



# HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

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## TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT

*Planning Board Meeting of April 9, 2026*

### Case No./Petitioner: ZRA-224; Department of Planning and Zoning

**Request:** The purpose of this Zoning Regulation Amendment (ZRA) is to permit Cottage Cluster Age-Restricted Adult Housing developments allowing for an increased amount of affordable missing middle housing options and to align them with the broader goals of Howard County's General Plan, HoCo By Design and the County's Housing Opportunities Master Plan.

The ZRA includes:

- Created and added a definition of Cottage Clusters
- Amended the definition for an Optional Design Project
- Amended the Uses Permitted as a Matter of Right in the PGCC district
- Amended the supplemental zoning regulations for a Cottage Cluster Age-Restricted Adult Housing development within an Optional Design Project
- Amended the Parking Requirements for residential uses to include this use

## I. BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF EXISTING ZONING REGULATIONS

### Cottage Cluster Developments

The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) does not have history of cottage cluster developments in the Zoning Regulations.

### Age-Restricted Adult Housing (ARAH)

In 1988, "Housing for elderly and/or handicapped persons" was added to the Zoning Regulations as a special exception. In 2001, "Housing for elderly and/or handicapped persons" was replaced with "Age-Restricted Adult Housing (ARAH)." Today, ARAH is permitted by right in the CCT, PSC, R-SI, TNC, POR and PEC districts and permitted by conditional use in the B-1, B-2, RC, RR, R-ED, R-20, R-12, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-A-15, R-APT and R-H-ED districts.

### Optional Design Project

Optional Design Project was added to the Zoning Regulations during the 2013 Comprehensive Zoning Plan as a design process specific to the CR (Commercial Redevelopment) zoning district. It is a deliberative planning process between the developer and DPZ, and ultimately subject to final approval by the Planning Board.

## II. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

This section contains a summary of the Petitioner’s proposed amendment. The Petitioner’s proposed amendment text is attached as Exhibit A.

### **Sec. 103.0: Definitions**

The Petitioner is proposing to amend the following definitions:

- Create a definition for Cottage Cluster
- Amend the definition of Optional Design Project
  - Remove the reference that an Optional Design Project is only permitted in the CR zoning district

### **Sec. 126.0: Planned Golf Course Community (PGCC)**

The Petitioner is proposing to add Age-Restricted Adult Housing Cottage Clusters as a use Permitted as a matter of right, subject to the requirements of Section 128.0.R.

### **Sec. 128.0.A.12: Supplemental Zoning Regulations**

The Section contains the Supplemental Regulations for zoning districts with Section A-O outlining different provisions for certain zoning districts.

The Petitioner proposes adding a new subsection “R” to promote housing stock diversification and expand missing middle housing types, and to encourage age-restricted adult housing developments to build small to medium housing units that allow seniors to downsize and are affordable for low to middle income households, subject to the following criteria:

- The parcel is developed using the Optional Design Project process.
- The parcel is within the Planned Service Area for public water and sewer.
- The property is zoned R-ED, PGCC, R-20, R-12, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-H-ED, R-A-15, R-APT, B-1 or B-2 Districts.
- The minimum development area is 20,000 gross square feet.
- The maximum development area is 10 gross acres.
- The cottage cluster dwellings are limited to Age-Restricted Adult Housing. Deed restrictions or covenants are required that establish how the age restrictions will be implemented and maintained.
- The cottage cluster development must include the following design criteria:
  - The landscape character of the site must blend with adjacent residential

- development.
- The optional design project and the architectural design of the building(s) are reviewed by the Design Advisory Panel.
  - The development must include a common courtyard scheme. The common courtyard size shall be a minimum of 250 square feet per dwelling unit. A common entity will manage all open space, common areas and related improvements.
  - Loading and trash storage areas shall be adequately screened from view.
  - A 20% MIHU requirement will be imposed if a development will contain any constructed amenity area. The minimum size of a constructed amenity area shall be at least 500 square feet. The cumulative area for all recreational amenities shall not exceed 3,500 square feet.
  - The development must comply with specific bulk requirements, unless an adjustment is approved by the Planning Board.
  - No accessory structures or uses shall be permitted within the development, except those amenity areas constructed for the community.
  - The development shall incorporate universal design features.

**Sec. 133.0.D: Off-Street Parking and Loading Facilities: Minimum Parking Requirements for Specific Uses**

The Petitioner is proposing to amend the Age-restricted Adult Housing parking requirements to add Cottage Cluster to the Apartment and Multi-plex parking category.

**III. EVALUATION OF PROPOSAL**

This section contains the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) technical evaluation of ZRA-224 in accordance with Section 16.208(f) of the Howard County Code.

**(1) The compatibility, including potential adverse impacts and consequences, of the proposed Zoning Regulation Amendment with the existing and potential uses of the surrounding areas and within the same zoning district.**

Staff does not anticipate this ZRA would produce adverse impacts that are substantially greater than what the current regulations allow. This amendment would have a general impact on all properties zoned R-ED, PGCC, R-20, R-12, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-H-ED, R-A-15, R-APT, B-1 or B-2 districts. This ZRA will provide missing middle housing options by permitting Age-Restricted Adult Housing Cottage Clusters by right in the above districts under Optional Design Project guidelines.

**(2) The properties to which the Zoning Regulation Amendment could apply and, if feasible, a map of the impacted properties.**

This ZRA would add Age-Restricted Adult Housing Cottage Clusters to the R-ED, PGCC, R-20, R-12, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-H-ED, R-A-15, R-APT, B-1 or B-2 districts on parcels 20,000 square feet or great up to 10 acres. A map detailing each of these uses and the properties to which the uses could apply are provided in Attachments A.

**(3) Conflicts in the Howard County Zoning Regulations as a result of the Zoning Regulation Amendment.**

If adopted, this amendment would not create any conflicts in the Howard County Zoning Regulations. The purpose of the proposed legislation is to provide missing middle housing options and update the Zoning Regulations with the broader goals of HoCo By Design and the County’s Housing Opportunities Master Plan.

**(4) The compatibility of the proposed Zoning Regulation Amendment with the Policies and objectives, specifically including the environmental policies and objectives, of the Howard County General Plan.**

HoCo By Design, Howard County’s General Plan, describes a cluster of homes oriented around a common green space as one form of “missing middle housing.” As defined in HoCo By Design, missing middle housing refers to “a range of small- to medium-size home choices that are available at different price points” which are “compatible in scale and character with surrounding neighborhoods.”

The proposed ZRA is strongly supported by the Dynamic Neighborhoods chapter of HoCo By Design, which is supportive of providing attainable and diverse housing options. It emphasizes creating more diverse housing options through the County, increasing housing affordability, and ensuring there are housing options for older adults, disabled populations and those with special needs. The below Policy Statements and Implementation Actions are taken from HoCo By Design and are supportive of the proposed ZRA.

**Policy Statement DN-1** states to “Increase Opportunities for missing middle housing through the creation and use of zoning tools and incentives.” The Implementing Actions include expanding the types of housing allowed in the Zoning Regulations to include missing middle housing including cottage clusters, evaluating flexible zoning standards to create missing middle housing opportunities, and establishing regulations to disperse missing middle housing throughout the County.

**Policy Statement DN-5** states to “Allow the development of small-scale missing middle housing and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) that are consistent with the character and integrity of their surroundings, meet specific site conditions in single-family neighborhoods, and comply with all applicable APFO and parking requirements.” The Implementing Actions include exploring zoning and other incentives for minor subdivisions that consist of missing middle housing types.

**Policy Statement DN-12** states to “Provide a range of affordable, accessible, and adaptable housing options for older adults and persons with disabilities.” The Implementing Actions include using zoning tools and incentives that increase the supply of missing middle housing, provide flexibility in the Zoning Regulations for accessibility to allow older adults to downsize in their community, and encouraging Age-Restricted Adult Housing development to build small- to medium-scale housing units to include apartments, condominiums, townhouses, and missing middle housing type that allow seniors to downsize.

The Quality By Design chapter contains policies and implementing actions regarding the future character of new development. It recommends considering whether the role of the Design Advisory Panel should be expanded to other areas within Howard County and recommends developing context-sensitive design standards appropriate for various scales of infill development to effectively transition between larger developments and established uses, and to encourage compatibility of small-scale infill within established neighborhoods.

### Conclusion

This proposed ZRA advances HoCo By Design’s policies for increasing opportunities for missing middle housing through zoning. Further, it provides a design review process such that proposed age-restricted adult housing cottage clusters will be evaluated in terms of physical accessibility (with universal design standards) and sensitivity to surrounding neighborhoods (with context-sensitive design and Design Advisory Panel review) – design elements supported by the General Plan’s policies.

### Environmental Policies and Objectives

The proposed ZRA-224 is not in conflict with the environmental policies and objectives in HoCo By Design. The proposed ZRA would not change any development requirements for sensitive resource protection, stormwater management or forest conservation.

DocuSigned by:

*Lynda Eisenberg*

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Lynda D. Eisenberg, AICP, Director

3/26/2026

Date

**Exhibit A**

**Petitioner’s Proposed Text**

(CAPITALS indicate text to be added; text in [[brackets]] indicates text to be deleted.)

**Legislative Text Changes**

**Howard County Zoning Regulations**

1 **SECTION 103.0: Definitions**

2 COTTAGE CLUSTER: A GROUPING, INCLUDING A COMMON COURTYARD, OF AT LEAST  
3 FOUR DETACHED DWELLING UNITS THAT HAVE A FOOTPRINT OF LESS THAN 900  
4 SQUARE FEET.

5  
6 Optional Design Project: [[The equivalent of a Planned Unit Development in a CR Zoning District, an]]  
7 AN Optional Design Project is an alternative development proposal wherein the permitted land uses, the  
8 associated land use regulations, the development design, and other intended characteristics for the  
9 development site are initially drafted through a deliberative planning process between the developer and  
10 the Department of Planning and Zoning, and ultimately subject to final approval by the Planning Board.

11  
12 **Section 126.0: PGCC (Planned Golf Course Community)**

13  
14 **B. Uses Permitted as a Matter of Right**

15  
16 There shall be two subdistricts in the PGCC District: The PGCC-1 or Residential Subdistrict and the  
17 PGCC-2 or Multi-use Subdistrict. Delineation of the subdistrict boundaries shall be determined by the  
18 Zoning Board and shall be shown on the zoning map of Howard County.

- 19  
20 1. The following uses shall be permitted as a matter of right in both the Residential Subdistrict and  
21 in the Multi-use Subdistrict.  
22 a. One single-family detached unit per lot.  
23 b. One zero lot line unit per lot.  
24 c. Single-family attached dwelling units.  
25 d. Apartment units.  
26 e. Farming, provided that on a residential lot or parcel of less than 40,000 square feet no livestock  
27 shall be permitted. However, residential chicken keeping is allowed as noted in Section 128.0.  
28 f. Conservation areas, including wildlife and forest preserves, environmental management areas,  
29 reforestation areas, and similar uses.  
30 g. Government buildings, facilities and uses, including public schools and colleges.

- 1 h. Private recreational facilities, such as parks, athletic fields, swimming pools, basketball courts
- 2 and tennis courts, reserved for use by residents of a community and their guests. Such facilities
- 3 shall be located within condominium developments or within communities with recorded
- 4 covenants and liens which govern and provide financial support for operation of the facilities.
- 5 i. Golf courses and country clubs.
- 6 j. Riding academies and stables.
- 7 k. Carnivals and fairs sponsored by and operated on a nonprofit basis for the benefit of charitable,
- 8 social, civic or educational organizations, subject to the requirements of Section 128.0.D.
- 9 l. Seasonal sales of Christmas trees or other decorative plant materials, subject to the requirements
- 10 of Section 128.0.D.
- 11 m. Underground pipelines; electric transmission and distribution lines; telephone, telegraph and
- 12 CATV lines; mobile transformer units; telephone equipment boxes; and other, similar public
- 13 utility uses not requiring a Conditional Use.
- 14 n. Commercial communication antennas attached to structures, subject to the requirements of
- 15 Section 128.0.E.
- 16 o. Commercial communication towers located on government property, excluding School Board
- 17 property, and with a height of less than 200 feet measured from ground level, subject to the
- 18 requirements of Section 128.0.E. This height limit does not apply to government communication
- 19 towers, which are permitted as a matter of right under the provisions for "Government structures,
- 20 facilities and uses."
- 21 p. Volunteer fire departments.
- 22 [[r]] Q. Rooftop solar collectors.
- 23 R. AGE-RESTRICTED ADULT HOUSING COTTAGE CLUSTER, SUBJECT TO THE
- 24 REQUIREMENTS OF SECTION 128.0.R.
- 25
- 26

27 **Section 128.0: Supplementary Zoning District Regulations.**

28 **Section 128.0.R: AGE-RESTRICTED ADULT HOUSING COTTAGE CLUSTERS WITHIN**  
 29 **AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT**

- 30 (1) **PURPOSE AND APPLICABILITY.** THE PURPOSE OF THIS SUBSECTION IS TO
- 31 EXPAND THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PROCESS TO THE R-ED, PGCC, R-20, R-
- 32 12, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-H-ED, R-A-15, R-APT, B-1 OR B-2 DISTRICTS WITH A TOTAL
- 33 DEVELOPMENT AREA NOT EXCEEDING TEN (10) GROSS ACRES. THE INTENT OF
- 34 THIS REGULATION IS TO ELIMANTE BARRIERS IN THE ZONING REGULATIONS TO
- 35 PROMOTE HOUSING STOCK DIVERSIFICATION AND EXPAND MISSING MIDDLE
- 36 HOUSING TYPES. THE GOAL IS TO ENCOURAGE AGE-RESTRICTED ADULT
- 37 HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS TO BUILD SMALL TO MEDIUM HOUSING UNITS THAT
- 38 ALLOW SENIORS TO DOWNSIZE AND ARE AFFORDABLE TO LOW TO MIDDLE
- 39 INCOME HOUSEHOLDS.
- 40
- 41 (2) **CONDITIONS OF ELIGIBILITY.** THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PROCESS
- 42 PRESCRIBED IN THIS SECTION SHALL BE PERMITTED ONLY WHEN THE PROPOSED

1 PROJECT (A) CONSISTS OF A PARCEL OR ASSEMBLAGE OF PARCELS HAVING A  
 2 TOTAL DEVELOPMENT AREA NOT TO EXCEED TEN (10) GROSS ACRES; (B) BE  
 3 LOCATED WITHIN THE R-ED, PGCC, R-20, R-12, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-H-ED, R-A-15, R-APT,  
 4 B-1 OR B-2 DISTRICTS; (C) IS WITHIN THE PLANNED PUBLIC WATER AND SEWER  
 5 SERVICE AREA; AND (D) SATISFIES THE PURPOSE SET FORTH IN SECTION  
 6 128.0.R.1.  
 7

8 **(3) PROCEDURE FOR APPROVAL OF AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT. PROJECTS**  
 9 **THAT SATISFY THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS OF SECTION 128.0.R.2 MAY**  
 10 **PROCEED UNDER THE FOLLOWING OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PROCESS:**

- 11 1. THE OWNER OF AN INTEREST IN A TRACT OF LAND MAY SUBMIT AN  
 12 APPLICATION FOR AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT. PRIOR TO PREPARING  
 13 A SPECIFIC PLAN AND SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION, THE PETITIONER IS  
 14 ENCOURAGED TO MEET WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND  
 15 ZONING ON AN INFORMAL BASIS TO DISCUSS THE OVERALL CONCEPT  
 16 FOR THE INTENDED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT.
- 17 2. PRIOR TO FILING A FORMAL APPLICATION FOR AN OPTIONAL DESIGN  
 18 PROJECT, THE PETITIONER SHALL PRESENT THE OPTIONAL DESIGN  
 19 PROJECT PLAN TO THE DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL FOR EVALUATION IN  
 20 ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED IN SECTION 16.1500  
 21 OF THE HOWARD COUNTY CODE. THE DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL  
 22 RECOMMENDATIONS SHALL BE INCLUDED IN THE TECHNICAL STAFF  
 23 REPORT PRODUCED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING  
 24 AND FORWARDED TO THE PLANNING BOARD FOR ITS CONSIDERATION OF  
 25 THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT.
- 26 3. THE FORMAL APPLICATION SHALL BE SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT  
 27 OF PLANNING AND ZONING AND SHALL INCLUDE:
  - 28 a) AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT PLAN WHICH INCLUDES SHEETS  
 29 DEPICTING ALL EXISTING NATURAL AND CURRENT  
 30 DEVELOPMENT FEATURES OF THE LAND AREA TO BE INCLUDED  
 31 IN THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT, AND ALSO DEPICTING  
 32 AND/OR LISTING, AS MAY BE APPROPRIATE, THE FOLLOWING FOR  
 33 THE PROPOSED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT:
    - 34 1. A BOUNDARY SURVEY
    - 35 2. PERMITTED USES
    - 36 3. BUILDINGS
    - 37 4. STRUCTURES
    - 38 5. PARKING AREAS AND NUMBER OF PARKING SPACES
    - 39 6. POINTS AND WIDTHS OF VEHICULAR INGRESS AND EGRESS
    - 40 7. ON-SITE PEDESTRIAN-RELATED FEATURES AND  
 41 CONNECTIONS TO OFF-SITE PEDESTRIAN-RELATED  
 42 FEATURES
    - 43 8. LANDSCAPING

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- 9. HARDSCAPING
  - 10. RETAINED NATURAL FEATURES SUCH AS WETLANDS, STEEP SLOPES, AND TREE AND FOREST COVER
  - 11. ARCHITECTURAL ELEVATIONS OF ALL SIDES OF ALL BUILDINGS AND SIGNIFICANT STRUCTURES WITH EXTERIOR MATERIALS SPECIFIED
  - 12. EXTERIOR LIGHTING PLAN WITH LIGHTING STRUCTURES AND LIGHT SOURCES GIVEN ON SPECIFIC LIGHTING PRODUCT INFORMATION SHEETS
  - 13. INFORMATION ON THE ADJOINING PROPERTIES, INCLUDING THE OWNER NAME, ZONING, EXISTING USE, AND EXISTING SITE IMPROVEMENTS
  - b) A WRITTEN JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT THAT EXPRESSES IN DETAIL:
    - 1. HOW THE PROPOSED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT CONFORMS TO THE PURPOSE STATEMENT IN SECTION 128.0.R.1.
    - 2. HOW THE PROPOSED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT WILL ENHANCE AND NOT OVERWHELM THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY.
    - 3. HOW THE PROPOSED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT WILL BE A BENEFIT TO HOWARD COUNTY THAT IS GREATER THAN A CONVENTIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE PROPERTY USING THE UNDERLYING ZONING DISTRICT REGULATIONS.
    - 4. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO MARKET STUDIES AND TRAFFIC STUDIES.
  - 4. THE SUBMITTED OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT APPLICATION WILL BE ASSIGNED AN OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT CASE NUMBER AND THE APPLICATION SHALL BE SUBJECT TO THE STANDARD PRELIMINARY REVIEW PROCESS CONDUCTED FOR ALL ZONING-RELATED CASES TO DETERMINE IF THE INFORMATION IN THE APPLICATION MATERIALS IS SUFFICIENT TO ADEQUATELY EVALUATE THE PROPOSAL. IF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING DETERMINES THAT IT NEEDS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND/OR CLARIFICATIONS, IT SHALL SO NOTIFY THE APPLICANT IN WRITING WITHIN 14 DAYS OF RECEIVING THE APPLICATION. ONCE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT APPLICATION INFORMATION IS DETERMINED TO BE SUFFICIENT FOR THE INITIAL FORMAL EVALUATION, THE CASE SHALL BE CONSIDERED OFFICIALLY ACCEPTED FOR SCHEDULING PURPOSES.
  - 5. WITHIN 14 DAYS OF OFFICIALLY ACCEPTING THE CASE FOR SCHEDULING PURPOSES, THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING SHALL SCHEDULE A REQUIRED FORMAL PROJECT MEETING WITH THE PETITIONER AND/OR THE PETITIONER'S PROJECT TEAM IF:

- 1 a) THE PETITIONER HAS NOT HELD INFORMAL MEETINGS WITH THE
- 2 DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING TO DISCUSS THE
- 3 OVERALL CONCEPT FOR THE INTENDED OPTIONAL DESIGN
- 4 PROJECT PRIOR TO SUBMITTING THE FORMAL APPLICATION, OR
- 5 b) THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING HAS CONCERNS
- 6 REGARDING THE USE, DESIGN, AND OR SCOPE OF THE OPTIONAL
- 7 DESIGN PROJECT THAT HAVE CHANGED FROM WHAT WAS
- 8 DISCUSSED, INDICATED, AND/OR SHOWN DURING THE INFORMAL
- 9 MEETING(S).
- 10 6. ONCE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT IS DETERMINED BY THE
- 11 DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING TO BE SUITABLY IN
- 12 CONFORMANCE WITH THE PURPOSE STATEMENT IN SECTION 128.0.R.1, AT
- 13 THE DISCRETION OF THE PETITIONER, THE PETITIONER MAY SCHEDULE
- 14 TO HAVE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT BE REVIEWED BY THE
- 15 SUBDIVISION REVIEW COMMITTEE (SRC) AT A REGULARLY SCHEDULED
- 16 MEETING OF THE SRC. THE PURPOSE OF THIS OPTIONAL SRC REVIEW
- 17 WOULD BE FOR THE PETITIONER TO HAVE ADVANCE NOTICE OF ANY
- 18 ISSUES IN THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT THAT WOULD NOT COMPLY
- 19 WITH ALL TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS OF ANY OF THE REVIEWING
- 20 AGENCIES.
- 21 7. AT THE POINT THAT THE PETITIONER DECIDES TO PROCEED WITH THE
- 22 OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT AND SO NOTIFIES THE DEPARTMENT OF
- 23 PLANNING AND ZONING, THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING
- 24 SHALL SCHEDULE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT FOR A PLANNING
- 25 BOARD HEARING. DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING SHALL
- 26 PREPARE A TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT ON THE OPTIONAL DESIGN
- 27 PROJECT, AND FORMALLY ISSUE THIS TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT AT
- 28 LEAST TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO THE SCHEDULED PLANNING BOARD
- 29 HEARING.
- 30 8. THE PLANNING BOARD SHALL HOLD ITS PUBLIC HEARING ON THE
- 31 OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT AND MAY TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION ANY
- 32 COMMENTS PRESENTED AT THAT PUBLIC HEARING. THE PLANNING
- 33 BOARD MAY:
- 34 a) APPROVE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT AS PROPOSED, BASED
- 35 UPON FINDINGS THAT THE PROPOSED OPTIONAL DESIGN
- 36 PROJECT WILL ACCOMPLISH THE PURPOSES OF SECTION 128.0.R.1
- 37 THE CRITERIA FOR 128.0.R.4;
- 38 b) APPROVE THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT WITH REVISIONS OR
- 39 CONDITIONS, BASED UPON FINDINGS THAT THE REVISED
- 40 OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT WILL ACCOMPLISH THE PURPOSES
- 41 OF SECTION 128.0.R.1; OR
- 42 c) DENY THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT.

- 1           9. THE PLANNING BOARD SHALL ISSUE ITS FORMAL DECISION ON THE  
2           OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT IN A DECISION AND ORDER. IF THE OPTIONAL  
3           DESIGN PROJECT IS APPROVED, ALL APPROVED EXHIBITS OF THE  
4           OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT SHALL BE STAMPED AS APPROVED BY THE  
5           PLANNING BOARD AND SIGNED BY THE PLANNING BOARD CHAIRPERSON.  
6           10. NO SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN SHALL BE APPROVED FOR AN OPTIONAL  
7           DESIGN PROJECT UNLESS THE SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONFORMS  
8           SUBSTANTIALLY TO ALL EXHIBITS OF THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT AS  
9           APPROVED BY THE PLANNING BOARD. EXCEPT AS PROVIDED BELOW FOR  
10          PRE-AUTHORIZED MINOR MODIFICATIONS, ANY MODIFICATIONS TO ANY  
11          PLANNING BOARD APPROVED FEATURES OF THE OPTIONAL DESIGN  
12          PROJECT MUST BE APPROVED BY THE PLANNING BOARD:  
13              a) MINOR ADDITIONS TO STRUCTURES, WITH A FLOOR AREA NO  
14              LARGER THAN 10% OF THE EXISTING FLOOR AREA OF THE  
15              DWELLING, NOT TO EXCEED 900 TOTAL SQUARE FEET PER UNIT.  
16              b) MINOR ADDITIONS TO PARKING LOTS COMPRISING NO MORE  
17              THAN 25% OF THE ORIGINAL NUMBER OF PARKING SPACES  
18              REQUIRED.  
19              c) CLEARING OR GRADING THAT DOES NOT EXCEED 5,000 SQUARE  
20              FEET IN AREA.  
21              d) SIMILAR MINOR MODIFICATIONS AS DETERMINED BY THE  
22              DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING, INCLUDING  
23              REDUCTIONS IN THE NUMBER OF RESIDENTIAL UNITS AND THE  
24              INTENSITY OF THE UNIT MIX.

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26           **(4) COTTAGE CLUSTER AGE-RESTRICTED ADULT HOUSING UTILIZING THE**  
27           **OPTIONAL DESIGN PROJECT.**  
28

29   AGE-RESTRICTED ADULT HOUSING COTTAGE CLUSTER DEVELOPMENTS ARE PERMITTED  
30   AS A MATTER OF RIGHT IN THE R-ED, PGCC, R-20, R-12, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-H-ED, R-A-  
31   15, R-APT, B-1 OR B-2 DISTRICTS, PROVIDED THAT:

- 32  
33           1. THE DEVELOPMENT SHALL BE LOCATED WITHIN AN OPTIONAL DESIGN  
34           PROJECT  
35  
36           2. THE PARCEL SHALL BE LOCATED WITHIN THE PLANNED SERVICE AREA  
37           FOR PUBLIC WATER AND SEWER.  
38

- 1                    3. THE MINIMUM DEVELOPMENT AREA IS 20,000 GROSS SQUARE FEET IN THE
- 2                    R-ED, PGCC, R-20, R-12, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-H-ED, R-A-15, R-APT, B-1 OR B-2
- 3                    DISTRICTS.
- 4
- 5                    4. THE MAXIMUM DEVELOPMENT AREA SHALL NOT EXCEED 10 GROSS
- 6                    ACRES.
- 7
- 8                    5. THE COTTAGE CLUSTER DWELLINGS ARE LIMITED TO AGE-RESTRICTED
- 9                    ADULT HOUSING. THE PETITION MUST INCLUDE COPIES OF PROPOSED
- 10                   DEED RESTRICTIONS OR COVENANTS THAT ESTABLISH HOW THE AGE
- 11                   RESTRICTIONS REQUIRED UNDER THE DEFINITION OF AGE-RESTRICTED
- ADULT HOUSING WILL BE IMPLEMENTED AND MAINTAINED.
- 12
- 13                   6. THE PETITION SHALL ESTABLISH HOW THE AGE RESTRICTIONS REQUIRED
- 14                   UNDER THE DEFINITION OF THIS USE WILL BE IMPLEMENTED AND
- 15                   MAINTAINED OVER TIME. IF THE DEVELOPMENT WILL NOT BE A RENTAL
- 16                   COMMUNITY UNDER SINGLE OWNERSHIP, AN ENTITY SUCH AS A
- 17                   CONDOMINIUM ASSOCIATION OR HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION SHALL BE
- 18                   ESTABLISHED TO MAINTAIN AND ENFORCE THE AGE RESTRICTIONS IN
- ADDITION TO COUNTY ENFORCEMENT OF ZONING REGULATIONS.
- 19
- 20                   7. THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE SITE MUST BLEND WITH ADJACENT
- 21                   RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT. TO ACHIEVE THIS:
- 22                   (a) GRADING AND ALL LANDSCAPING SHALL RETAIN AND ENHANCE
- 23                   ELEMENTS THAT ALLOW THE SITE TO BLEND AND BE COMPATIBLE
- 24                   WITH ADJACENT RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT.
- 25                   (b) THE PROJECT SHALL BE COMPATIBLE WITH ADJACENT RESIDENTIAL
- 26                   DEVELOPMENT BY PROVIDING EITHER:
- 27                   i. AN ARCHITECTURAL TRANSITION WITH BUILDINGS NEAR THE
- 28                   PERIMETER THAT ARE SIMILAR TO NEIGHBORING DWELLINGS
- 29                   IN SCALE, MATERIALS AND ARCHITECTURAL DETAIL AS
- 30                   DEMONSTRATED BY ARCHITECTURAL ELEVATIONS OR
- 31                   RENDERINGS SUBMITTED WITH THE PETITION, OR
- 32                   ii. ADDITIONAL BUFFERING ALONG THE PERIMETER OF THE SITE,
- 33                   THROUGH RETENTION OF EXISTING FOREST OR LANDSCAPING,
- ENHANCED LANDSCAPING, BERMS OR INCREASED SETBACKS.
- 34
- 35                   8. THE OPTIONAL DESIGN PLAN AND THE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN OF THE
- 36                   BUILDING(S) SHALL HAVE BEEN REVIEWED BY THE DESIGN ADVISORY
- 37                   PANEL, IN ACCORDANCE WITH TITLE 16, SUBTITLE 15 OF THE HOWARD

- 1 COUNTY CODE, PRIOR TO THE SUBMISSION OF THE SITE DEVELOPMENT
- 2 PLAN TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING. THE PETITIONER
- 3 SHALL PROVIDE DOCUMENTATION WITH THE PETITION TO SHOW
- 4 COMPLIANCE WITH THIS CRITERION.
- 5
- 6 9. ALL OPEN SPACE, COMMON AREAS AND RELATED IMPROVEMENTS SHALL
- 7 BE MANAGED AND MAINTAINED BY A COMMON ENTITY, EITHER THE
- 8 OWNER OF THE DEVELOPMENT, A CONDOMINIUM ASSOCIATION, OR A
- 9 HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION.
- 10
- 11 10. LOADING AND TRASH STORAGE AREAS SHALL BE ADEQUATELY
- 12 SCREENED FROM VIEW.
- 13
- 14 11. THE DEVELOPMENT SHALL INCLUDE A COMMON COURTYARD SCHEME
- 15 WHERE THE DWELLING UNITS SHALL BE ORIENTED UNIFROMALLY
- 16 AROUND. THE COMMON COURTYARD SIZE SHALL BE A MINIMUM OF 250
- 17 SQUARE FEET PER DWELLNG UNIT SURROUNDING THE AREA. THE
- 18 COURTYARD AND OTHER OPEN SPACE OR OPEN AREA SHALL PROVIDE
- 19 AMENITIES SUCH AS PATHWAYS, SEATING AREAS AND RECREATION
- 20 AREAS FOR THE RESIDENTS, AND SHALL BE PROTECTIVE OF NATURAL
- 21 FEATURES. THE COMMON COURTYARD SHALL NOT BE USED TO MEET THE
- 22 REQUIREMENTS FOR ABOVE GROUND STORMWATER MANAGEMENT
- 23 FACILITIES.
- 24
- 25 12. A 20% MIHU REQUIREMENT WILL BE IMPOSED IF A DEVELOPMENT WILL
- 26 CONTAIN ANY CONSTRUCTED AMENITY AREAS INCLUDING GYMS, POOLS,
- 27 SPORTS COURTS, CLUBHOUSES OR OTHER CONSTRUCTED OUTDOOR
- 28 RECREATION FACILITIES. THE MINIMUM SIZE OF A CONSTRUCTED
- 29 AMENITY AREA SHALL BE AT LEAST 500 SQUARE FEET. THE CUMULATIVE
- 30 AREA FOR ALL RECREATIONAL AMENITIES SHALL NOT EXCEED 3,500
- 31 SQUARE FEET.
- 32
- 33 13. PARKING DESIGN FOR COTTAGE CLUSTER SHOULD FOCUS ON MINIMIZING
- 34 THE VISUAL DOMINANCE OF CARS TO PRESERVE A PEDESTRIAN
- 35 FRIENDLY COMMUNITY ATMOSPHERE. PARKING LAYOUTS CAN BE A
- 36 PERIMETER PLACEMENT OR CLUSTERED SPACES PER COURTYARD. LARGE
- 37 SURFACE AREA PARKING IS DISCOURAGED. BUFFER ZONES ARE
- 38 REQUIRED TO SEPARATE PARKING CLUSTERS FROM THE COMMON
- 39 COURTYARDS.
- 40
- 41 14. BULK REQUIREMENTS:
- 42 a) MAXIMUM HEIGHT:
- 43 PRINCIPAL STRUCTURES.....20 FEET

- 1                   b) MINIMUM STRUCTURE AND USE SETBACKS FROM PROJECT
- 2                   BOUNDARY .....50 FEET
- 3                   c) MINIMUM STRUCTURE AND USE SETBACKS FROM A PUBLIC
- 4                   STREET RIGHT-OF-WAY .....25 FEET
- 5                   d) MINIMUM COMMON COURTYARD WIDTH .....20 FEET
- 6                   e) MINIMUM DISTANCE BETWEEN PRINCIPAL STRUCTURES .....8 FEET
- 7                   f) MINIMUM STRUCTURE SETBACK FROM INTERIOR ROADWAY OR
- 8                   DRIVEWAY FOR UNITS WITH GARAGES .....20 FEET
- 9                   g) THE COTTAGE CLUSTER DWELLING UNIT SHALL HAVE A
- 10                  FOOTPRINT OF LESS THAN OR EQUAL TO 900 SQUARE FEET
- 11                  h) THE MAXIMUM DENSITY SHALL BE AS FOLLOWS:
- 12

| ZONING DISTRICTS         | MAXIMUM UNITS PER NET ACRE |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| R-ED, R-H-ED, PGCC, R-20 | 9                          |
| R-12                     | 10                         |
| R-SC                     | 11                         |
| R-SA-8                   | 12                         |
| R-A-15, R-APT            | 20                         |

13  
 14                   THE PLANNING BOARD, THROUGH THE APPORVAL OF AN OPTIONAL  
 15                   DESIGN PROJECT, MAY APPROVE AN ADJUSTMENT TO THE BULK  
 16                   REQUIREMENTS IF THE PETITIONER DEMONSTRATES THAT THE DESIGN  
 17                   RESULTS IN A HIGHER QUALITY DEVELOPMENT, THAN OTHERWISE  
 18                   PERMITTED UNDER THE BULK REGULATIONS.

- 19
- 20                  15. NO ACCESSORY STRUCTURES OR USES SHALL BE PERMITTED WITHIN THE
- 21                  DEVELOPMENT, EXCEPT THOSE AMENITY AREAS CONSTRUCTED FOR THE
- 22                  COMMUNITY, INCLUDING GARDENS, CARPORTS, ACCESSORY SOLAR
- 23                  COLLECTORS, COMMUNITY GRILL AREA, OR COMMUNITY SHED FOR
- 24                  STORAGE.
- 25
- 26                  16. THE DEVELOPMENT SHALL INCORPORATE UNIVERSAL DESIGN FEATURES
- 27                  FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING GUIDELINES THAT
- 28                  IDENTIFY REQUIRED, RECOMMENDED AND OPTIONAL FEATURES. THE
- 29                  PETITION SHALL INCLUDE DESCRIPTIONS OF THE DESIGN FEATURES OF
- 30                  PROPOSED DWELLINGS TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR APPROPRIATENESS FOR
- 31                  THE AGE-RESTRICTED POPULATION. THE MATERIAL SUBMITTED SHALL
- 32                  INDICATE HOW UNIVERSAL DESIGN FEATURES WILL BE USED TO MAKE
- 33                  INDIVIDUAL DWELLINGS ADAPTABLE TO PERSONS WITH MOBILITY OR
- 34                  FUNCTIONAL LIMITATIONS AND HOW THE DESIGN WILL PROVIDE
- 35                  ACCESSIBLE ROUTES BETWEEN PARKING AREAS, SIDEWALKS, DWELLING
- 36                  UNITS AND COMMON AREAS.
- 37

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**Section 133.0.D Minimum Parking Requirements for Specific Uses**

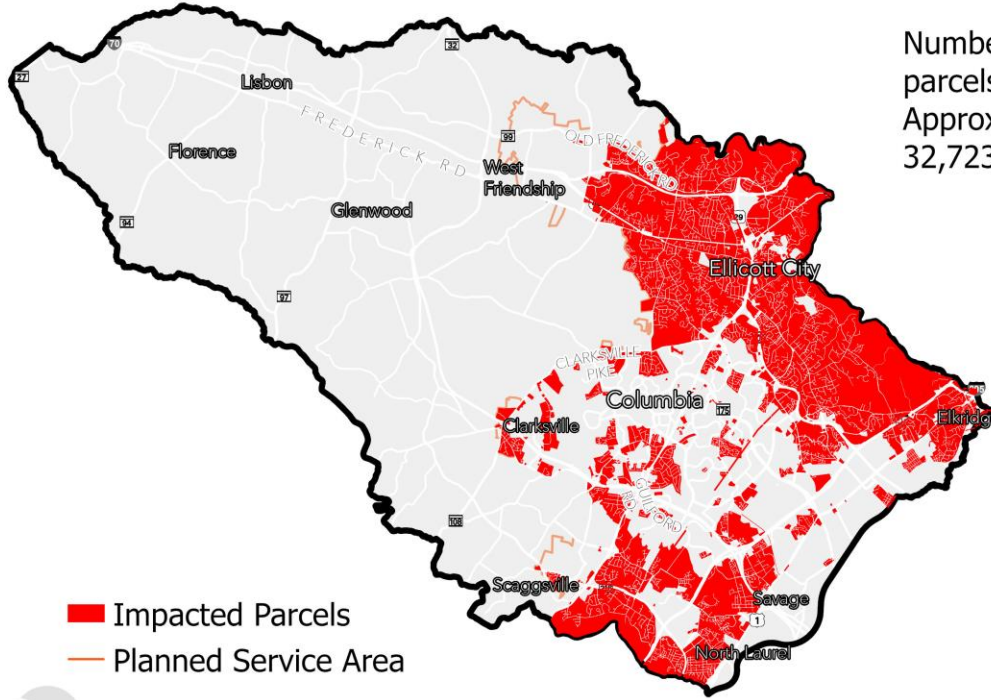
In the following text, "sf" refers to gross square feet of floor area unless net floor area is approved by the Department of Planning and Zoning. "DPZ" refers to the Department of Planning and Zoning. The parking for multiple uses shall be calculated cumulatively unless otherwise noted or unless approved in accordance with Section 133.0.F.

**1. Residential Uses**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| a. Single-family detached, single-family attached, and mobile homes | 2.0 spaces per du in all residential zoning districts. An additional 0.5 spaces per dwelling unit must be provided for visitor parking in all residential zoning districts except RC and RR Districts. |
| b. Apartments   | 2.0 spaces per du plus 0.3 spaces per dwelling unit for visitors.  |
| c. Age-restricted Adult Housing:                                    |  |
| (1) Single-family detached and Single-family attached dwellings     | 2.0 spaces per du in all residential zoning districts. An additional 0.3 spaces per dwelling unit must be provided for visitor parking in all residential zoning districts except RC and RR Districts. |
| (2) Apartments, COTTAGE CLUSTERS and Multi-Plexes                   | 1.0 space per du plus 0.3 space per dwelling unit for visitors.  |

### Attachment A

## ZRA-224 Impacted Parcels



Number of impacted parcels: 55,651  
Approximate acreage: 32,723 acres

- Impacted Parcels
- Planned Service Area

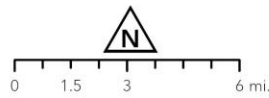


Roadways



County Boundary

Howard County Department of Planning & Zoning  
Maryland Department of Planning





# HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

3430 Court House Drive

Ellicott City, Maryland 21043

410-313-2350

Lynda D. Eisenberg, AICP, Director

FAX 410-313-3467

## Agency Comment Form

### Zoning Regulation Amendment

Date: March 19, 2026

Use: To add a provision titled "Age-Restricted Adult Housing Cottage Clusters within an Optional Design Project" under Section 128.0.

Zoning: R-ED, PGCC, R-20, R-12, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-H-ED, R-A-15, R-APT, B-1, B-2

File No.: ZRA-224

Petitioner: Department of Planning and Zoning

Comments Due: March 25, 2026

#### **DCCP COMMENTS:**

The Department of Planning and Zoning, Comprehensive and Community Planning Division (DCCP), has reviewed the proposed ZRA-224 for consistency with HoCo By Design, Howard County's General Plan. ZRA-224 proposes to revise the Zoning Regulations to allow for age-restricted adult (ARAH) housing cottage clusters within an optional design project, subject to certain conditions.

ZRA-224 defines cottage clusters as "a grouping, including a common courtyard, of at least four detached dwelling units that have a footprint of less than 900 square feet." An Optional Design Project is defined as "an alternative development proposal wherein the permitted land uses, the associated land use regulations, the development design, and other intended characteristics for the development site are initially drafted through a deliberative planning process between the developer and the Department of Planning and Zoning, and ultimately subject to final approval by the Planning Board."

The Optional Design Project process, as proposed in the petition, includes review by the Howard County Design Advisory Panel. It also requires that the landscape character of the site blend with adjacent residential development, and that developments incorporate universal design features.

#### **General Plan Evaluation**

HoCo By Design, Howard County's General Plan, describes a cluster of homes oriented around a common green space as one form of "missing middle housing." As defined in HoCo By Design, missing middle housing refers to "a range of small- to medium-size home choices that are available at different price points" which are "compatible in scale and character with surrounding neighborhoods."

Multiple policies and implementing actions related to missing middle housing are found in HoCo By Design's Dynamic Neighborhoods chapter: Policy DN-1 calls for increasing "opportunities for missing middle housing through the creation and use of zoning tools and incentives," and implementing action DN-1.3 suggests considering "expanding the types of housing allowed in the Zoning Regulations... to include missing middle housing types, such as... cottage clusters." Further, DN-1.4 suggests evaluating zoning tools, such as flexible development standards, as potential opportunities to create missing middle housing. DN-1.5 calls for establishing "regulations that disperse missing middle homes throughout the County."

Policy DN-5 recommends allowing for the development of “small-scale missing middle housing... consistent with the character and integrity of their surroundings,” and DN-5.3 calls for exploring “zoning and other incentives for minor subdivisions that consist of missing middle housing types.”

Policy DN-12 recommends providing “a range of affordable, accessible, and adaptable housing options for older adults and persons with disabilities.” Implementing action DN-12.1 suggests using “zoning tools and incentives that increase the supply of missing middle housing.” DN-12.2 calls for flexibility in the Zoning Regulations for accessibility to allow older adults to downsize in their community. DN-12.3 suggests encouraging “Age-Restricted Adult Housing (ARAH) developments to build small- to medium-scale housing units to include apartments, condominiums, townhomes, and missing middle housing types that allow seniors to downsize.”

The Quality By Design chapter contains policies and implementing actions regarding the future character of new development. QBD-1.3 recommends considering whether the role of the Design Advisory Panel (DAP) “should be expanded to other areas within Howard County.” Policy QBD-4 recommends developing “context-sensitive design standards appropriate for various scales of infill development to effectively transition between larger developments and established uses, and to encourage compatibility of small-scale infill within established neighborhoods.”

## **Conclusion**

This proposed ZRA advances HoCo By Design’s policies for increasing opportunities for missing middle housing through zoning. Further, it provides a design review process such that proposed age-restricted cottage clusters will be evaluated in terms of physical accessibility (with universal design features) and sensitivity to surrounding neighborhoods (with context-sensitive design and Design Advisory Panel review) – design elements supported by the General Plan’s policies.

*Kate Bolinger*

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SIGNATURE



Agency Comment Form  
 Zoning Regulation Amendment

Date: March 11, 2026  
 Use: To add a provision titled "Age-Restricted Adult Housing Cottage Clusters within an Optional Design Project" under Section 128.0.  
 Zoning: R-ED, PGCC, R-20, R-12, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-H-ED, R-A-15, R-APT, B-1, B-2  
 File No.: ZRA-224  
 Petitioner: Department of Planning and Zoning  
 Property Address:

| ZONING REGULATION AMENDMENT CRITERIA BY AGENCY   |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |      |    |
|--|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|------|----|
| CRITERIA   | DLD | DED | RCD | DCCP | BEH | DRP | SHA | DILP | FD |
| Compatibility of the proposed ZRA with the policies and objectives of the HC General Plan.         |     |     |     | x    |     |     |     |      |    |
| Protection of the environmental integrity as a result of the proposed zoning regulation amendment. | x   | x   | x   |      | x   | x   |     |      |    |

Comments Due: March 25, 2026

COMMENTS: The Development Engineering Division takes NO EXCEPTION to the request for the proposed amendment based on the justification presented in the application to permit Cottage Cluster ARAH developments.

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*Jim Witmer*  
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 SIGNATURE



# HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

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

Lynda D. Eisenberg, AICP, Director

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File No.: ZRA-224

Petitioner: Department of Planning and Zoning

Property Address:

| ZONING REGULATION AMENDMENT CRITERIA BY AGENCY   |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |      |    |
|--|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|------|----|
| CRITERIA   | DLD | DED | RCD | DCCP | BEH | DRP | SHA | DILP | FD |
| Compatibility of the proposed ZRA with the policies and objectives of the HC General Plan.         |     |     |     | x    |     |     |     |      |    |
| Protection of the environmental integrity as a result of the proposed zoning regulation amendment. | x   | x   | x   |      | x   | x   |     |      |    |

Comments Due: March 25, 2026

COMMENTS: The Department of Recreation & Parks takes no exception to the proposed ARAH Cottage Cluster housing amendment as proposed.

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\_\_Jason L. Thompson, PLA\_\_

SIGNATURE