



# HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

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Voice/Relay

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**Subject:** Testimony for Council Resolution – 89-2020 – HoCo By Design General Plan Guidelines: A Strategic Framework

**To:** Lonnie R. Robbins  
Chief Administrative Officer

**From:** Amy Gowan, Director <sup>DS</sup>  
Department of Planning and Zoning *AG*

**Date:** June 2, 2020

The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) supports CR89-2020, a resolution adopting HoCo By Design General Plan Guidelines: A Strategic Framework. The Guidelines will be used by DPZ to prepare and revise the General Plan.

## General Plan Background

The current General Plan, *PlanHoward 2030*, was adopted in 2012, and serves as the comprehensive long-range plan for all of Howard County. It guides decisions related to development, land preservation, changing demographic and employment trends, neighborhood sustainability, capital projects, County services and other key issues. The Plan is the basis for land use decisions made by the Planning Board, County Council, and Zoning Board.

The Howard County General Plan typically looks 20 years into the future and is updated approximately every 10 years, the mid-point of the planning timeframe. The County has made General Plan updates in 1960, 1971, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2012. While the Plan was scheduled for an update in 2022, the County has accelerated the Plan's development to address issues raised during a comprehensive assessment of the County's zoning and land development regulations in 2017-2018. The assessment evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the County's land development regulations and made recommendations about how they may be made more user-friendly, internally consistent and better aligned with planning goals. The community was engaged throughout the assessment process and provided over 700 comments, many of which were determined would be best addressed in the General Plan update.

## General Plan Guidelines – Howard County Code

Title 16, Subtitle 9, Section 16.900(j)(4) of the Howard County Code requires the Planning Board to prepare general guidelines to be used by DPZ for preparing and/or revising the County's General Plan. The code further states that County Council shall adopt the guidelines by resolution prior to the formulation of the general plan utilizing these guidelines.

## HoCo By Design General Plan Guidelines - Content

The HoCo By Design General Plan Guidelines recommended by the Planning Board are focused on establishing a planning process at a very early stage, rather than establishing a specific set of policy objectives. They provide a framework for collecting and organizing information to develop the County's new General Plan. They also

emphasize a comprehensive strategy to stakeholder engagement; highlight the value of data and analysis to promote more informed decision making; and encourage strategies that sustain the flow of information to stakeholders throughout the planning process. Additionally, these Guidelines present an organizational framework for the Plan which includes: Areas to Preserve, Areas to Enhance, Areas to Transform, and Areas to Strengthen.

The Guidelines were developed based upon: community input from the development regulations assessment; stakeholder interviews; existing Howard County plans and policies; best practices used around the country; and recommendations provided by the Planning Board at a workshop held on April 9, 2020.

On May 7, 2020 the Planning Board unanimously recommended approval of the General Plan Guidelines that were subsequently filed as CR-89-2020.

### **Stakeholder Engagement and COVID-19**

To protect public health and safety, the project team will be regularly re-evaluating the HoCo By Design public engagement plan during the pandemic to determine how to best move forward with stakeholder engagement. The plan includes a variety of virtual engagement opportunities that offer alternatives to in-person activities. In response to the evolving nature of the pandemic, DPZ has updated the Guidelines since the Planning Board Hearing to provide additional information on the impacts of social distancing on public engagement. Based on discussion with the Planning Board at the May 7, 2020 meeting, pages 34 and 35 were added to the Draft to address some of the questions raised at that meeting.

DPZ has been working with the consultant team to identify best practices for engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, while adhering to social distancing requirements. While the progression of the pandemic will influence what type of engagement can be done and when, DPZ intends to launch a collaborate engagement process that can adapt as circumstances change.

### **Fiscal Impact**

There are no additional fiscal impacts associated with this action.

The County has an active contract with City Explained, Inc. (CEI), the consultant hired to manage the General Plan Update. The contract was initiated in January 2020 and includes the entire project scope and budget. The contract has been funded with funds repurposed from various earmarks and departmental budget surpluses from FY14-18. Existing staff will be used to manage the contract, conduct assigned analysis and support the consultants.

DPZ appreciates Council's consideration of CR-89-20, as first step in updating the County's General Plan. The approach outlined in the proposed Guidelines provides a roadmap for the update process so that it proceeds in an open, transparent, inclusive and thoughtful manner.

cc: Sameer Sidh, Chief of Staff  
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Kristin O'Connor, Division Chief, Comprehensive and Community Planning, DPZ