CONNECTIONS TO  
20 OFF-SITE PEDESTRIAN-RELATED FEATURES;

21 (I) LANDSCAPING;

22 (J) HARDSCAPING;

23 (K) RETAINED NATURAL FEATURES SUCH AS WETLANDS, STEEP  
24 SLOPES, AND TREE AND FOREST COVER;

25 (L) ARCHITECTURAL ELEVATIONS OF ALL SIDES OF ALL BUILDINGS  
26 AND SIGNIFICANT STRUCTURES WITH EXTERIOR MATERIALS  
27 SPECIFIED;

28 (M) EXTERIOR LIGHTING PLAN WITH LIGHTING STRUCTURES AND  
29 LIGHT SOURCES GIVEN ON SPECIFIC LIGHTING PRODUCT  
30 INFORMATION SHEETS; AND/OR

1 (N) INFORMATION ON THE ADJOINING PROPERTIES, INCLUDING THE  
2 OWNER'S NAME, ZONING, EXISTING USE, AND EXISTING SITE  
3 IMPROVEMENTS.

4 (2) A WRITTEN JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT THAT EXPRESSES IN DETAIL:

5 (A) HOW THE PROPOSED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT CONFORMS TO  
6 THE PURPOSE STATEMENT IN SECTION 128.0.P.1;

7 (B) HOW THE PROPOSED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT WILL ENHANCE  
8 AND NOT OVERWHELM THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY;

9 (C) HOW THE PROPOSED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT WILL BE A  
10 BENEFIT TO HOWARD COUNTY THAT IS GREATER THAN A  
11 CONVENTIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE PROPERTY USING THE  
12 UNDERLYING ZONING DISTRICT REGULATIONS; AND

13 (D) SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO  
14 MARKET STUDIES AND TRAFFIC STUDIES.

15 D. THE SUBMITTED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT APPLICATION WILL BE ASSIGNED AN  
16 OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT CASE NUMBER AND THE APPLICATION SHALL BE  
17 SUBJECT TO THE STANDARD PRELIMINARY REVIEW PROCESS CONDUCTED FOR  
18 ALL ZONING-RELATED CASES TO DETERMINE IF THE INFORMATION IN THE  
19 APPLICATION MATERIALS IS SUFFICIENT TO ADEQUATELY EVALUATE THE  
20 PROPOSAL. IF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING DETERMINES THAT  
21 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND/OR CLARIFICATION IS NEEDED, IT SHALL SO  
22 NOTIFY THE APPLICANT IN WRITING WITHIN 14 DAYS OF RECEIVING THE  
23 APPLICATION. ONCE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT APPLICATION  
24 INFORMATION IS DETERMINED TO BE SUFFICIENT FOR THE INITIAL FORMAL  
25 EVALUATION, THE CASE SHALL BE CONSIDERED OFFICIALLY ACCEPTED FOR  
26 SCHEDULING PURPOSES.

27 E. WITHIN 14 DAYS OF OFFICIALLY ACCEPTING THE CASE FOR SCHEDULING  
28 PURPOSES, THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING SHALL SCHEDULE A  
29 REQUIRED FORMAL PROJECT MEETING WITH THE PETITIONER AND/OR THE  
30 PETITIONER'S PROJECT TEAM IF:

1 (1) THE PETITIONER HAS NOT HELD INFORMAL MEETINGS WITH THE  
2 DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING TO DISCUSS THE OVERALL  
3 CONCEPT FOR THE INTENDED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PRIOR TO  
4 SUBMITTING THE FORMAL APPLICATION, OR

5 (2) THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING HAS CONCERNS  
6 REGARDING THE USE, DESIGN, AND OR SCOPE OF THE OPTIONAL DESIGN  
7 PROJECT THAT HAVE CHANGED FROM WHAT WAS DISCUSSED, INDICATED,  
8 AND/OR SHOWN DURING THE INFORMAL MEETING(S).

9 F. ONCE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT IS DETERMINED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF  
10 PLANNING AND ZONING TO BE SUITABLY IN CONFORMANCE WITH THE PURPOSE  
11 STATEMENT IN SECTION 128.0.P.1, AT THE DISCRETION OF THE PETITIONER, THE  
12 PETITIONER MAY SCHEDULE TO HAVE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT BE  
13 REVIEWED BY THE SUBDIVISION REVIEW COMMITTEE (SRC) AT A REGULARLY  
14 SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE SRC. THE PURPOSE OF THIS OPTIONAL SRC  
15 REVIEW WOULD BE FOR THE PETITIONER TO HAVE ADVANCE NOTICE OF ANY  
16 ISSUES IN THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT THAT WOULD NOT COMPLY WITH ALL  
17 TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS OF ANY OF THE REVIEWING AGENCIES.

18 G. AT THE POINT THAT THE PETITIONER DECIDES TO PROCEED WITH THE OPTIONAL  
19 DESIGN PROJECT AND SO NOTIFIES THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND  
20 ZONING, THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING SHALL SCHEDULE THE  
21 OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT FOR A PLANNING BOARD HEARING. THE  
22 DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING SHALL PREPARE A TECHNICAL STAFF  
23 REPORT ON THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT, AND FORMALLY ISSUE THIS  
24 TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT AT LEAST TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO THE SCHEDULED  
25 PLANNING BOARD HEARING.

26 H. THE PLANNING BOARD SHALL HOLD ITS PUBLIC HEARING ON THE OPTIONAL  
27 DESIGN PROJECT AND MAY TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION ANY COMMENTS  
28 PRESENTED AT THAT PUBLIC HEARING. THE PLANNING BOARD MAY:

29 (1) APPROVE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT AS PROPOSED, BASED UPON  
30 FINDINGS THAT THE PROPOSED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT WILL  
31 ACCOMPLISH THE PURPOSES OF SECTION 128.0.P.1;

1 (2) APPROVE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT WITH REVISIONS OR  
2 CONDITIONS, BASED UPON FINDINGS THAT THE REVISED OPTIONAL  
3 DESIGN PROJECT WILL ACCOMPLISH THE PURPOSES OF SECTION  
4 128.0.P.1; OR

5 (3) DENY THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT.

6 I. THE PLANNING BOARD SHALL ISSUE ITS FORMAL DECISION ON THE OPTIONAL  
7 DESIGN PROJECT IN A DECISION AND ORDER. IF THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT  
8 IS APPROVED, ALL APPROVED EXHIBITS OF THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT SHALL  
9 BE STAMPED AS APPROVED BY THE PLANNING BOARD AND SIGNED BY THE  
10 PLANNING BOARD CHAIRPERSON.

11 J. NO SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN SHALL BE APPROVED FOR AN OPTIONAL DESIGN  
12 PROJECT UNLESS THE SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONFORMS SUBSTANTIALLY TO  
13 ALL EXHIBITS OF THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT AS APPROVED BY THE  
14 PLANNING BOARD. EXCEPT AS PROVIDED BELOW FOR PRE-AUTHORIZED MINOR  
15 MODIFICATIONS, ANY MODIFICATIONS TO ANY PLANNING BOARD APPROVED  
16 FEATURES OF THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT MUST BE APPROVED BY THE  
17 PLANNING BOARD:

18 (1) MINOR ADDITIONS TO STRUCTURES, WITH A FLOOR AREA NO LARGER  
19 THAN 10% OF THE EXISTING FLOOR AREA OF THE MAIN FLOOR, NOT TO  
20 EXCEED 5,000 SQUARE FEET.

21 (2) MINOR NEW ACCESSORY STRUCTURES IF THE LOCATION DOES NOT  
22 INTERFERE WITH THE EXISTING APPROVED SITE LAYOUT (E.G.  
23 CIRCULATION, PARKING, LOADING, STORM WATER MANAGEMENT  
24 FACILITIES, OPEN SPACE, LANDSCAPING OR BUFFERING).

25 (3) MINOR ADDITIONS TO PARKING LOTS COMPRISING NO MORE THAN 25%  
26 OF THE ORIGINAL NUMBER OF PARKING SPACES REQUIRED, NOT TO  
27 EXCEED 25 SPACES.

28 (4) CLEARING OR GRADING THAT DOES NOT EXCEED 5,000 SQUARE FEET IN  
29 AREA.

1 (5) SIMILAR MINOR MODIFICATIONS AS DETERMINED BY THE DEPARTMENT  
2 OF PLANNING AND ZONING, INCLUDING REDUCTIONS IN THE NUMBER OF  
3 RESIDENTIAL UNITS AND THE INTENSITY OF THE UNIT MIX.  
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5 4. ADDITIONAL USES PERMITTED FOR OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECTS.

6 OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECTS THAT MEET THE CONDITIONS OF ELIGIBILITY SET FORTH IN  
7 SECTION 128.0.P.2 SHALL BE ELIGIBLE TO INCLUDE ANY USES SET FORTH IN THIS SECTION:

8 A. USES PERMITTED AS A MATTER OF RIGHT IN AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT

9 (1) EXCEPT FOR THOSE EXCLUDED USES LISTED IN SECTION 128.0.P.4.B  
10 BELOW, ALL OTHER USE CATEGORIES PERMITTED AS A MATTER OF RIGHT  
11 IN THE POR, B-1, AND B-2 DISTRICTS ARE PERMITTED AS A MATTER OF  
12 RIGHT, PROVIDED THAT THE USE CATEGORIES ARE AUTHORIZED IN AN  
13 APPROVED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT.

14 (2) SPECIAL USE CATEGORIES THAT ARE NOT SPECIFICALLY PERMITTED AS A  
15 MATTER OF RIGHT IN THE POR, B-1, AND B-2 DISTRICTS, BUT ARE  
16 CONSIDERED TO BE EQUIVALENT TO AND/OR COMPATIBLE WITH THE  
17 PERMITTED USE CATEGORIES, PROVIDED THAT THE SPECIAL USE  
18 CATEGORIES ARE AUTHORIZED IN AN APPROVED OPTIONAL DESIGN  
19 PROJECT AND PROVIDED THAT THE SPECIAL USE CATEGORIES ARE NOT  
20 USES LISTED IN SECTION 128.0.P.4.B BELOW.

21 B. EXCLUDED USES

22 (1) ADULT LIVE ENTERTAINMENT ESTABLISHMENTS.

23 (2) BUS TERMINALS.

24 (3) DWELLINGS, EXCEPT AS MAY BE PERMITTED UNDER SECTION  
25 128.0.P.4.C.

26 (4) FUNERAL HOMES AND MORTUARIES.

27 (5) MOTOR VEHICLE, CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT AND FARM EQUIPMENT  
28 MAINTENANCE, REPAIR AND PAINTING FACILITIES, INCLUDING FULL  
29 BODY REPAIR AND INCIDENTAL SALE OF PARTS.

30 (6) MOTOR VEHICLE, CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT AND FARM EQUIPMENT  
31 SALES.

- 1 (7) MOTOR VEHICLE INSPECTION STATIONS.
- 2 (8) MOTOR VEHICLE PARTS OR TIRE STORE, INCLUDING INSTALLATION
- 3 FACILITIES.
- 4 (9) MOTOR VEHICLE TOWING AND STORAGE FACILITIES.
- 5 (10) NURSING HOMES AND RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES.
- 6 (11) PRIVATE PARKS, SWIMMING POOLS, PLAYGROUNDS, ATHLETIC FIELDS,
- 7 TENNIS COURTS, BASKETBALL COURTS, AND SIMILAR PRIVATE,
- 8 NONCOMMERCIAL RECREATION FACILITIES.
- 9 (12) RELIGIOUS FACILITIES, STRUCTURES AND LAND USED PRIMARILY FOR
- 10 RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES.
- 11 (13) RETAIL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICE USES WHICH INCLUDE DRIVE-
- 12 THROUGH SERVICE, EXCEPT AS MAY BE PERMITTED UNDER SECTION
- 13 128.0.P.4.c.
- 14 (14) SCHOOLS, PRIVATE ACADEMIC, INCLUDING COLLEGES AND
- 15 UNIVERSITIES, EXCEPT AS MAY BE PERMITTED UNDER SECTION
- 16 128.0.P.4.c.
- 17 (15) VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS.

18 C. INTEGRATED-DESIGN USES SUBJECT TO AUTHORIZATION

19 THE FOLLOWING USES MAY BE AUTHORIZED AS PERMITTED USES IN ANY  
20 OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECTS THAT MEET THE AFOREMENTIONED CONDITIONS OF  
21 ELIGIBILITY, PROVIDED THAT IT IS FOUND THAT THEY ARE CREATIVELY  
22 INTEGRATED INTO THE PROJECT'S ARCHITECTURAL AND SITE DESIGN AND ARE  
23 SPECIFICALLY APPROVED IN THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT.

- 24 (1) MOTOR VEHICLE FUELING FACILITY.
- 25 (2) RETAIL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICE USES WHICH INCLUDE DRIVE-
- 26 THROUGH SERVICE.
- 27 (3) SCHOOLS, PRIVATE ACADEMIC, INCLUDING COLLEGES AND
- 28 UNIVERSITIES.

29 D. ACCESSORY USES IN AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT

30 ONLY AS SPECIFICALLY ESTABLISHED WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE OPTIONAL  
31 DESIGN PROJECT.

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5. OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT BULK REGULATIONS  
AS SPECIFICALLY ESTABLISHED WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT,  
WITH THE EXCEPTION THAT THE MAXIMUM HEIGHT OF ANY STRUCTURE SHALL NOT EXCEED  
65 FEET.

*Section 2. And Be It Further Enacted by the County Council of Howard County, Maryland that  
this Act shall become effective 61 days after its enactment.*