

**Amendment 94 to Council Bill No. 28 -2023**

**BY: Liz Walsh**

**Legislative Day 11**

**Date: 10/02/2023**

**Amendment No. 94**

*(This Amendment makes the following changes to HoCo by Design Chapters 2, 3, 6, and 7 to:*

- Chapter 2: Growth and Conservation Framework* - *Deletes references to 39 percent of County land is protected;*
- Chapter 3: Ecological Health* - *Deletes two references to 39 percent County land is parkland, open space, and easements;*
- Chapter 6: Dynamic Neighborhoods* - *Deletes a reference to 39 percent County land is permanently preserved as parkland, open space, agricultural or environmental uses;*
- Chapter 7: Quality by Design* - *Deletes a sentence that states that 39 percent of the County's land is preserved.)*

1 In the *HoCo By Design* General Plan, attached to this Act as Exhibit A, amend the following  
2 pages as indicated in this Amendment:

- 3 • Chapter 2: Growth and Conservation Framework, page 9.  
4 • Chapter 3: Ecological Health, pages 3 and 7.  
5 • Chapter 6: Dynamic Neighborhoods, page 8.  
6 • Chapter 7: Quality by Design, page 19.

7  
8 Correct all page numbers, numbering, and formatting within this Act to accommodate this  
9 amendment.

10

## Undeveloped, Unprotected Land

The wide distribution and relatively small size of undeveloped parcels in the County—approximately 2% of all land in the County—means there are limited opportunities to alter their intended impact on the landscape beyond what is planned under current zoning district assignments. Unless they are purchased or placed under easement for permanent preservation, it is likely that undeveloped land in the County will develop and look very similar to existing adjacent properties.

However, a significant amount of the undeveloped and unprotected land in the County remains undeveloped due to capacity constraints, including parcel shape and size, as well as environmental features, such as streams, wetlands, floodplains, and steep slopes. Given the higher proportion of environmental constraints on remaining undeveloped parcels, their potential for development will be limited.

If fully developed, these parcels could accommodate 2,024 new dwelling units and 4,210 new employees. The project team considered the limited capacity of this undeveloped, unprotected land in crafting recommendations for the General Plan.

## Land Preservation: Parkland, Open Space, and Farmland

Howard County has proactively preserved open space and farmland for decades. ~~Today, about 39% of all land in the County is protected.~~ Over half of this land is permanently preserved through environmental and agricultural preservation easements. The Agricultural Land Preservation Program has preserved over 23,000 acres of farmland through a combination of preservation easements purchased by the County, the dedication of agricultural preservation parcels as provided by the County’s Zoning Regulations, and preservation easements purchased by the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation. Over 9,000 acres of environmental preservation easements have been placed on land in the Rural West through the Zoning Regulations.

Additionally, about 25,000 acres of state, Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC), and county parks and open space make up over a third of preserved land in the County. Columbia Association’s 3,600 acres of open space comprises an additional 6% of preserved land in the County.

The General Plan retains all preserved parkland, open space, and easements in the County existing today, and presents opportunities for further conservation of environmental, agricultural, and open space land.



# deMAND For lAnd: twenty yeAr MArket Potential

Despite a limited supply of available undeveloped land, Howard County continues to see a high demand for residential and commercial growth. RCLCO Real Estate Advisors conducted a Market Research and Demand Forecast (the Forecast) to inform HoCo By Design. The Forecast found that the County has reached an inflection point, whereby land constraints and affordability challenges could impact the ability to accommodate future residential and commercial growth. It also found that the economic vitality of the County is directly tied to its desirability as a place to live and work, which must be maintained over time. Most high-paying and fast-growing industries are booming either in response to population and job bases (like healthcare, education, and publishing), or as a result of national economic and industry trends (like technology, professional services, and food services). To sustain the economic growth that has been historically enjoyed and to maintain a competitive edge over other markets, the County must continue to invest in housing, infrastructure, placemaking, job creation, and other activities that make it a desirable place for people and employers to call home.

## Market Demand Projections

The Forecast projected market-driven demand for new retail, office, industrial, residential, and hotel room space in the absence of land, regulation, or other constraints. It concluded that there is a strong market in Howard County for commercial uses, with potential to add up to 59,000 jobs between 2020 and 2040. Additionally, there is a future demand for 31,000 new homes to accommodate the 28,000 new households associated with that job growth (allowing for a vacancy factor). The Forecast also identified a current “pent up” demand for 20,000 more housing units, attributed to those who work in Howard County but live elsewhere in the region.



### Housing

Current Total  
116,000 Homes

Projected Demand  
31,000 New Homes



### Employment

Current Total  
223,000 Jobs

Projected Demand  
59,000 New Jobs



### Commercial

Current Total  
12.2M Sq.Ft  
4,000 Hotel Rooms

Projected Demand  
16.5M Sq. Ft.  
1,000 Hotel Rooms

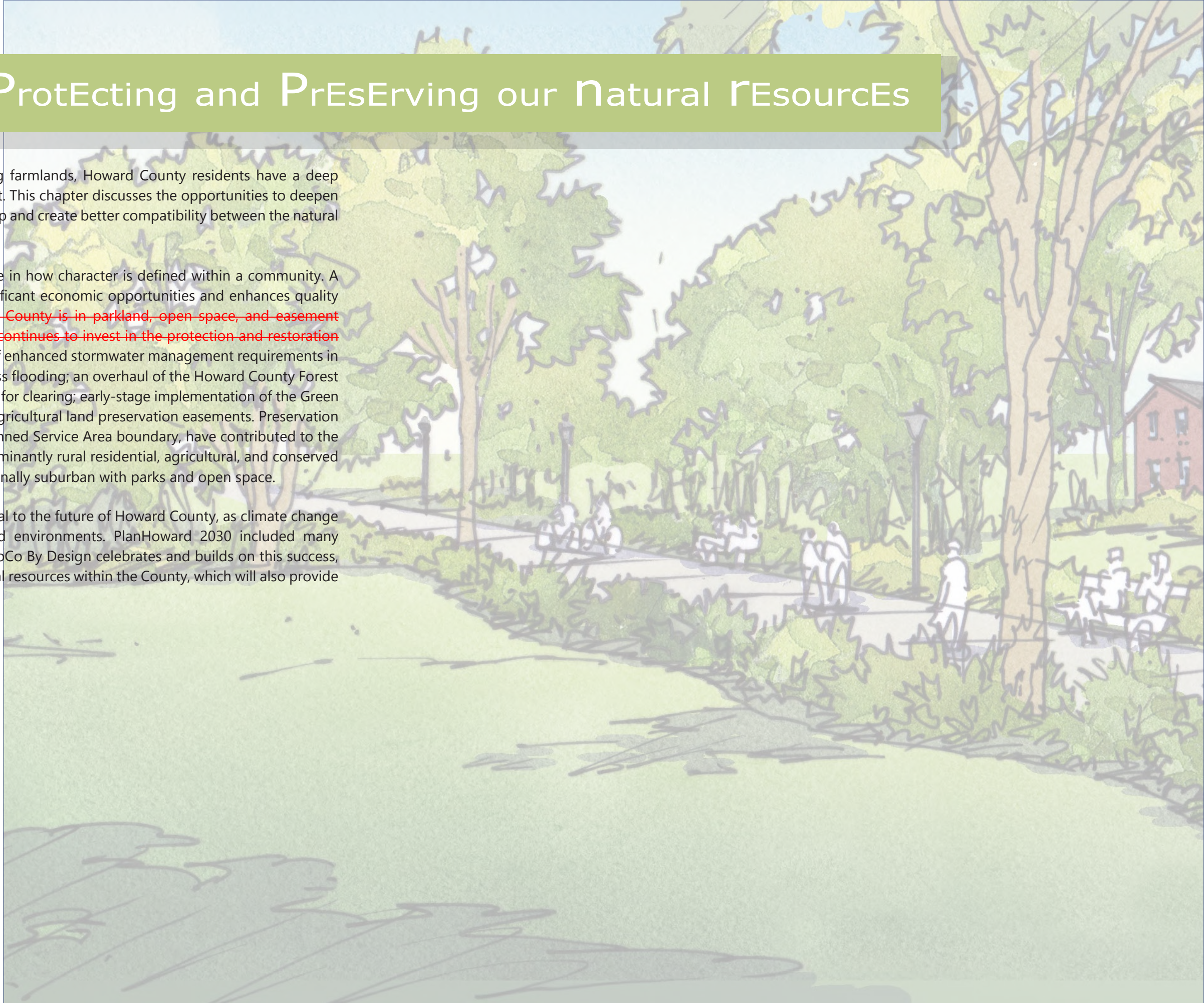
Source: RCLCO Market Research and Demand Forecast (2020)

# Ecological Health: Protecting and Preserving our Natural Resources

From its beautiful natural areas to its picturesque working farmlands, Howard County residents have a deep appreciation for protecting and preserving the environment. This chapter discusses the opportunities to deepen Howard County's commitment to environmental stewardship and create better compatibility between the natural and built environments.

Both landscape and environmental factors play a large role in how character is defined within a community. A protected and celebrated natural environment brings significant economic opportunities and enhances quality of life, health, and well-being. ~~Approximately 39% of the County is in parkland, open space, and easement (agricultural, environmental, and historic), and the County continues to invest in the protection and restoration of the natural landscape.~~ Recent actions include adoption of enhanced stormwater management requirements in the Tiber Branch and Plumtree Branch watersheds to address flooding; an overhaul of the Howard County Forest Conservation Act to increase forest retention and mitigation for clearing; early-stage implementation of the Green Infrastructure Network Plan; and acquisition of additional agricultural land preservation easements. Preservation and growth management efforts, including the existing Planned Service Area boundary, have contributed to the current pattern of land uses, where the Rural West is predominantly rural residential, agricultural, and conserved land, and the eastern portion of the County is more traditionally suburban with parks and open space.

Protection and restoration of natural resources will be crucial to the future of Howard County, as climate change alters how we interact with and plan for our developed environments. PlanHoward 2030 included many recommendations that have seen success in the County. HoCo By Design celebrates and builds on this success, recommending further actions to protect and restore natural resources within the County, which will also provide climate change mitigation and adaptation.



# SuPPorting tHE County's Ecological HEalth

Howard County contains a wealth of natural resources, including forests, meadows, wetlands, streams, and lakes, which are linked together through ecosystems (see Map 3-1). Ecosystems are comprised of all living organisms, the physical environment, and the relationships between the living and inanimate elements within a particular area. Ecosystems provide a wide variety of services that benefit humans and other species, including food production, clean water, flood control, temperature regulation, recreational opportunities, and aesthetic value. However, their monetary values are often overlooked, until human intervention is needed to repair or replace them. It is generally far more cost-effective to protect a healthy ecosystem than to try and restore one that has been degraded.

The health of these ecosystems—ecological health—is the foundation that supports economic and community health and personal well-being. Human activities can negatively affect ecological health by removing or degrading natural resources, but people can also help restore and protect these resources. The challenge is to meet current human needs while ensuring actions protect and restore ecological health so that it may continue to support future life.

Through the January 27, 2021 Executive Order 14008 on Tackling the Climate Crises at Home and Abroad, the United States joined an international movement by countries to pledge conservation of at least 30% of their land and water by 2030. This pledge is intended to help protect biodiversity and mitigate climate change through locally led conservation efforts. ~~Howard County already has 39% of its land and water conserved in parkland, open space, and easements.~~ The County should continue to support this movement by establishing a goal for natural resource conservation. This goal could be for the County as a whole and each major watershed.

## **EH-1 Policy Statement**

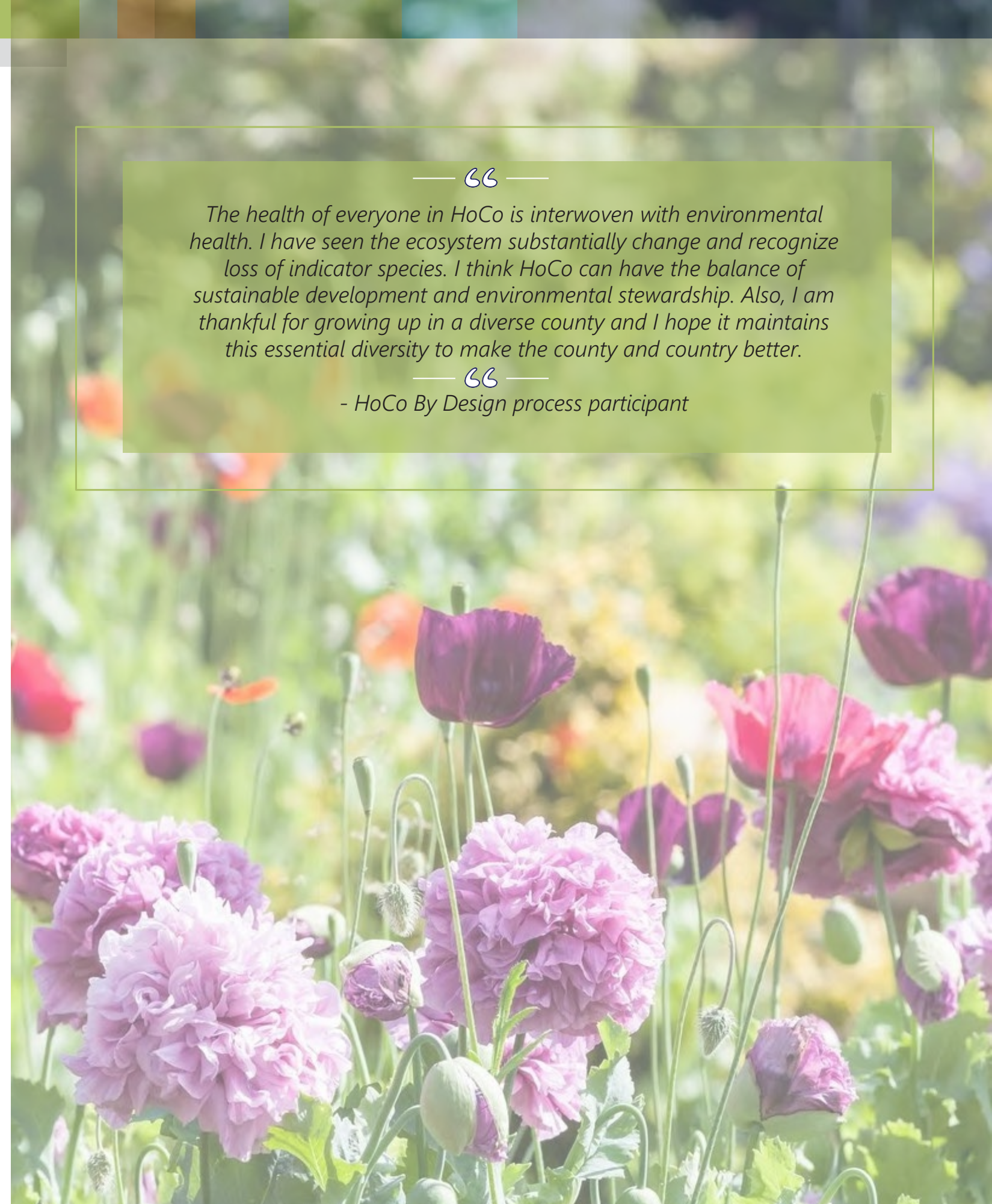
Continue to support the County's ecological health.

## **Implementing Actions**

1. Integrate the goals of protecting and restoring the County's ecological health when updating county programs and policies.
2. Ensure adequate funding for programs and measures to protect and restore the County's ecological health.
3. Create a dedicated funding source, as was done for the Agricultural Land Preservation Program, for environmental programs.
4. Establish a natural resource protection goal for the County and each major watershed to help protect biodiversity and mitigate climate change.

— “ —  
*The health of everyone in HoCo is interwoven with environmental health. I have seen the ecosystem substantially change and recognize loss of indicator species. I think HoCo can have the balance of sustainable development and environmental stewardship. Also, I am thankful for growing up in a diverse county and I hope it maintains this essential diversity to make the county and country better.*

— “ —  
- HoCo By Design process participant





# Overview: housing in hoWard County

## Howard County's Housing Mix

As shown in Map 6-1, the County's land is dominated by residential development and preserved land, with approximately 40% used for residential ~~and 39% permanently preserved as parks and open space or agricultural and environmental~~ land. Most of the preserved land is located in the West; whereas the majority of the residential development is located in the East. The Planned Service Area (PSA) boundary marks the distinction between these two geographies: the West relying on wells and septic systems, which generally do not support higher densities, and the East relying on public water and sewer.

Most of the County's residential land has been developed as low-density residential. Generally speaking, the housing mix in the County, east of the PSA boundary, consists of 40% low-density, single-family, detached residential, 22% medium-density residential (single-family attached homes) and 22% high-density residential (multi-family homes). The area west of the PSA, commonly referred to as the Rural West, contains 12% of the County's low-density residential development. Additionally, approximately 4% of the County's housing mix is age-restricted (55 years and older).

Low-density residential land offers limited choices for living in Howard County. According to the Land Use Assessment prepared for HoCo By Design, the lowest densities are in the Rural West, approximately one home per three acres, while the eastern part of the County averages 2.35 homes per acre (a little more than one home per half acre). The distribution of low-density residential development, with large blocks and limited street connections, generally favors travel by automobile to meet residents' daily needs.



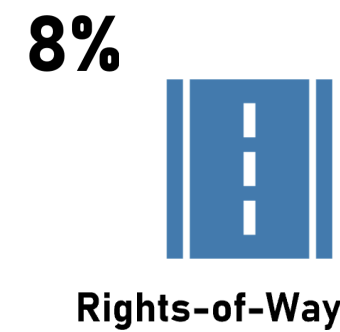
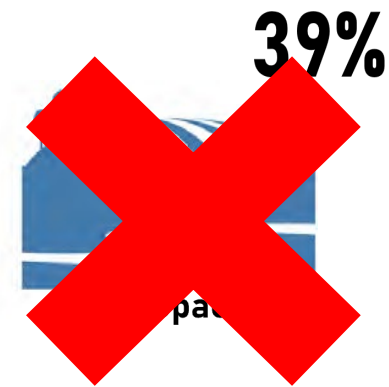
# CuRRent land Use patteRns

As more fully described in the Growth & Conservation Framework chapter, Howard County's current land use patterns reflect not only development trends over time but also proactive preservation of open space and farmland. **An estimated 39% of land is presently preserved. Another 8% Eight percent** of land is comprised of rights-of-way (ROW). By contrast, 51% of Howard County is considered developed, and just 2% of land remains unpreserved or undeveloped (with no built structures and not committed to a proposed development). Given this breakdown, only 53% of the County's total land area

can be developed.

Undeveloped parcels are scattered throughout the County and are generally relatively small—the average size is 5.36 acres, though the largest undeveloped parcel is 67 acres. The wide distribution and relatively small acreage mean there is limited ability to create a critical mass of acreage needed to generate new areas of activity. These properties may contain sensitive environmental resources, such as floodplains, wetlands, and steep slopes, that limit their development potential. Individual property owners may choose to build on the developable portions of these properties. It is likely such infill development will serve similar uses as their neighboring properties.

Developed land refers not only to permanent buildings and structures, but also includes surface parking lots that serve adjoining buildings, and sliver lots where size, shape, or access limitations would generally keep them from developing in the future.



Densities of developed areas vary throughout the County. For instance, in the West, the patchwork of developed land appears widespread. However, this land includes large-lot single-family homes that have relatively small building footprints. Generally, the remaining land is not available for future development, though there are some large parcels that have potential for future preservation or development through subdivision. Conversely, in the East, most developed land is used for residential and commercial purposes, although the homes are more concentrated than those in the West. Some developed land, such as parking lots, may be able to accommodate infill development in future years, but these opportunities remain limited.

The term "rights-of-way" (ROW) refers to land used for roads, rail lines, and major public utility corridors. Given their current use, this land is unlikely to see future development. However, some rail ROW have the potential to be converted to trails as adjacent land uses change.

With Howard County's land largely developed or preserved, the ability to grow in new areas is limited. Furthermore, connecting new areas in the West to the County's existing transportation network would be difficult. It would likely be challenging to design efficient new roadways given the patchwork of preservation easements and lack of developable land. Thus, transportation infrastructure investment is likely to occur along existing road and rail corridors.

