



# Howard County Council

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## COUNCILMEMBERS

Christiana Rigby, Chair  
District 3  
Deb Jung, Vice Chair  
District 4  
Opel Jones  
District 2  
Liz Walsh  
District 1  
David Yungmann  
District 5

### League of Women Voters County Council Forum on HoCo by Design – approved minutes

Hybrid Meeting (Virtual and In-Person Meeting)  
East Columbia Branch Library  
Wednesday, November 29, 2023  
7:00 p.m.

Laura Mettle opened the forum at 7:01pm.

**Councilmembers present:** Chair Christiana Rigby, Vice-Chair Deb Jung, and Liz Walsh

**Council Staff Present:** Isaiah Anderson, Executive Assistant

**Administrative Staff Present:** Mary Kendall (DPZ)

#### Agenda

- 1) Introduce the attending members of the Council (Ms. Walsh, Ms. Rigby, and Ms. Jung) and Ms. Mary Kendall, Deputy Director of the Howard County DPZ.

Laura Mettle began with an introduction of Christiana Rigby, Deb Jung, Liz Walsh, and Mary Kendall. Explained that there is a quorum of Council Members, subjecting meeting to Open Meetings Act, including video recording, minutes, and photos.

- 2) Briefly recap HoCo by Design plan process and define HoCo by Design.

Ms. Kendall provided an overview of the General Plan and highlighted some of the changes made through the amendment process. She included an explanation of various chapters and provided information about the efforts undertaken by the County. Ms. Kendall's presentation highlighted development and process in adopting the General Plan; how it will be utilized by Departments in various land use decisions; key issues identified throughout the process; and major focus of each chapter.

Ms. Kendall provided detail of the strategies and objectives to be addressed by the General Plan which included: strategy for growth and conservation; control pace of development and school/road capacity; addressed need to support healthcare services; future land uses and comprehensive re-zoning; definition of an activity center; emphasis on need to diversify housing types; affordable housing units; Route 1 corridor plan; APFO committee will need to

be convened within one year of General Plan's adoption; and factors that drive growth within a community.

- 3) Moderator will pose the overall questions and set some expectations for the session.

Ms. Kendall responded to questions about affordable housing unit allocation; and amendments approved by the Council.

- 4) Various topics from the plan will be addressed in turn, in this order:

- a. Ecological Health

Council Members responded to questions from the public about ecological health. Ms. Walsh responded with amendment changes she recommended on gas and electrification to address climate change. Discussed desire to prioritize certain heating/fueling systems over others. Ms. Jung provided an explanation of a few amendments proposed to address climate change, focused on community centers and International Green Construction code standards. Ms. Rigby discussed the Climate Action Resiliency Plan which goes into greater detail on climate change specifics.

- b. Housing

Council Members responded to questions on prioritizing infrastructure over waivers for General Plan implementation and integration of affordable housing into communities. Ms. Rigby discussed hesitations in village center redevelopment by property owners and developers. Ms. Walsh noted the County Executive's role in granting development waivers and the lack of affordable housing requirements.

Question posed to Council Members on the affordable housing units, specifically if this will be integrated into existing communities, or concentrated in certain areas. Ms. Jung discussed a General Plan amendment for a specific affordable housing percentage. There was general discussion on integrating affordable housing and infrastructure prioritization. Ms. Rigby and Ms. Jung addressed senior housing affordability and a General Plan amendment for mandatory affordable housing percentages. Ms. Kendall noted implementation actions on page DN-6.

Audience concerns about senior housing affordability and repurposing 55+ communities were addressed by Ms. Rigby and Ms. Jung. Ms. Jung referenced a past ZRA on senior housing affordability as well as another proposed amendment to General Plan to require percentage of affordable housing units, rather than an incentivization. Ms. Kendall and Ms. Rigby discussed zoning challenges and conditional use requirements for 55+ communities.

- c. Transportation

There was general discussion about the strategy for growth and conservation, plans for the planned service area; and the need to maintain planned service area as-is, with two small expansions.

#### d. Infrastructure

Question to Council about compliance and enforcement of climate change goals, specifically with regards to developers and ensuring citizen participation in the process.

Ms. Jung provided detail on the compliance and enforcement aspect. Explained that Council is unable to fully control development and discussed desire to complete comprehensive re-zoning based on the General Plan.

Ms. Rigby touched on the issue of property rights and Howard County charter. County right-of-way and road ownership impact the potential for sidewalk construction. Complete Streets policy allows Council to focus on land use and subdivision regulations to make recommendations to the APFO workgroup.

Ms. Mettle inquired about zoning changes for rural west septic systems. Ms. Rigby, Ms. Jung, and Ms. Kendall highlighted recent ZRA changes and multi-unit housing developments with shared septic systems.

#### e. Economic Development

Council responded to questions about a new hospital and its feasibility under APFO guidelines, public-private roles in development; bed capacity; mental health issues and emergency room use. Ms. Rigby discussed funding for increased bed capacity, especially for mental health, and the role of partners like Chase Brexton. Ms. Walsh discussed Elkridge area development, focusing on mixed-use development and public space.

#### f. Route 1 Corridor

Question posed to Council on repurposing office buildings for alternative uses. Ms. Jung and Ms. Walsh discussed the challenges and developer hesitations in such conversions. Ms. Rigby recommended a relevant podcast.

Council responded to additional questions on affordable housing; cutting the timeframe from one year for APFO to six months; expedited recommendations for comprehensive zoning to allow current sitting Council to handle. Ms. Jung expressed a desire to address zoning as quickly as possible but explained that Council is reliant on County Administration and planning codes.

Ms. Jung concluded with thanking audience members for their participation and questions.

Laura Mettle adjourned the forum at 8:42pm.