

Date: September 24, 2026

To: Brandee Ganz, Chief Administrative Officer
Department of County Administration

From: Yosef Kebede, P.E., Director, Floodplain Administrator
Department of Public Works

Signed by:

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Subject: Proposed Adoption of Updated Floodplain Management Ordinance (Title 16, Subtitle 7)

The Department of Public Works (DPW), in coordination with the Department of Inspections, Licenses & Permits (DILP) and the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ), has completed a comprehensive update to Howard County's Floodplain Management Ordinance (Title 16, Subtitle 7). This effort aligns County code with current Federal and State requirements, incorporates new locally developed floodplain data, and modernizes regulatory language to better protect life, property, and public infrastructure.

The intent of the proposed legislation is to adopt Howard County's updated Floodplain Management Ordinance based on the Maryland Model Floodplain Ordinance and recent Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidance, while preserving and clarifying existing County-specific standards. This update supports continued compliance with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), maintains eligibility for FEMA funding, and reflects lessons learned from recent flood events.

Major changes and amendments include:

1. Incorporation of Updated Floodplain Mapping and Data

The ordinance adopts the latest FEMA Flood Insurance Study (FIS), Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), and Howard County Floodplains developed in 2025 and 2026 using detailed study and Base Level Engineering methods. This ensures the County uses the most accurate flood hazard information available.

2. Clarification of Roles and Responsibilities

Duties of the Floodplain Administrator and supporting agencies (DPW, DILP, DPZ) have been updated for clarity, consistency, and operational accuracy. These revisions reflect current practice and ensure that each agency's responsibilities are clearly defined in areas such as permit review, inspections, map changes, and enforcement.

3. Expanded and Updated Definitions

Numerous definitions were revised or added, including Accessory Structures, Agricultural Structures, Flood Protection Setback, Base Flood Elevation, Special Flood Hazard Areas, Substantial Improvement, and others. These updates align the County with State requirements, FEMA Technical Bulletins, and NFIP standards, while also clarifying how County departments interpret and apply key terms.

4. Permit Process Modernization

The ordinance clarifies permit requirements for all development in Special Flood Hazard Areas, including elevating structures, using fill, placing accessory structures, making additions, and altering watercourses. It strengthens application requirements, including elevation certificates and hydrologic and hydraulic analyses where required.

5. **Revisions to Standards for Construction in Flood Hazard Areas**

Requirements for residential and nonresidential construction were updated to reflect modern building code standards, including elevation requirements, limitations on fill, flood openings, mechanical/electrical system placement, and use of flood damage-resistant materials. Additional protections were added for critical and essential facilities.

6. **Accessory Structures and Agricultural Structures**

The updates clarify what types of structures qualify as accessory or agricultural, consistent with County zoning regulations and FEMA guidance. Requirements now specify when variances are required, applicable size limitations, and construction standards for these structures.

7. **Updates to Procedures for Variances and Appeals**

The variance section has been significantly reorganized to align with NFIP criteria, including hardship standards, limitations on variance eligibility, requirements for properties in the Tiber Branch Watershed, and documentation obligations for applicants and the County.

8. **Enhanced Enforcement Provisions**

The ordinance strengthens violation and enforcement procedures, including stop-work orders, penalties, required corrective actions, and record-keeping expectations, consistent with County code and NFIP program requirements.

Fiscal Impact

After adoption of the updated Floodplain Management Ordinance, additional forms to document permit applications and reviews for development in floodplains will be established, however additional fees will not be necessary. The revisions do not require additional staff and can be implemented within existing workflows. Training needs will be managed through normal departmental processes.

If you have any questions or need additional detail, please feel free to contact me at extension x4407.

cc:

Robert J. Frances, P.E., Director, DILP

Don Mock, P.E., Chief of Plan Review, DILP

Lynda Eisenberg, Director, DPZ

James Witmer, P.E., Chief Development Engineering Division, DPZ

Mark Richmond, P.E., Chief Stormwater Management Division, DPW

Christine Lowe, P.E., CFM, DPW

Jennifer Sager, County Administration

Howard County Government, Calvin Ball, County Executive