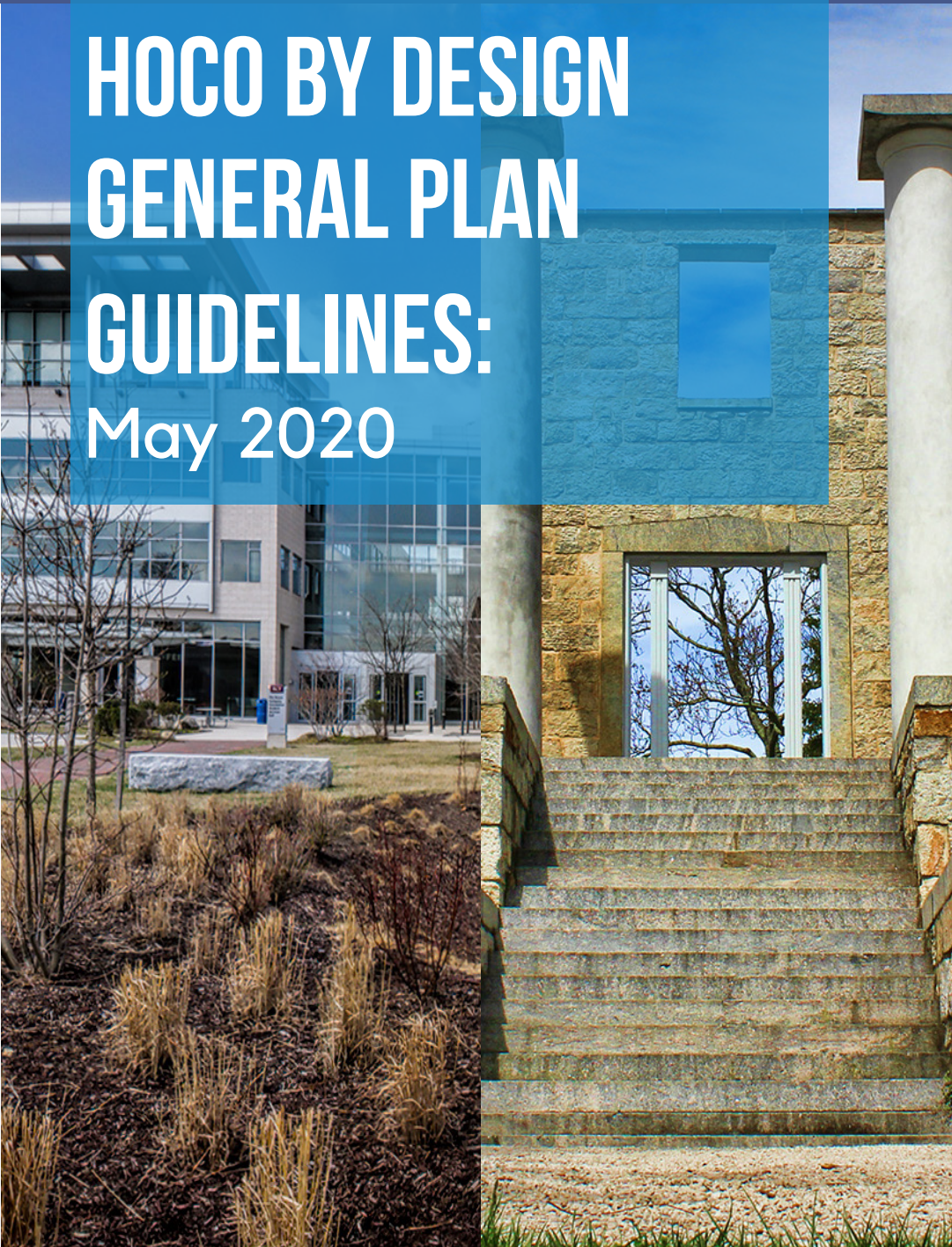


# HOCO BY DESIGN GENERAL PLAN GUIDELINES: May 2020



HOCO BY  
DESIGN

Every Voice, One Vision



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# INTRODUCTION

Title 16, Subtitle 9, Section 16.900(j)(4) of the Howard County Code requires the Planning Board to prepare general guidelines for preparing and/or revising the County's General Plan. The clause states:

- (4) *General plan guidelines:*
- (i) *Preparation of guidelines. Within five years from the adoption of this comprehensive rezoning plan, the Planning Board shall prepare general guidelines to be used by the Department of Planning and Zoning in the preparation and/or revision of the general plan.*
  - (ii) *Adoption of guidelines. The County Council shall adopt the guidelines by resolution prior to the formulation of the general plan utilizing these guidelines.*

The guidelines are focused on establishing a planning process at a very early stage, rather than establishing a specific set of policy objectives. They do not mandate guaranteed outcomes or a vision for the Plan before engaging the community, collecting data, or contemplating alternative futures for the County. The general guidelines for the HoCo by Design General Plan were developed with input from stakeholder interviews, information gathered from other plans and policies prepared for Howard County, best practices used around the country, and a workshop with the Planning Board on April 9, 2020.

The guidelines presented in this document provide a framework for collecting and organizing information to develop the County's new General Plan. This framework will emphasize a comprehensive, consistent, and continuous strategy to stakeholder engagement; shape community dialogs and conversations; emphasize 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. By following these guidelines, it is the County's hope that the planning process will be holistic and inclusive and will result in a shared vision, guiding principles, and recommendations in the new HoCo By Design General Plan.

There are four components to the document:

- Background – The history, function, and importance of Howard County's General Plans.
- Planning Process – The five phases over which the General Plan will be completed.
- Public Engagement Plan – The initiatives used to engage the Howard County community at-large.
- Organizational Framework – How the General Plan document will be prepared.

To protect public health and safety, the County will be complying with the State issued stay-at-home order during the COVID-19 pandemic and will therefore be offering a variety of means for public engagement. The public engagement plan includes many in-person activities, and therefore, may need to be adjusted depending on the progression of the pandemic. The County looks forward to our collaborative efforts to update the General Plan while ensuring that all stakeholders can participate in a meaningful and safe manner.

## Policies, Plans, Studies, and Ordinances



## Best Practices



## Stakeholder and Community Engagement



## 2017-2018 Development Regulations Assessment



The general guidelines were prepared by casting a wide net to collect information that would help build a holistic and inclusive planning process. This included hiring a large and experienced consultant team to ensure that the process is built around best practices. Community input from the development regulations assessment helped to identify key areas of inquiry and analysis for the planning process. Stakeholder interviews helped to identify key information needs and underscored the importance of community engagement. A comprehensive review of existing policies, plans, studies and ordinances provided a baseline understanding of Howard County's unique history, characteristics, and priorities.



# GENERAL BACKGROUND FOR THE PLAN UPDATE

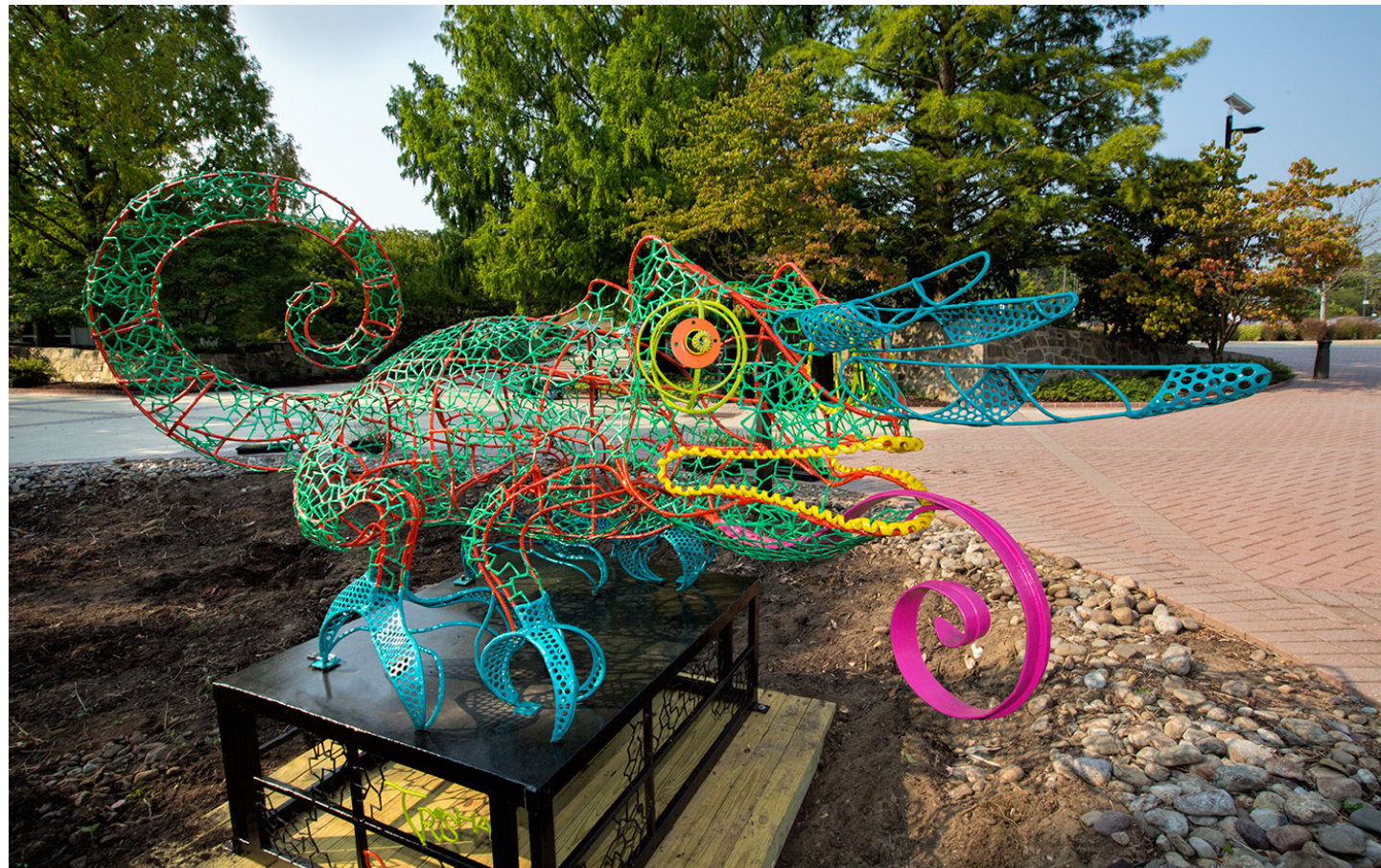
Howard County has a long history of planning for its future.

## BACKGROUND

Howard County is embarking on a journey to develop a collective vision for the community's future to be captured in a new General Plan "HoCo by Design: Every Voice. One Vision". It will be a visionary document reflecting a process that encourages the community to think big about its long-term future. Upon adoption, the General Plan will present official statements and preferences toward growth, development, and conservation in the County and help current and future leaders make decisions about regulations, requirements, ordinances, and policies. While the General Plan provides a long-term 20 year vision for the future, its implementation occurs in incremental steps over time, which will be outlined in the final document.

In accordance with state law, Howard County's General Plan has been updated approximately every ten years (1960, 1971, 1982, 1990, 2000, 2012) to reflect shifting demographics, regional growth, new laws, and changes to priorities and community goals. The new Plan reviews conditions at the time the previous Plan was adopted and considers if revisions to the vision, guiding principles, or recommendations are needed moving forward to take advantage of changing markets or demographics, respond to new realities in terms of available land to develop or redevelop, recognize conditions of supporting infrastructure, or safeguard residents quality-of-life. New data for the county is collected for the update and evaluated and shared with stakeholders in the planning process to make more informed decisions about the future.

Efforts to develop the new General Plan are being led by the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) with guidance and input from other Howard County agencies and assistance from a consultant team selected to serve as an extension of DPZ planning staff.



# HOOCO BY DESIGN

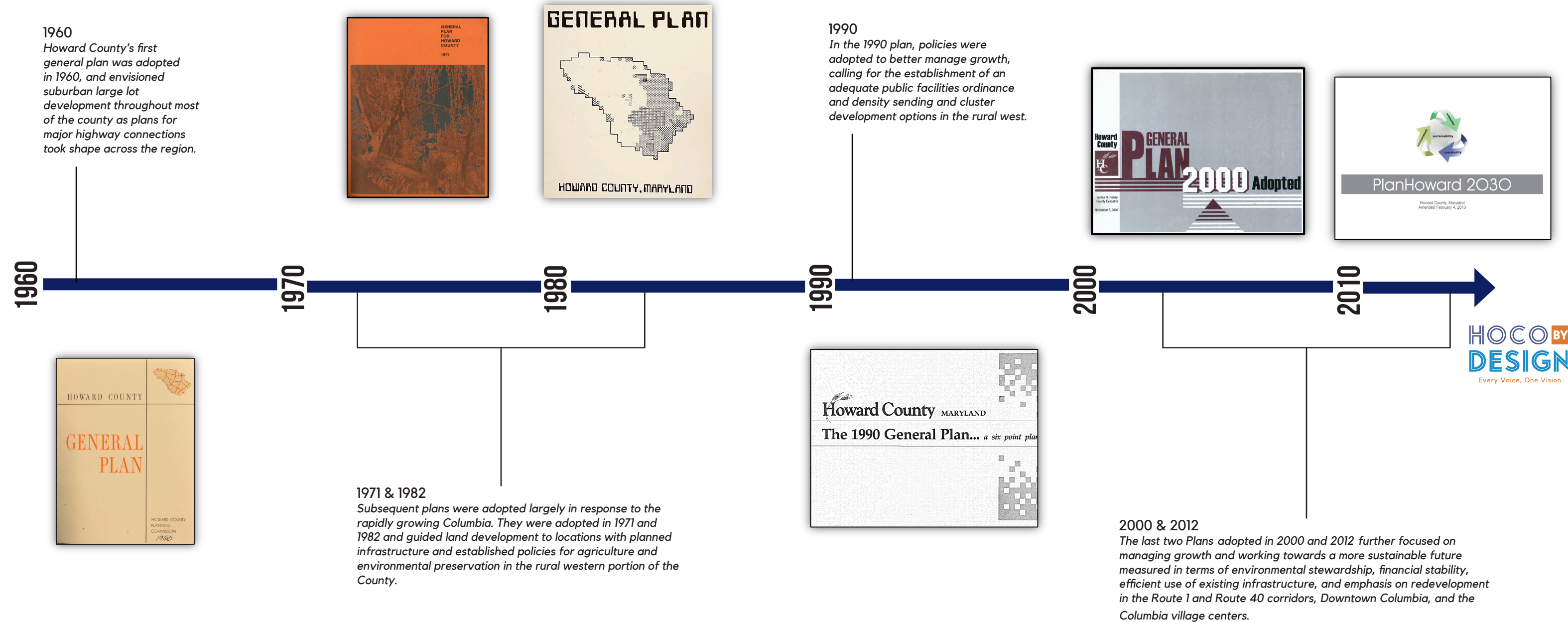
Every Voice, One Vision

"HoCo" is a colloquialism used by those with ties to Howard County. It is what makes the term familiar for the new General Plan, always thinking local and from within the community about the best path forward. Furthermore, the project will be successful "By Design," both because it will be crafted and shaped with great intentionality, and also because its development and implementation will require just as much art as it does science to protect and promote the character of Howard County.

The planning process will employ an innovative stakeholder outreach initiative, which invites participation early and often from a cross-section of people represented in the County. The project's slogan "Every Voice. One Vision." sets the tone for the project. County officials want to hear from every voice in Howard County to manifest a collective vision for the future of the community.

# GENERAL PLAN HISTORY IN HOWARD COUNTY

Howard County has a strong tradition of planning for a collective vision for the community's future, dating back to the first General Plan adopted in 1960.



# GENERAL PLAN FACTS AND LIMITATIONS

## Facts

General Plans can take a variety of forms, and there is often confusion about what General Plans actually do and how they influence development. An essential task of any General Plan effort is to establish clear policy on how and where a community will develop and grow as it adjusts to evolving economic, environmental, and social conditions. General Plans typically describe a community's preferences for the future distribution of land uses; location of roadways and other infrastructure; and intensity, form, and character of new development. The best general plans articulate these community preferences in the form of major themes and direction for the county's future. Thus, the General Plan is a statement on county development and land use policy and informs many of Howard County's subsequent decisions on land use, transportation, open space, agriculture, community facilities, community character, historic preservation, housing, economic development, and quality of life. HoCo By Design will articulate a vision for the future that reflects the Howard County community's needs and will be implemented subsequently through master and functional plans, manuals, regulations, and the capital budget.

## Limitations

While general plans have a meaningful impact on development, their influence is limited, and it is important to understand those limitations. First, General Plans are not regulatory tools – they serve as the overarching vision for the future. Land development is regulated in practice by the County's zoning and subdivision requirements, which are developed to be consistent with the General Plan. Second, General Plans do not attempt to replace the market forces of supply and demand. They help to shape and channel market forces by establishing certain policy guidance to manage development. Third, by virtue of being visionary, General Plans are not enacting immediate change – they recognize that change will occur incrementally as the plan is implemented over time. Last, General Plans are not static. The best planning is done continually and makes adjustments as needed to reflect changes in community goals as well as successes and challenges when it comes to implementation.

## County Library of Plans & Ordinances

The General Plan is part of a library of documents prepared by Howard County to guide future growth, development, and conservation efforts. It is one of a few opportunities the community has to think about its future holistically – comparing its wants and needs for land use, transportation, housing, neighborhoods, economic development, and the environment and the interdependencies of each for a successful future. It is intended to relate to other County plans, policies, and ordinances in place or currently underway and provide guidance to other government agencies preparing plans or programming projects.

# WHAT DRIVES GROWTH IN A COMMUNITY?



## Market Demand

The demand for different development types, patterns, and intensities is established by future buyers or renters attracted to the area (and their purchasing power) that will fill new products or pay different price points.



## Willing Property Owners

Property owners decide if and when land becomes available for future development, or if land might become available for permanent conservation.



## Government

Government ordinances, including zoning and subdivision regulations, manage development in line with the community vision established in the general plan.



## Developers

The private sector helps decide who builds, what they build, where they build, and why they build in a community, which is driven primarily by when a developer is confident about the other growth factors and decides to 'take the chance' to start a new project.



## Lending Community

Banks and other institutions establish minimum lending criteria and set interest rates for borrowing money needed to fund new development.

# GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE PLAN UPDATE

The general guidelines for *HoCo by Design* are organized into three topics: planning process, public engagement, and an organizational framework.

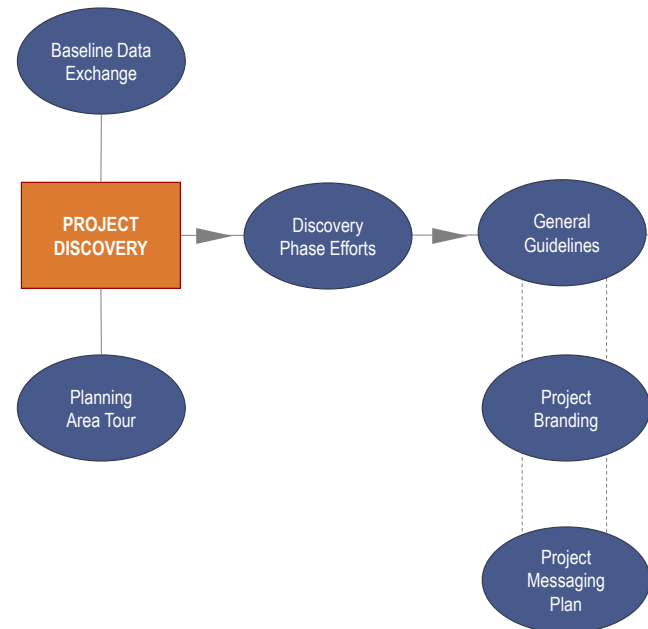


# PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process for updating the General Plan is organized around five planning cycles, which build on each other to deliver a well-tested document for adoption. The process map below visually highlights the five planning cycles and several tasks in each to complete the planning process. A detailed explanation of each planning cycle is provided on Pages 18-28 of this document.

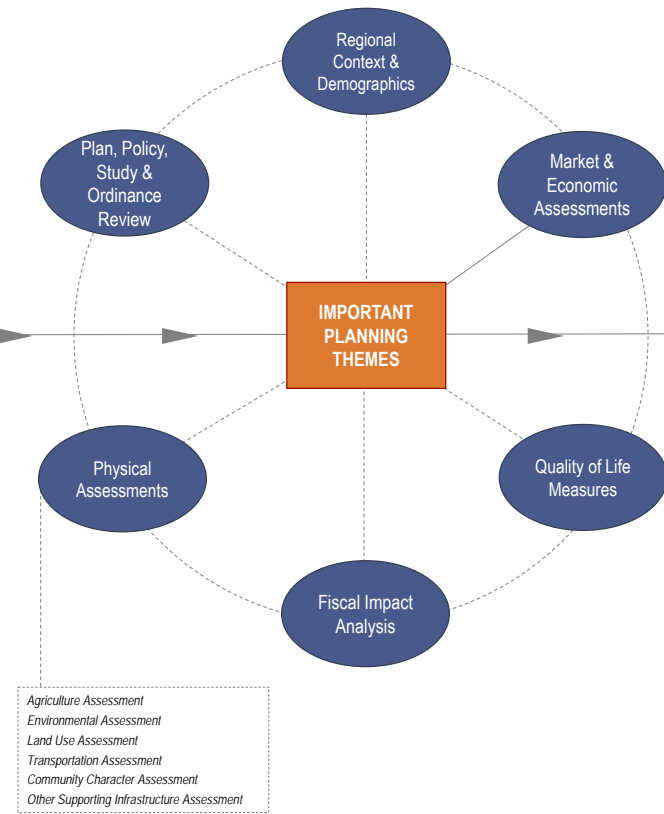
## PLANNING PHASE 1: INITIAL PROJECT RESEARCH & GENERAL GUIDELINES DEVELOPMENT

INITIAL PROJECT RESEARCH & GENERAL GUIDELINES DEVELOPMENT



## PLANNING PHASE 2: IDENTIFY & REFINE EMERGING IMPORTANT PLANNING THEMES

IDENTIFY & REFINE EMERGING IMPORTANT PLANNING THEMES



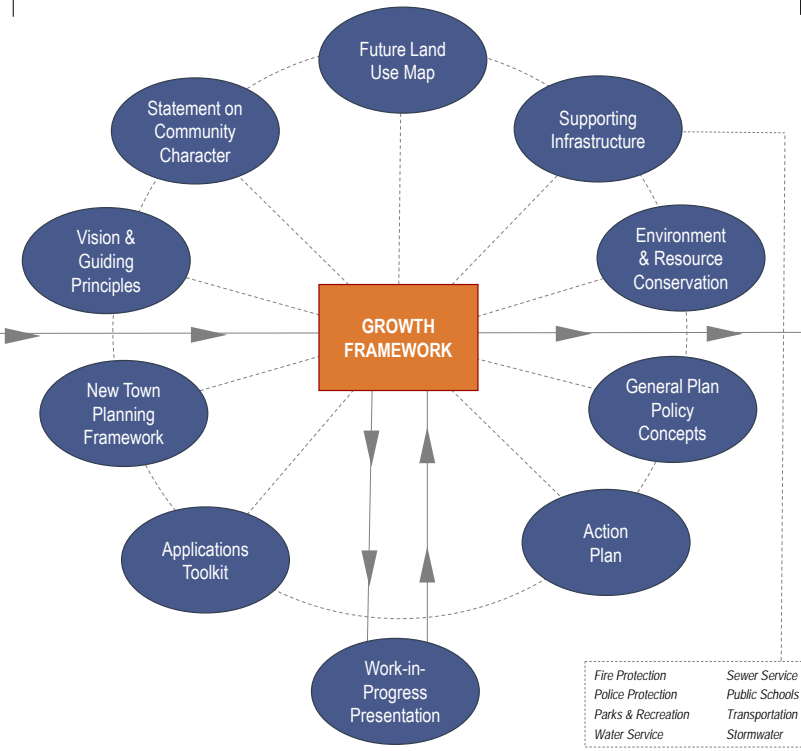
## PLANNING PHASE 3: SCENARIO MODELING & TESTING

SCENARIO MODELING & TESTING



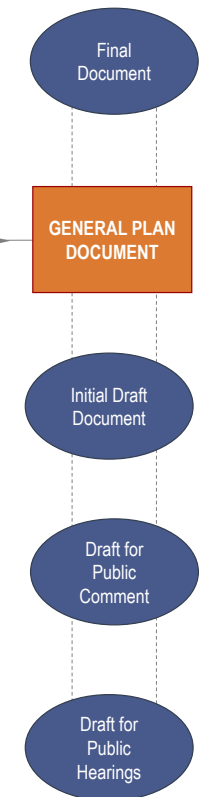
## PLANNING PHASE 4: DEVELOP & REFINE GROWTH FRAMEWORK

DEVELOP & REFINE GROWTH FRAMEWORK



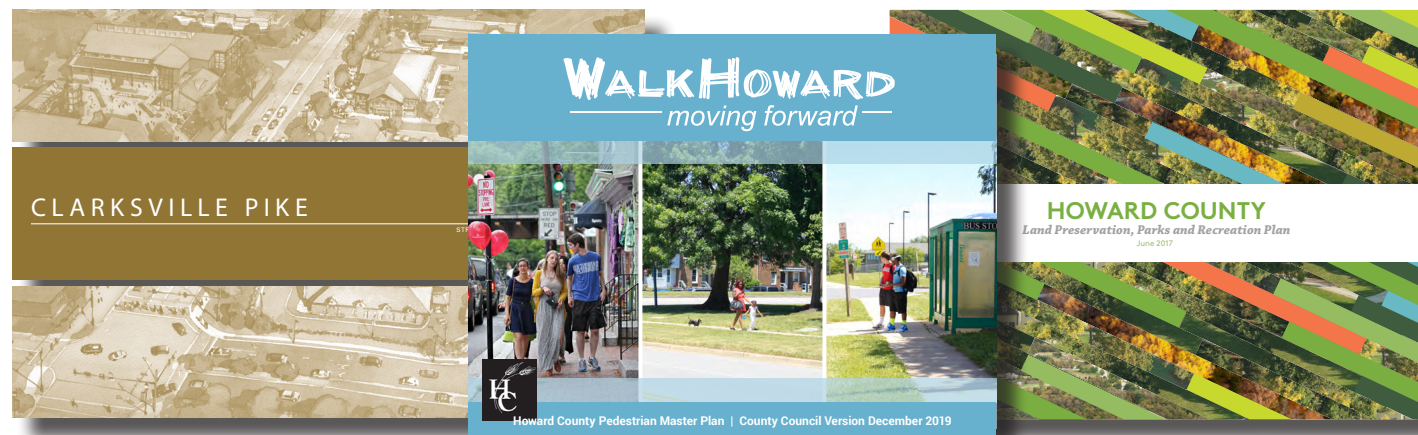
## PLANNING PHASE 5: DRAFT, PRESENT AND REVISE HOCo BY DESIGN DOCUMENT

DRAFT, PRESENT AND REVISE HOCo BY DESIGN DOCUMENT

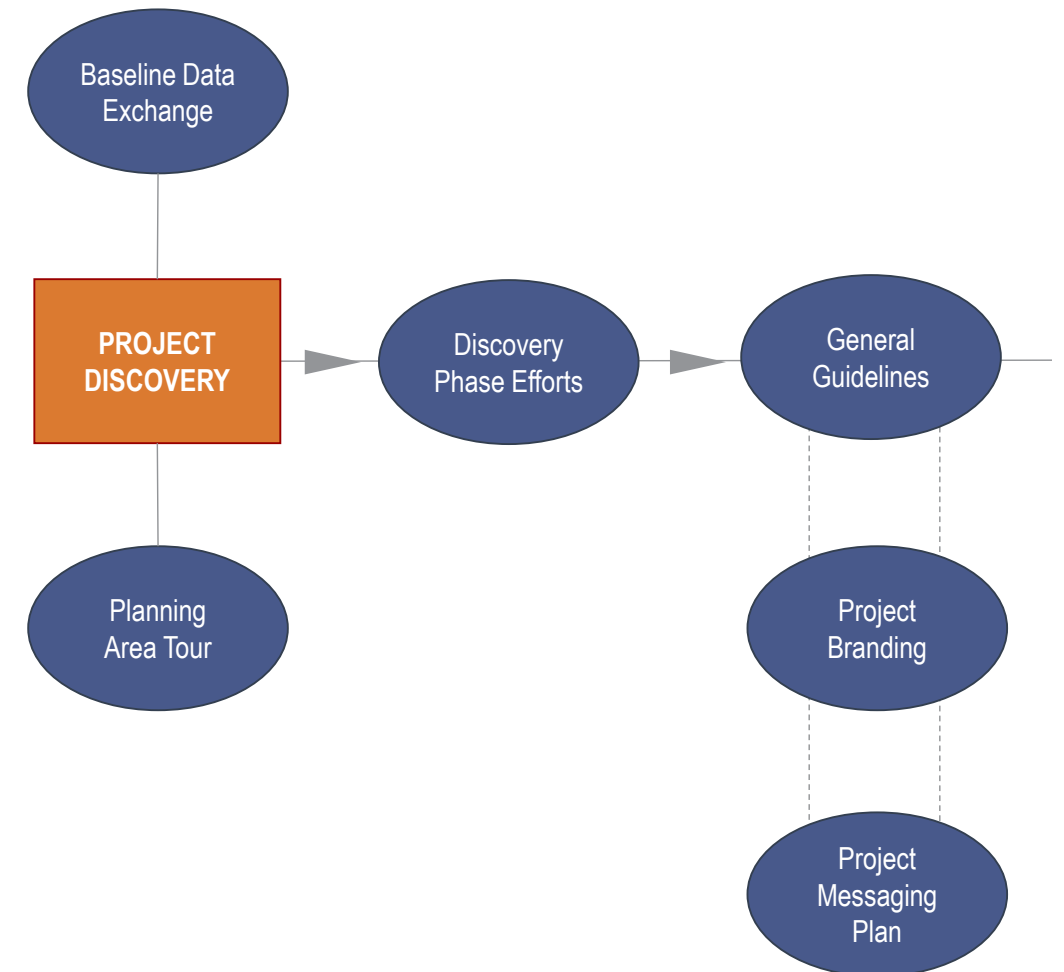


# PROJECT DISCOVERY

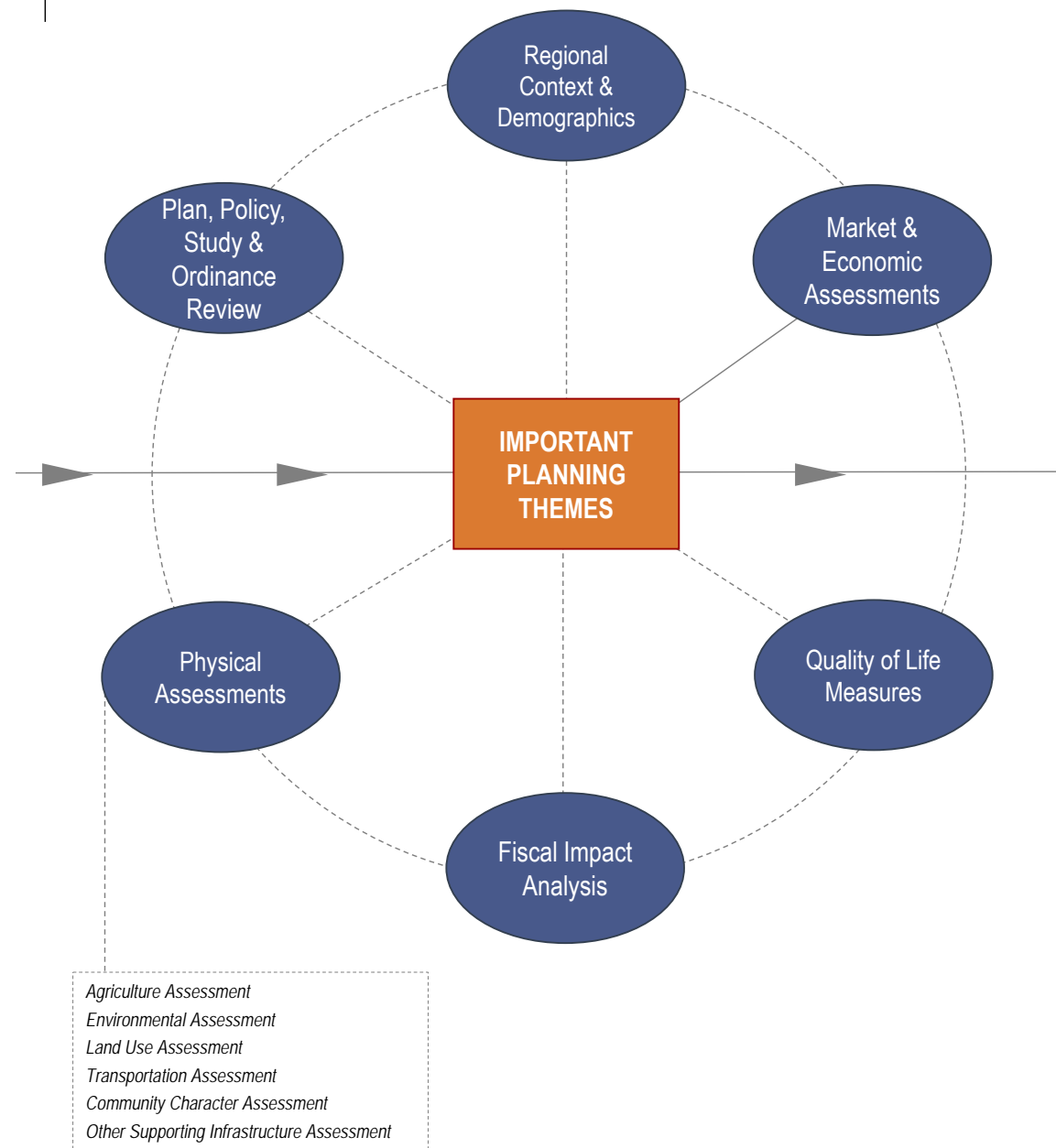
The first phase of the process, or the Project Discovery phase, is already underway, as it entails the background work needed to complete and adopt HoCo By Design's general guidelines. As was already discussed in the previous section, it includes reviewing existing plans, identifying applicable general planning best practices, stakeholder interviews and more.



# PLANNING PHASE 1: INITIAL PROJECT RESEARCH & GENERAL GUIDELINES DEVELOPMENT



**PLANNING PHASE 2:  
IDENTIFY & REFINE EMERGING  
IMPORTANT PLANNING THEMES**



**IMPORTANT PLANNING THEMES**

With the general guidelines adopted, community engagement can begin in earnest, and the HoCo By Design team can begin the task of identifying the underlying planning and land use issues that Howard County is likely to face as it continues to grow. The milestone associated with this planning phase matches its name – **Important Planning Themes**. In order to identify these core planning themes, the HoCo By Design team will assess nine general areas important to preparing the new General Plan: policy and ordinance review, regional context and demographics, market and economic assessments, growth projections, natural environment, built environment, supporting infrastructure, fiscal impact analysis, and residents’ quality of life. These areas will first be examined separately to document existing conditions and emerging trends. They will then be evaluated together for the purpose of identifying cross-cutting topics and inter-dependencies that will need to be addressed together in HoCo By Design. These cross-cutting topics will serve as the basis for the Theme-Based Chapters element of the guidelines.

**GENERAL AREAS OF INTEREST FOR DATA & ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES \***



Policy & Ordinance Review



Regional Context & Demographics



Market & Economic Assessments



Growth Projections



Natural Environment



Built Environment



Supporting Infrastructure



Fiscal Impact Analysis



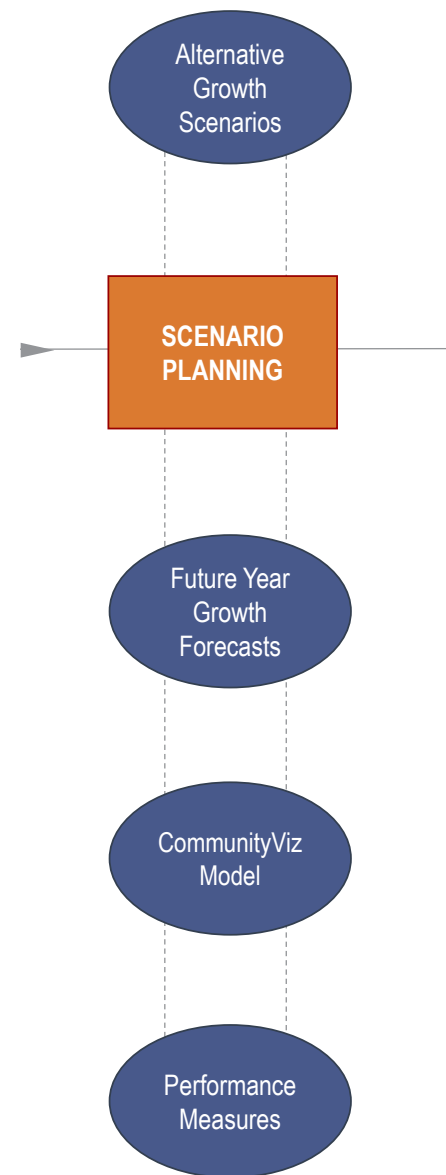
Quality of Life

\*The full list of topics studied under each general area of interest will be influenced by the planning process, including comments collected from various engagement activities, different data discoveries, and various analysis findings.

# SCENARIO PLANNING

With this rich understanding of Howard County's existing conditions, growth projections, and cross-cutting planning themes, the HoCo By Design team will begin to develop a potential Future Land Use Map by using a process known as scenario planning. A scenario planning process generates future alternatives, emerging trends, or the community's desires for long-term sustainability. Scenario planning is a quantitative process used to contemplate ways a community could grow and can answer questions such as 'How should we grow?' 'Where do we grow?' and 'How much will growth cost?'. The Scenario Planning phase involves building computer models capable of answering these questions by measuring and evaluating different hypothetical scenarios for the future of Howard County. The conclusion of this phase will yield a preferred future scenario that will serve as a rubric for Howard County's plans for growth and conservation.

## PLANNING PHASE 3: SCENARIO MODELING & TESTING



# PLAYING IN A VIRTUAL SANDBOX

Scenario planning offers an overall process, analysis tools, and partnering strategy to share information and make more-informed decisions about the future.

Participants will be asked to contemplate their vision of the most livable study area, and the project team will measure their impacts and evaluate the trade-offs associated with competing scenarios. The scenarios themselves are stories about the future, not forecasts or predictions. They are possible futures that might come to pass based on what already exists, emerging trends, or the community's desires to change course for the future. The essential requirement of any growth scenario is that it be plausible, within the realm of what exists or what could be.



### 01 Where are we now?

- community assessments
- participant values and preferences
- key decision criteria/performance
- measures for evaluating
- previous commitments
- market realities



### 02 How do we make decisions?

- scenario testing software
- anticipated growth totals
- statistical models
- forecasting tools

### 04 Where do we want to be?

- vision statement
- evaluate alternative futures
- growth scenarios report card
- preferred growth scenario



### 03 Where are we going?

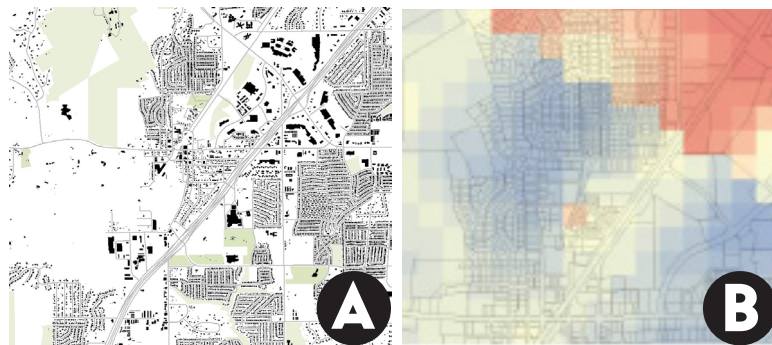
- evaluate conditions at build-out of the study area based on currently adopted plans



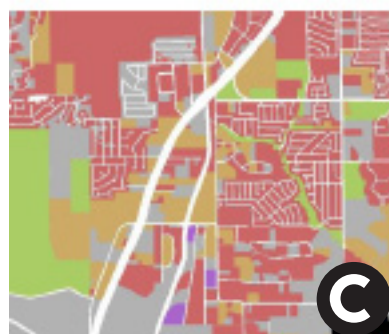
### 05 How do we get there?

- goals, strategies, and actions
- agendas and priorities
- documentation

# SNAPSHOT OF IMPORTANT STEPS FOR A SCENARIO PLANNING PROCESS



CODE	SITE EFF	PER RES	PI
POS	0%	0%	
RR	100%	100%	
SFE	80%	100%	
SF22	80%	100%	
SF15	80%	100%	
SF10	80%	100%	
SF85	80%	100%	
SF7	80%	100%	
TH	80%	100%	
MF	70%	100%	
NS	70%	0%	
LR	70%	0%	
C	70%	0%	



## Inventory Existing Conditions

An inventory and analysis of existing conditions in the planning area provides the foundation for a scenario planning process. The project team will evaluate data available for both the natural and built environments (A) as the starting point for rationalizing alternative growth scenarios later in the process. They will also incorporate market realities and economic drivers present in the community to help prepare a heat map (B) for where growth might be attracted to in the future. Very specific information, like parcel-level development status (C), will help increase the accuracy of analysis tools. Data in tables (D) will be tied to spatial data collected to represent things like allowable density, land use mix, etc. in local policies and ordinances.



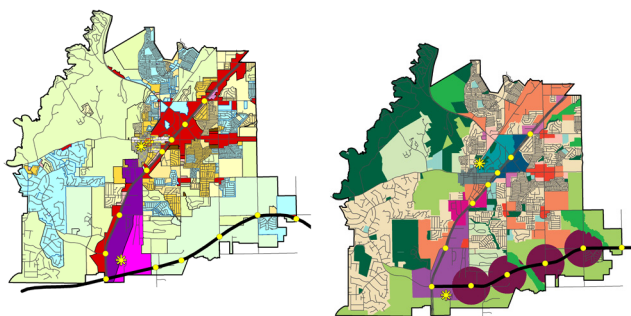
## Community Dialog About Growth & Conservation

Some outreach events for the General Plan will target discussions about future growth and conservation opportunities in the planning area. Information from the events will be used to develop alternative growth scenarios, which will be used to test and evaluate ideas about different development types, locations, patterns, and intensities appropriate in the county (including a traditional board game created for Howard County.)



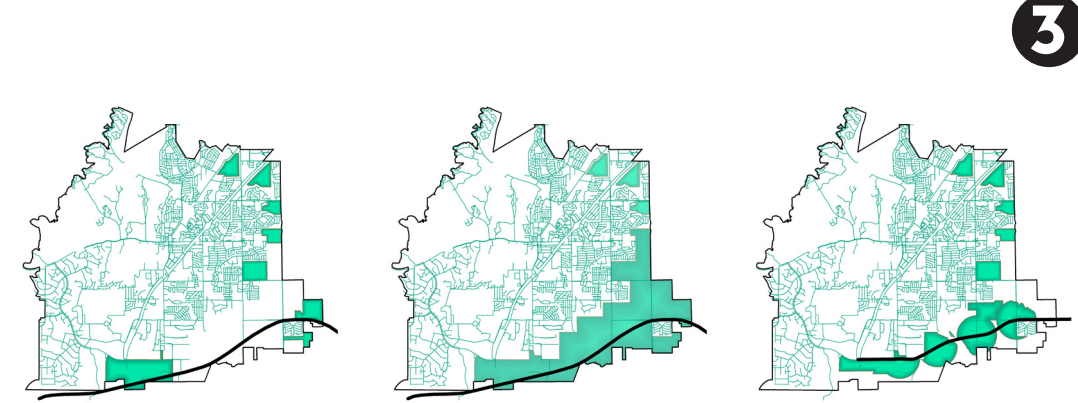
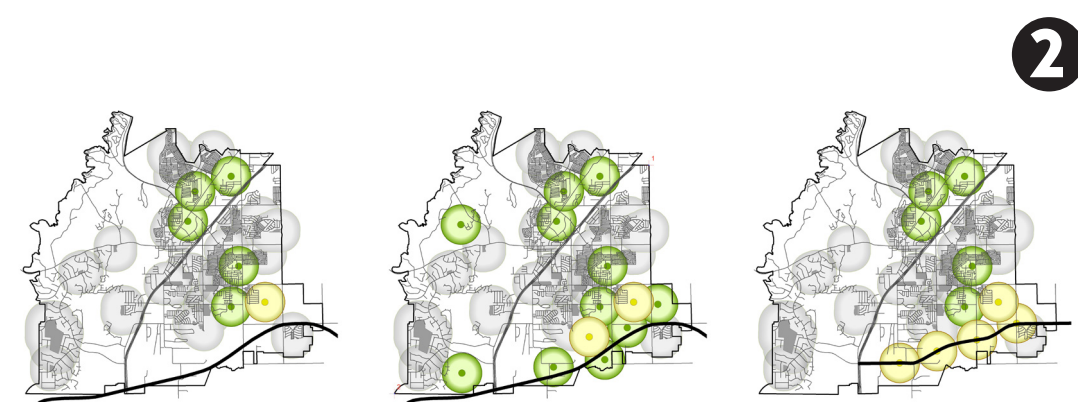
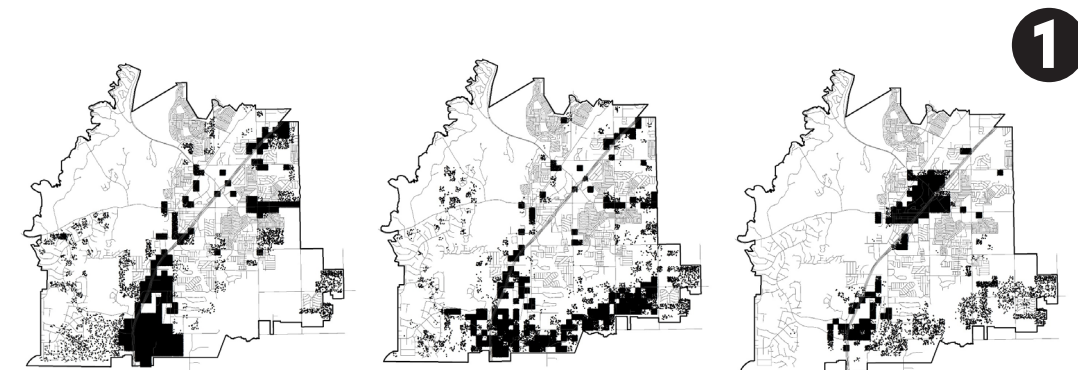
## Measure Impacts & Evaluate Trade-Offs

Alternative growth scenarios considered for the General Plan will include a theme, story, key assumptions, and maps. Information will be created, in part, using CommunityViz software, which is a decision support tool that combines numeric and spatial data about a location. The "live environment" in the software provides users with the opportunity to test new ideas and quickly see updated results.



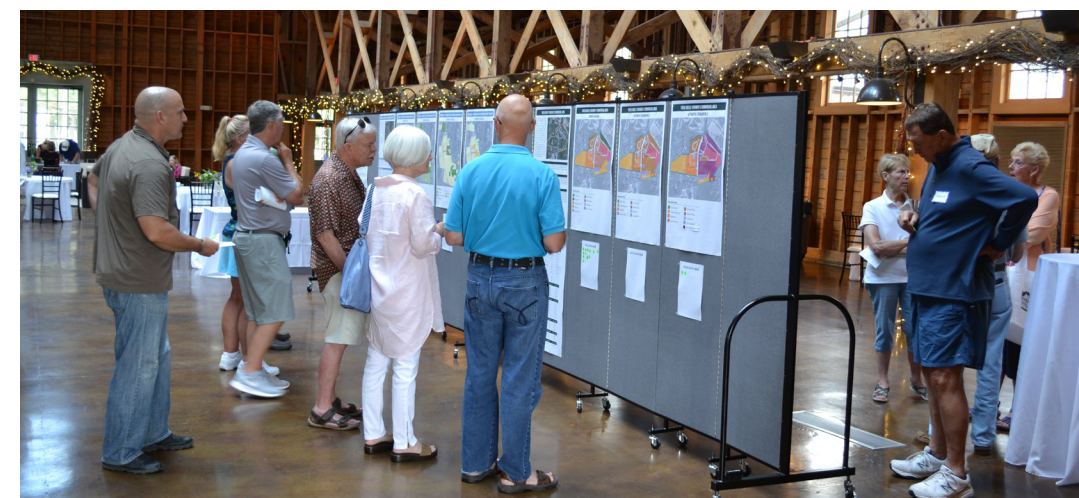
## Measure Impacts & Evaluate Trade-Offs

Computer models and spreadsheets will be used to allocate future growth in the planning area (1), and the "new demand" for facilities and services will be measured for things like new parks (2) or water service expansion (3). Scenarios will be compared side-by-side to evaluate the trade-offs of alternative futures using "performance measures" created by the project team that are unique to the community. Most performance measures developed for the scenario planning effort will relate to different goals and values expressed earlier by the community in the planning process.

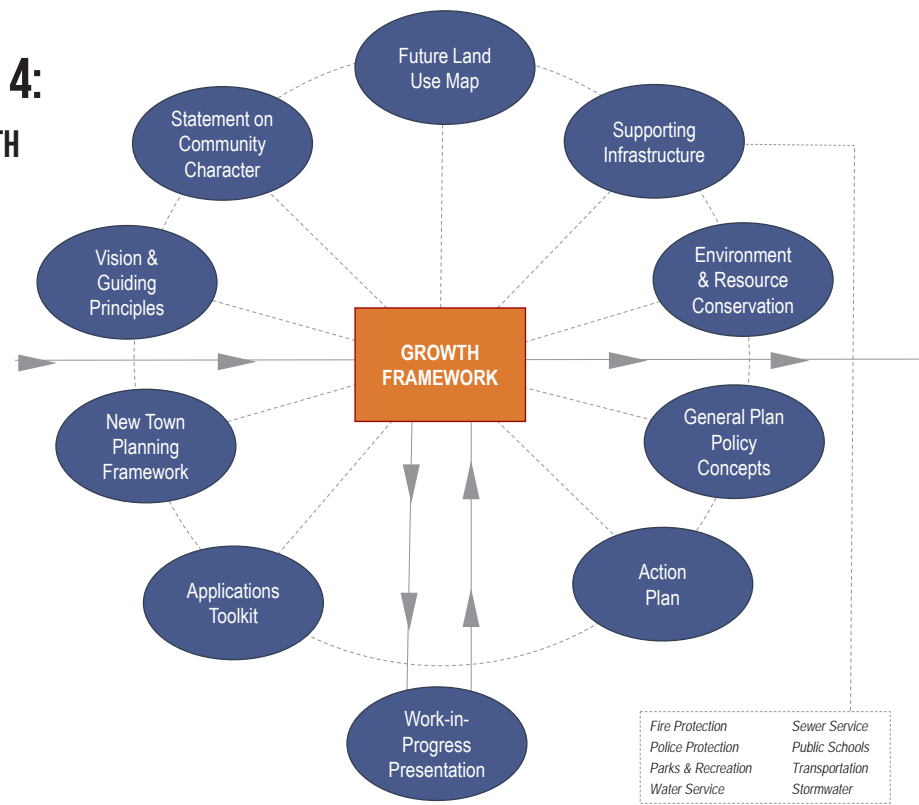


## Share Results with the Community

Results from the scenario planning process will be shared with the community at a Growth Choices Workshop, and feedback from participants related to the strengths and weaknesses of each alternative growth scenario will be considered when developing the future land use map included in the general plan.



**PLANNING PHASE 4:  
DEVELOP & REFINE GROWTH  
FRAMEWORK**



**GROWTH FRAMEWORK**

With this rubric for a preferred scenario in hand, a framework for growth and conservation can be designed to help manifest Howard County's vision for the next 20 years. The **Growth Framework** phase entails a variety of tasks needed to build the foundations of the final HoCo By Design general plan document. This includes developing a clear Vision for Howard County's future growth and conservation, supported by Guiding Principles and a Statement on Community Character that summarizes preferred development styles and design concepts. Implementation strategies are considered through the development and refinement of a Future Land Use Map, evaluating and paying special attention to the needed supporting infrastructure and environmental impacts.

**New Town Framework**

As the HoCo By Design planning process builds a plan for the entire county, a more granular examination for Columbia will provide a spotlight on the area's unique history and land use regulations. The New Town regulations were adopted in 1965 and have been in place for decades with relatively few changes in the overall structure until 2009 and 2010. In 2009, changes were made related to village center redevelopment and in 2010, changes related to Downtown Columbia redevelopment. The HoCo By Design planning process will develop a planning framework for the New Town area (minus Downtown) with an emphasis on village center redevelopment, employment and commercial corridors, and the adjacent Gateway area. However, since the Downtown Columbia Plan (2010) is still relevant, it will continue to serve as the guiding document for future downtown growth.

The New Town Framework concepts will highlight the community's preferred design principles for community character and will supplement the Future Land Use Map to reflect preferred land uses. The New Town Framework will be used to illustrate big ideas expressed as recommendations in the final General Plan document.

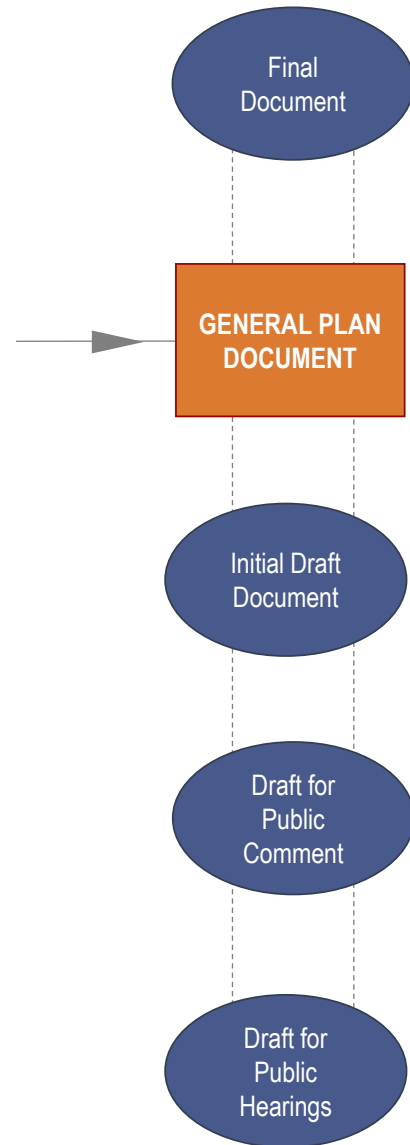


A multi-day design charrette in the Columbia area will be held to develop the New Town Framework. A multidisciplinary team of consultants representing the fields of community planning, transportation, economic development, market analysis, and urban design will work as an extension of DPZ staff throughout the event. The "open forum" will let the public work closely with the project team on specific policy recommendations and master plan concepts for Columbia to consider.

The renderings featured are from a variety of previous projects undertaken by City Explained, Inc. and serve as examples of the renderings that will be produced during the Growth Framework phase of the planning process.



**PLANNING PHASE 5:  
DRAFT, PRESENT AND REVISE  
HOCO BY DESIGN DOCUMENT**

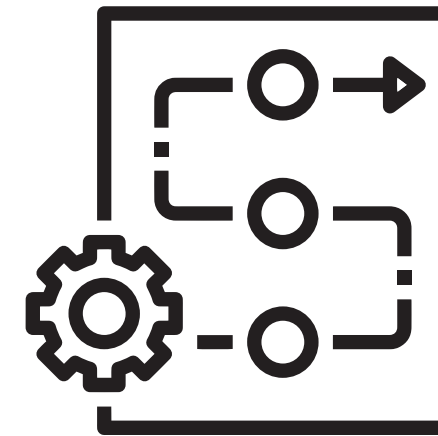


**GENERAL PLAN DOCUMENT**

The final phase of the planning process entails putting pen to paper by drafting, presenting, revising, and adopting HoCo By Design as Howard County's next General Plan. The General Plan Document phase knits together all the input and feedback we received over the previous four phases and presents a playbook for how to achieve a future for Howard County that is tailored, local, creative, and is truly designed by, and designed for, Howard County.

**TREAT THE PLAN AS A PLAYBOOK**

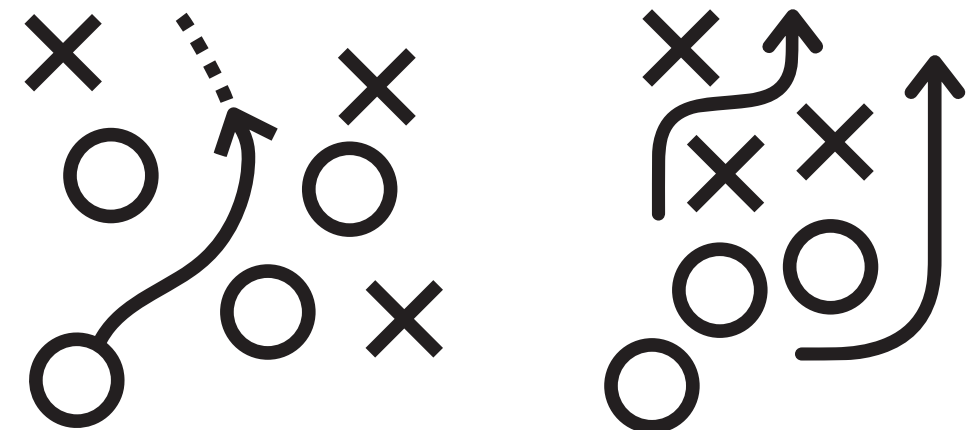
Howard County should be able to take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves, so HoCo By Design will use a "playbook" approach to guide future growth and development in the county. Some parts of the document —things like the planning context, guiding principles, community character statement, and important targets — should remain constant and keep Howard County on a focused path for success. Other parts of the document —things like the general recommendations, focus area study recommendations, and supporting maps — may need to evolve over time to adapt to conditions that were not present at the time the Plan was adopted. Any changes considered under the playbook mindset for the document should be evaluated against the planning context, guiding principles, community character statement, and important targets to determine if they are in the best long-term interests of Howard County and its residents, businesses, and property owners.



**Blueprint Approach**

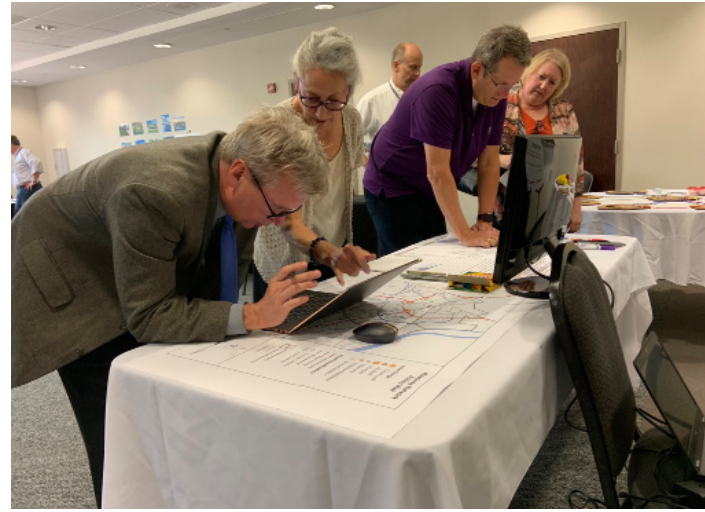
A specific plan that serves as a guide for making **something else**.

VS



**Playbook Approach**

A book of different plays that are used by a team in response to changing conditions.



# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The Public Engagement Plan for HoCo By Design is composed of a comprehensive set of initiatives that represent a significant investment to partner with the community and create a shared document for guiding decisions about the County's future. This shared document can only come to fruition with the full participation of and input from every part of the Howard County community, including but not limited to decision-makers, employers, service providers, community organizations and, most importantly, the general public. In order to maximize inclusivity, the overall approach to public engagement starts with defining targets, namely the basic wants and needs of engaged participants:

1. To be asked to participate;
2. To be provided multiple, convenient opportunities to participate;
3. To find safe, convenient places to gather;
4. To connect with people on something meaningful; and
5. To feel their involvement will affect change.

The overall approach strives to ensure that everyone should have an opportunity to engage, which means high-tech and low-tech options are provided and targeted to different segments of the population to maximize participation in the Plan update. Traditionally under-represented groups in the planning process for a General Plan update are specifically targeted for this initiative, including, but not limited to: students, young adults, working parents, community-based organizations, residents with English as a second language, home renters, and business owners and employees.

Fourteen different stakeholder engagement initiatives are identified to support the General Plan update. Each is presented below under one of four general categories used to organize the stakeholder engagement initiative: tools to educate, tools to inform the project team, tools to collaborate, and tools to get feedback on draft deliverables.



# FOUR CATEGORIES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

## Educate

Strategies to **Educate** include public engagement initiatives designed to ensure that Howard County's residents are kept informed about HoCo By Design's progress and opportunities to participate, as well as ensuring that participants understand planning issues big and small.



**Planning Education Curriculum** – An assembly of Howard County and planning best practices materials and technical guides created and presented to educate participants throughout the planning process.

**Online Engagement** – The process will feature a website-- currently under development--that will serve as the primary online hub for education, information sharing, collaboration, and feedback once the project has entered the Important Planning Themes phase.

**Responding to Public Inquiries** – There will be a variety of means for participants to get their questions answered by members of the HoCo By Design team directly throughout the planning process.

## Inform

The public engagement tactics used to **inform** the project team include opportunities for everyone to share big ideas, preferences, and visions for Howard County's future.



**Stakeholder Interviews** – Interviews and small meetings with community leaders, organizations, and industry groups to share their ideas, thoughts, and frame of reference.

**Community Ideas Exchange Workshop** – The first major public engagement event designed to creatively share ideas, preferences, and visions for Howard County's future. This event will play a critical role in helping to identify Howard County's Important Planning Themes.

**On-The-Table Initiative** – An informal discussion guide to host meetings and share ideas with friends and family about Howard County's future. The guide explains how to share the contents of the discussion with the HoCo By Design team so that the thoughts and ideas discussed can be used to help identify the Important Planning Themes.

**Better Communities Board Game** – A Howard County-specific board game (also available and adapted for online play) that will launch during the Important Planning Themes phase asks players to allocate projected growth across the county, educating players about the trade-offs associated with different types of land uses and development. Additionally, the resulting development patterns produced by the game will be used to inform and build community-driven alternative growth scenarios during the Scenario Planning phase.

### \*The departments and agencies involved in the Technical Advisory Team include:

Public Works  
Office of Transportation  
Housing and Community Development  
Recreation and Parks  
Economic Development Authority  
Office of Community Sustainability  
Community Resources and Services  
Inspections, Licenses, and Permits  
Health Department

Office of Emergency Management  
Fire and Rescue  
Police  
Office of Budget  
County Administration  
Technology and Communication Services  
Office of Law  
Planning and Zoning

## Collaborate

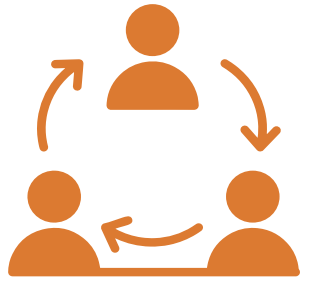
Public engagement activities in which we **Collaborate** are more granular and require a higher degree of cooperation to facilitate an exchange of information.

**Technical Advisory Team** – A group of Howard County Department staff who provide the subject matter and institutional expertise needed to review HoCo By Design team findings, ideas and reports. The Technical Advisory Team will be called on to help guide the planning process intermittently throughout the project.\*

**Planning Advisory Committee** – A body will be appointed by the County Executive consisting of community leaders, service providers, industry groups, and the general public. The Planning Advisory Committee provides the local knowledge and sounding board needed to ensure HoCo By Design is reflective of the community's needs and desires.

**Strategic Advisory Group** – Groups of local, state, or national issue area experts organized by the Important Planning Themes identified at the onset of the planning process. Strategic Advisory Group members will review the work produced by the HoCo By Design team over the course of the planning process, ensuring that findings are informed by subject matter experts in the field.

**New Town Framework Design Charette** – A public event hosted during the Growth Framework phase designed to engage the community in exercises that drill down on the New Town area (minus Downtown Columbia). The event will include presentations, technical roundtable discussions, and drop-in discussions meant to the character that makes Columbia unique and examine development alternatives for the area.



## Feedback

While there will always be opportunities to provide input, the public engagement events that fall into the **Feedback** category explicitly involve the HoCo By Design team presenting milestone findings for public reaction and comment.

**Growth Choices Community Workshop Series** – An event held during the Growth Framework phase to present the alternative growth scenarios developed during the Scenario Planning phase. Participants will be asked to provide feedback on the various alternatives after being presented with their defining characteristics, impacts, and trade-offs. The feedback collected online and in-person during the Growth Choices Community Workshop Series will play a critical role in designing the Future Land Use Map.

**Draft Plan Recommendations Workshop Series** – The final event (though far from the final opportunity) to provide feedback on the official recommendations presented in the new General Plan, HoCo By Design. Occurring during the General Plan Document phase, participants will be asked to provide their input on the Vision, Guiding Principles, Future Land Use Map, and specific recommendations in HoCo By Design. The feedback received during this workshop series will be used to develop the draft and final plan itself.

**Policy-Maker Briefings & Hearings** – Events in which the HoCo By Design team makes presentations to elected officials, appointed officials, board members, etc. to provide updates and seek their input. These occur throughout the planning process and generally coincide with major milestones.

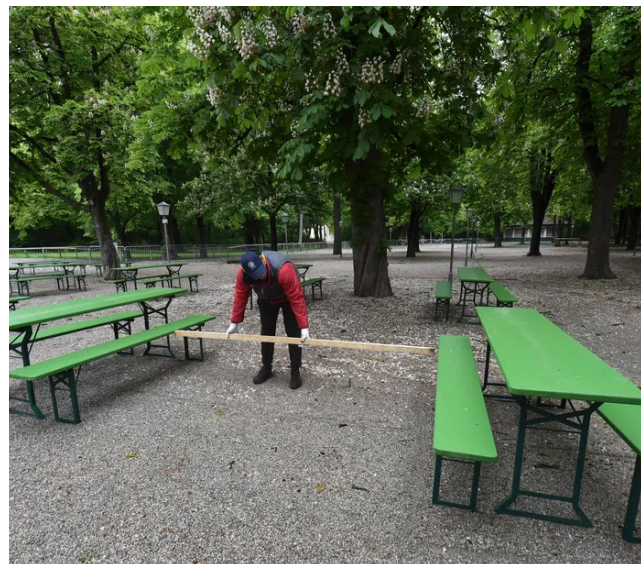
# RESPONSE TO COVID-19: PHYSICALLY DISTANT, SOCIALLY CONNECTED

Howard County is committed to providing community services and continuing government operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Planning and Zoning is working with its national and local consultants to identify industry best-practices to ensure that all stakeholders may participate in HoCo By Design in a meaningful and safe manner.

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 both virtual and in-person components. The public engagement plan already includes a variety of online opportunities that offer alternatives to in-person activities.

While the progression of the pandemic will influence what type of engagement can be done and when, the Department intends to launch a collaborate engagement process that can adapt as circumstances change.

The boxes to the right briefly describe what may need to be considered for the Four Categories of Public Engagement presented on Pages 32 and 33 while we are practicing social distancing.



## EDUCATE

- Planning Education Curriculum
- Online Engagement
- Responding to Public Inquiry

These events are all able to take place online as planned.

## FEEDBACK

- Growth Choices Community Workshops
- Draft Plan Recommendations Workshops
- Policy-Maker Briefings & Hearings

This category of engagement is slated for 2021 and may need to be adapted to alternative formats if social distancing restrictions are applied at that time.



## COLLABORATE

- Technical Advisory Team
- Planning Advisory Committee
- Strategic Advisory Group
- New Town Framework Design Charrette

Other than the New Town Framework Design Charrette, these activities will occur throughout the life of the HoCo By Design planning process, which is scheduled to last 24 months. Most activities in this category can occur through virtual meetings if necessary. The New Town Framework Design Charrette is slated for 2021. If necessary in 2021, the team will explore options to substitute the charrette with virtual opportunities or adapt the charrette to meet social distancing requirements.

## INFORM

- Stakeholder Interviews
- Community Ideas Exchange Workshop
- On-The-Table Initiative
- Better Communities Board Game

While some of these opportunities were initially envisioned to take place in-person, the project team is exploring options to substitute them with virtual opportunities or adapt them to meet social distancing requirements. For example, the project team is exploring options for a physical board game that is safe for use in small groups to compliment a more robust on-line version. However, decisions on using a physical board game will be made based on future guidance related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

# ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

HoCo By Design will use a character-based organizational framework that segments areas of Howard County into Areas to Preserve, Areas to Enhance, Areas to Transform, and Areas to Strengthen. This framework will provide HoCo By Design with general meanings and examples for achieving the County's shared vision, applying its guiding principles, and presenting recommendations in the document. Clear purpose and intent for several high-level initiatives guiding the Plan also provides focus for the community, elected officials, County staff, development interests, conservation partners, and other agencies in terms of their mission and expected outcomes to implement the next General Plan.



**Areas to Preserve** are intended to safeguard environmentally sensitive lands and provide meaningful opportunities to link residents with parks, recreation facilities, and nature. They can also represent areas of particular historical or culture significance, protecting Howard County's character and what makes it a special place.



**Areas to Enhance** could include existing developed areas, such as neighborhoods, employment hubs or retail centers that are now stable, but should consider small-to-medium improvements over the long-term in order to keep up with changing economics, technologies and age-related wear and tear. These areas are not likely to witness wholesale redevelopment, but could benefit from several precise, tactical improvements capable of meaningfully enhancing the quality of life for the people that inhabit those areas.



**Areas to Transform** provide opportunities to re-imagine Howard County's future, and introduce new, energized activity areas that provide key locations for new employment centers, regional shopping centers, entertainment areas, and upper story or adjacent residential units in appropriate locations. These areas require more deliberate planning and phasing to keep them viable over longer periods of change and have the potential to serve as new and reinvigorated activity centers for the whole of Howard County.



**Areas to Strengthen** represent places around Howard County that already have positive momentum in the right direction and just need some additional, intentional support to overcome the hurdles preventing them from reaching their full potential. Physical improvements should build upon, and contribute to, their continued success.

# EMPHASIS FOR THE NEW GENERAL PLAN

The new General Plan HoCo by Design: Every Voice. One Vision will build on the foundation of previous Plans in thinking about a successful and adaptable future for the community. It will be the first Plan to emphasize design and character and instill a lasting sense of place unique to different areas of the County. The notion that protecting or enhancing the brand and character of Howard County as the overarching goal of the Plan will organize other thoughts and ideas about more traditional topics included in the General Plan.

The new General Plan will also adopt a different format for presenting information in the document, which recognizes that the challenges and opportunities facing Howard County do not fit neatly into individual silos (chapters) found in more traditional General Plan documents (e.g., land use, transportation, natural resources, parks and recreation, or economic development). Instead, HoCo By Design will revolve around themes that will be identified through the public engagement process. Despite this different approach to writing a general plan, HoCo By Design will be consistent with state laws, regulations, and guidelines. County staff, elected and appointed officials, and their partners will be in the best position to implement HoCo By Design's vision for the future by weaving together the issues and solutions, rather than treating them separately, for meeting the County's biggest challenges in the future.

## It all starts with Howard County's Character...

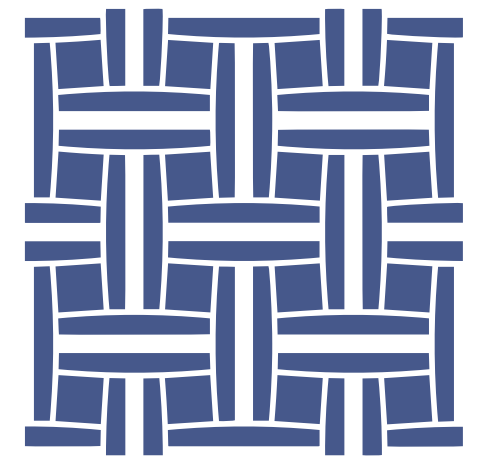


Silo Chapters



VS

Theme Chapters



**CONCLUSION**



# CONCLUSION

The general guidelines for the completion of HoCo By Design were created in context, with Howard County's unique characteristics and planning needs at the forefront. The general guidelines – the Planning Process, Public Engagement Plan and Organizational Framework – were developed to build on Howard County's long tradition of having meaningful and impactful General Plans that help to create the County's exceptional quality of life.

The general guidelines will be a resource to the HoCo By Design team, and referred to throughout the planning process to maintain a comprehensive, consistent and continuous engagement strategy. This community engagement will be supported by data and analysis.

While the general guidelines were prepared as a matter of County law, they were written in order to create the best possible planning process and resulting document for today's Howard County. With the adoption of these guidelines, the HoCo By Design team will have the framework needed to create a holistic and inclusive General Plan that strives to capture every voice and achieve one vision.