



## Zoning governs all development in Howard County.

The zoning regulations specify what can — and cannot — be built on a parcel of land, including its use, density and configuration on the site.

For example, some zoning might allow apartments to be built on a parcel, while elsewhere, the zoning allows only single-family houses or a commercial building, such as a gas station.



### The role of the **Legislative Branch** as it relates to zoning & development:

- The County Council establishes land use policies by adopting the General Plan
- Allocates growth annually by adopting the school capacity chart and housing allocations
- Adopt zoning and land development regulations, including comprehensive zoning changes and text amendments
- Act as the Zoning Board to address rezoning requests outside of the comprehensive zoning process
- Appoints the Hearing Examiner and members of the Board of Appeals

### The role of the **Executive Branch** as it relates to zoning & development:

- Proposes land use policies and regulations for the County Council to consider – with veto authority over Council decisions
- Through the Department of Planning and Zoning, reviews development plans to ensure that they comply with zoning and other development regulations - allows plan adjustments under special hardship circumstances
- Through the Department of Planning and Zoning, enforces code violations

**All development must follow existing zoning**, unless the landowner/developer requests and receives an exception from the zoning code to allow a different kind of development to occur on the parcel.

In some cases, **zoning exceptions — which are called *conditional uses*** — might allow more housing units to be built on a parcel than the existing zoning permits, or allow a commercial building on a parcel that is zoned for residential. In addition, *variances* can be granted to regulations on specifics such as setbacks, height, lot coverage, etc. *Conditional uses* and *variances* are granted by the Hearing Examiner.

## Plan Review

The county begins its official review of a proposed building project once the landowner/developer submits a project plan to planning and zoning officials. All plans are reviewed by the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) and other county agencies (such as Public Works, Soil Conservation, Fire, etc.) for compliance with county regulations. The approval or denial of specific projects is done through an *Administrative* or a *Discretionary* process.

**Administrative Process** - All development plans are reviewed by county agencies, led by the Department of Planning and Zoning, for compliance with adopted regulations. Plans are typically revised numerous times before approval is granted.

**Discretionary Process** - Some development plans are submitted to either the Planning Board, Zoning Board, or Hearing Examiner for approval or denial. Review occurs through a public hearing process and decisions are based on criteria that are specific to each type of request.

## General Plan

The council adopted the current General Plan, **Plan Howard 2030**, in 2012. The plan targets growth in particular areas of the county, including downtown Columbia and the Route 1 corridor. The General Plan establishes the policy direction for where development should occur, as well as the amount and intensity of development.



## Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance

All approved developments also must comply with the county's *Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance* (APFO), a growth management tool that enables the County to provide adequate public roads, schools and housing allocations in a timely manner and achieve General Plan objectives. APFO is designed to direct growth to areas where adequate infrastructure exists or soon will exist.

The county also has launched **HoCode Rewrite**, a process to modernize and unify the development regulations under a single, comprehensive document that will make them simpler for residents to understand and use. The rewrite will better align with *PlanHoward 2030* goals in several ways, including: make the regulations more internally consistent; tighten ambiguous language; and organize information in a user-friendly manner.

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