



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

3430 Court House Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-2350

Voice/Relay

Amy Gowan, Director

FAX 410-313-3467

TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT

Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan

Planning Board Meeting of October 15, 2020

Petitioner: Amy Gowan, Director, Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ)

DPZ Contacts: *Kate Bolinger, Planning Supervisor, kbolinger@howardcountymd.gov*
Peter Conrad, Deputy Director, pconrad@howardcountymd.gov
410-313-2350

Request: Request of the Planning Board to hold a public meeting for input and recommendation to the County Council on an amendment to *PlanHoward 2030*, the general plan for Howard County, to incorporate the Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan (the Plan) by reference.

Description: The proposed amendment to *PlanHoward 2030* includes new text to incorporate the Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan by reference. If the amendment is approved, *PlanHoward 2030* text will be amended in the first page of the Executive Summary. (Refer to exhibit A and exhibit B for copies of the Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan and the proposed amendment, respectively.)

The Plan provides policies and implementing actions for protecting and enhancing flood-impacted Ellicott City and the surrounding Tiber-Hudson Watershed. To accomplish this, the plan integrates strategies for community character and placemaking, flood mitigation, environmental stewardship, economic development and transportation and parking frameworks. Strategies are then illustrated through options for specific geographic areas including streetscapes, riverfront, lower and upper main, Ellicott Mills gateway, the West End and the courthouse areas. The plan is guided by and builds upon the EC Safe and Sound plan currently underway.

The EC Safe and Sound plan is a multi-phase plan built around four primary focus areas: ensuring public safety, supporting business and property owners, maintaining Ellicott City's historic charm, and developing a more inclusive, community-driven process. The EC Safe and Sound plan provides the framework for flood mitigation projects that will increase the watershed's retention capacity and will improve water conveyance.

While the EC Safe and Sound flood mitigation plan serves as the foundation for the master plan, the flood mitigation plan—and associated Section 106 process—is on a separate, yet parallel track. The master plan is likely to be adopted prior to the resolution of the Section 106 process and is distinct in the following ways:

- **Flexible Document:** The master plan is intended to be a fluid, flexible document containing a menu of options with policies and goals that are designed to be adaptable.
- **Early Guidance:** The master plan offers early guidance on design for projects such as the lower main channel, but the master plan is not meant to represent the final design or only design option for the project. If some element of the flood mitigation plan does not come to fruition, the overall comprehensive nature of the master plan—its goals, desired outcomes and policies—should be looked upon for guidance.
- **Detailed Building Information:** The master plan is not intended to include detailed information on the impacted buildings (history, mitigation options, etc.). This information will be included as part of the Section 106 process.

Background:

Ellicott City is an historic community in Howard County, Maryland, located at the confluence of multiple tributaries that feed into the Patapsco River. The community is steeped in history, with much of its original architecture intact. Notable for its connections to the National Road, the original B&O Railroad line and rich mill heritage, the unincorporated town traces its origins to 1772. Today, Ellicott City is a regional tourism destination, a center for entrepreneurial endeavors, and a nationally significant active historic district. These unique characteristics warranted a highly context-sensitive approach to planning and urban design provided in this master plan.

The planning effort was initiated in 2017 following a deadly, historic flash flood which devastated the town in 2016. After the initial emergency response, a series of community action groups were developed to begin addressing the town’s flood-prone nature. Numerous idea-generating workshops were held with focus groups and the general public, which identified potential strategies for flood mitigation and improved public amenities in town. The Plan was underway for approximately one year and nearing completion when a second devastating flash flood occurred in May 2018.

The Plan addresses a complex set of inter-related challenges, including the opportunity to invest in attractive amenity spaces while being sensitive to the community’s rich history. The watershed-wide recommendations directly respond to the two historic floods and the County’s vision for a future Ellicott City that exists in closer balance with the hydraulic forces that have shaped the town through the generations. Though Ellicott City will never be without flooding risk, the recommendations in the Plan will help generate a more resilient response to flood events should they occur again in the future.

Public Outreach:

The Plan is the result of a multi-year outreach process. Since launching the plan in May of 2017, DPZ has hosted eight public workshops to shape the vision, gather input on emerging ideas, and review the draft plan. The eighth and final public workshop, held in August 2020, was held virtually as a result of public health measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

In addition to meetings, the public was invited to provide input through online tools throughout the planning effort. Over 600 responses to online surveys were received. An email distribution list was used to keep approximately 1,500 people apprised of opportunities for input.

The draft Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan was released in July 2020 and available for public comment for over 30 days (from July 21 to August 28). DPZ compiled nearly 450 public comments and synthesized these comments into a public comment summary (see exhibit C).

An 11-member appointed master plan advisory team (MPAT) served as a sounding board for the project. When the original executive order establishing MPAT expired, a new MPAT was formed. The two MPAT groups met a combined total of eight times over the course of the project (with the eighth and final meeting occurring virtually). MPAT discussed the draft plan at the group's final meeting on August 26, 2020 (see exhibit D).

DPZ sought input from the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) throughout the planning effort and encouraged members to follow the process. In July 2017, HPC members were invited to participate, along with other preservationists, in a focus group regarding historic preservation. On November 7, 2019, DPZ participated in a workshop with the HPC to discuss the master planning effort. At the August 6, 2020 HPC meeting, DPZ requested advisory comments from the HPC on the draft Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan. The HPC's advisory comments to DPZ were summarized in a letter dated September 3, 2020, and further documented in minutes from the August 6, 2020 meeting (see exhibit E).

On August 20, 2020, DPZ staff provided an overview of the Public Draft and the adoption process to the Planning Board to seek input in advance of an advisory recommendation from the Board. At that meeting, Planning Board members expressed appreciation for:

- the plan's ability to find new opportunities in response to change,
- the incorporation of the EC Safe and Sound plan,
- the multi-objective vision statement,
- the thoroughness of the plan's contents, and
- the overall approach to a complex set of challenges in Ellicott City.

Planning Board Review:

§16.900(j)(1)(III) states that a bill proposing amendment of the general plan shall not be added to the Council's legislative agenda until the County Council has received a recommendation and report from the Planning Board.

DPZ Recommendation:

That the Planning Board recommend approval of the Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan (Exhibit A) and an amendment to *PlanHoward 2030*, the general plan for Howard County, to include the Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan (the Plan) by reference (Exhibit B).

DocuSigned by:
Amy Gowan
5B4D5DD9470C4D4...
10/1/2020
Amy Gowan, Director
Department of Planning and Zoning
Date

Directly Attached

Draft Council Bill

Exhibits

- A. Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan – Council Draft, September 2020
- B. Proposed Text Amending the General Plan, *PlanHoward 2030*
- C. Summary of Comments Received on the Draft Plan, September 2020
- D. Master Plan Advisory Team Minutes, August 26, 2020
- E. Historic Preservation Commission Letter and Meeting Minutes, September 3, 2020

Introduced _____
Public Hearing _____
Council Action _____
Executive Action _____
Effective Date _____

County Council of Howard County, Maryland

2020 Legislative Session

Legislative Day No.

Bill No. _____ -2020

Introduced by: The Chairperson at the request of the County Executive

AN ACT amending *PlanHoward 2030*, the general plan for Howard County, to include The Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan and recognizing that the Plan is a comprehensive, long-range document created by a community-driven vision for historic Ellicott City and the Tiber Branch Watershed; and generally relating to planning, zoning and land use in Howard County.

Introduced and read first time _____, 2020. Ordered posted and hearing scheduled.

By order _____
Diane Schwartz Jones, 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 _____, 2020.

By order _____
Diane Schwartz Jones, Administrator

This Bill was read the third time on _____, 2020 and Passed ____, Passed with amendments _____, Failed _____.

By order _____
Diane Schwartz Jones, Administrator

Sealed with the County Seal and presented to the County Executive for approval this ____ day of _____, 2020 at ____ a.m./p.m.

By order _____
Diane Schwartz Jones, Administrator

Approved/Vetoed by the County Executive _____, 2020

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 **WHEREAS**, Howard County has prepared The Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan (the
2 “Plan”) to provide policies and implementing actions for protecting and enhancing flood-
3 impacted Ellicott City and the surrounding Tiber-Hudson Watershed; and
4

5 **WHEREAS**, Ellicott City and the surrounding Tiber-Hudson Watershed have important
6 cultural, economic, environmental and recreational resources, as well as significant historical
7 sites and a district on the National Register of Historic Places; and
8

9 **WHEREAS**, Ellicott City and the surrounding Tiber-Hudson Watershed include a State-
10 recognized Main Street and State-approved Sustainable Community Area; and
11

12 **WHEREAS**, the Plan integrates strategies for community character and placemaking,
13 flood mitigation, environmental stewardship, economic development and transportation and
14 parking frameworks; and
15

16 **WHEREAS**, the Plan is guided by and builds upon the EC Safe and Sound plan currently
17 underway; and
18

19 **WHEREAS**, the Plan is the result of a multi-year outreach process that included eight
20 public workshops and input through online tools throughout the planning effort; and
21

22 **WHEREAS**, in July of 2012, by passage of Council Bill No. 26-2012, the Howard
23 County Council adopted PlanHoward2030, a new general plan for Howard County; and
24

25 **WHEREAS**, the County Council now wishes to amend *PlanHoward2030* in order to
26 include the Plan.
27

28 **NOW, THEREFORE,**
29

1 **Section 1. Be It Enacted** by the County Council of Howard County, Maryland, that
2 *PlanHoward2030 is hereby amended to include the Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan, as*
3 *attached to this Act as Exhibit A, and the following amendments are made to PlanHoward2030:*

- 4 1. *The first page of the Executive Summary is amended as shown in the attached*
5 *Exhibit B; and*
- 6 2. *The Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan shall be attached to and incorporated*
7 *into PlanHoward2030.*

8
9 **Section 2. And Be It Further Enacted** by the County Council of Howard County, Maryland that the
10 *Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning may correct obvious errors, capitalization,*
11 *spelling, grammar, headings and similar matters and may publish this amendment to*
12 *PlanHoward2030 by adding or amending covers, title pages, a table of contents, and graphics to*
13 *improve readability.*

14
15 **Section 3. And Be It Further Enacted** by the County Council of Howard County, Maryland,
16 *that this amendment be attached to and made part of PlanHoward2030.*

17
18 **Section 4. And Be It Further Enacted** by the County Council of Howard County, Maryland, that
19 *this Act shall become effective 61 days after its enactment.*

Exhibit A
Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan

DRAFT