

NORTH EAST PLANNING COMMISSION
North East Town Hall Meeting Room
106 South Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901
Wednesday, May 27, 2025
7:00 P.M.

Chairman Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Present for the meeting included Commissioner Crothers-Moore, Members Judy Duffy, and Calvin Wilson. Also present included Chris Mink, ENEngineering, Town Engineer, Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant. Melissa B. Cook-MacKenzie, Zoning Administrator was absent from the meeting.

-MINUTES-

April 1, 2025

Commissioner Crothers-Moore made a motion to approve the April 1, 2025 Planning Commission meeting minutes and Mr. Wilson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

-OLD BUSINESS-

None.

-NEW BUSINESS-

Riverwoods at North East Lot 2-Phase 2: Preliminary Site Plan; Landscape Plan, Lighting Plan and Highway Corridor Overlay District review. Applicant: Mitch Ensor, Bay State Land Services and Alex Zemicheal, Enterprise Community Development, Inc., 875 Hollins Street, Suite #202, Baltimore, Maryland. Property Owner: Alvin & Pamela Russell, 2665 Pulaski Highway, North East, Maryland. Also Found on Tax Map 25H; Parcel 95; Zoning District "RM-C" Multi-Family Residential and "HCOD" Highway Corridor Overlay District.

Riverwoods at North East Phase 2

Mitch Ensor, Representative from Bay State Land Services, 2012 Rock Spring Road, Forest Hill, Maryland 21050 and Alex Zemicheal, Enterprise Community Development Incorporated, presented the Riverwoods Phase 2 Preliminary Site Plan.

Mr. Ensor reported that the Riverwoods Phase 2 project had been heard by Cecil County Technical Advisory Committee in November 2024. The Concept Site Plan was presented to the Town of North East Planning Commission January 7, 2025 and conditional approval was granted.

Mr. Ensor reported that they have received preliminary Stormwater Management approval and preliminary Sediment and Erosion technical approval.

Mr. Ensor reported that the Riverwoods at North East Phase 2 project consists of two apartment buildings, which will house 48 apartments, and 2 parking lots. Each of the apartment buildings will contain 24 apartments with 1, 2, and 3 bedroom apartments. The Riverwoods Phase 2 is an extension of the existing Riverwoods at North East Phase 1. Phase 1 received their final approval in 2014.

The Preliminary Plan being presented refines the detail and comments from ENEngineering, Cecil County Department of Public Works, Sediment and Erosion Control and Cecil Soil Conservation made during the Concept Plan meeting in January. Originally, this site consisted of 11.5 acres and was divided into two phases. Pursuant to receiving all of the required approvals, the hope is that construction for Riverwoods Phase 2 can begin in late fall or early winter 2025. Riverwoods, Phase 2 will utilize Riverwoods Road, a private road, and the following amenities will be shared: the playground, clubhouse and parking lots. The sewer main and water main will also be shared.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations

There are two areas designated for EV Charging Stations in Riverwoods Phase 2. The first set of EV charging stations will be located off of Riverwoods Drive, within the first parking lot to the left, far away from the building (per the advice from Jeff Isaacs, North East Fire Company). Mr. Ensor stated that each charging unit will be able to service two vehicles/two parking spaces. Mrs. Vennell inquired if HUD has a required a certain number of EV charging stations. Mr. Ensor responded, yes 20 EV charging stations, 6 will be installed in the first parking lot and wire will be set for the remaining balance of 14 charging stations located in the second parking lot. They are unsure whether there will be a demand for the additional EV charging spaces at this time, however, if the need exists the EV charging stations can be easily installed since the wire will have been set previously.

Highway Corridor Overlay District (HCOD) – Architectural

Mrs. Vennell reported that a portion of the property lies within the HCOD. The regulations state that if a portion is within the HCOD the entire site shall adhere to the HCOD regulations.

Mr. Ensor reported that the architectural plans are complete and also include structural, electrical and lighting plans, as well as locations of the EV charging stations and mechanical plans. Mr. Ensor displayed architectural images of the proposed buildings pointing out that they will be three stories tall with multiple breaks in the façade similar to the existing buildings. The image shown depicted the front and rear of the buildings. The color palate on the exterior is similar to the existing buildings in Phase 1, consisting of a mix of brown, gray and stone accents. Chairman Dobbins commented that the Phase 2 buildings proposed and the existing Phase 1 buildings appear to complement one another as he did not note any significant difference between them.

Mr. Ensor reported that Mr. Isaacs from the Fire Company commented that the width of the entrances and stairways are very helpful for the Fire Company when addressing emergency calls. Mr. Wilson inquired if there are handicapped accessible apartments. Mr. Ensor replied yes there are several 1st floor apartments that will be handicapped accessible as well as some apartments with the capability of easily converting to handicapped accessible.

ENEngineering Comment Letter

Mr. Ensor responded to each item on the ENEngineering comment letter dated May 12, 2025.

Preliminary Site Plan Comments

1. A Reciprocal Agreement between Lot 1 and Lot 2 shall be required to ensure all requirements of the North East Zoning Ordinance and Annexation Agreement can be met. Mr. Ensor commented that Phase 1 and Phase 2 will rely on each other and both phases will share parking, dumpsters, playground and the clubhouse among other things. Mr. Ensor reported that Mr. Zimicheal has submitted an agreement to the Towns Attorney for review. Mrs. Vennell inquired if all of the residents of Phase 1 and Phase 2 and their guests will have the use of all of the same amenities. Mr. Ensor replied yes.
2. A Lighting Plan is required as part of the HCOD review. A Lighting Plan has been designed and has been included in the Electrical Permit package. Mr. Ensor stated that if needed he could forward the Lighting Plan to the Planning Office.
3. Dumpster Screening: A fence shall be located around the dumpsters for screening purposes and shown on the site plan. Mr. Ensor respond, they will comply with all of the requirements and the enclosure would be compatible with the dumpster enclosures in Phase 1.
4. Stormwater Management and Erosion status of the Concept and/or Preliminary Approvals: Mr. Ensor responded that they have received technical approval of the Concept Plan. Cecil Soil and Cecil County Department of Public Works issued approval letters, on May 12, 2025, which were forwarded to the Town, unfortunately after Mr. Mink's letter had already been drafted. Mrs. Vennell confirmed receipt of the approval letters.
5. Crosswalks are required across Riverwoods Road connecting Phase 2 to the existing Phase 1 sidewalks: Mr. Ensor commented that the plan shows the crosswalks and stated that there will be handicapped spaces on either side of the crosswalks. Mr. Mink commented that the proposed crosswalks would be located mid-block and would therefore require the appropriate signage and crosswalk stripes. Mr. Ensor confirmed they will comply with the requirements. Mrs. Vennell stated a sign plan shall be required with the Final Site Plan submittal.

6. Proposed Parking Lot in the northeast corner of Lot 2 impacts the previously recorded Forest Conservation Area. Mr. Ensor reported that Cecil County Department of Planning requested a reassessment of only the portion of the forested area in Phase 2. Mr. Ensor reported that a Forest Stand Delineation of Phase 2 has been done. In addition he reported that Cecil County Planning Department requested an updated letter from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The updated letter from DNR had been received and has been forwarded to the Cecil County Planning Department. DNR did not find any protected species located on the subject property. Mr. Ensor added that there is area on Phase 2 where additional forestation can be installed if required by Cecil County. Mrs. Vennell added that prior to submitting for the Final Site Plan a letter from Cecil County stating that all of the Forest Conservation Area requirements have been met shall be required.
7. Floodplain line: Mr. Ensor stated that the 100 year Floodplain line is just on the edge of the subject property. Mr. Mink stated that it appears there is a portion of the site that is located within the 100 year Floodplain. Mr. Ensor clarified that a portion of the site is within the 500 year Floodplain and stated that during the Forest Stand Delineation the exact location of the Floodplain line will be determined as all environmental features must be identified on this plan including Non-Tidal Wetlands. Mr. Ensor reported that on the original Forest Stand Delineation for the entire 11.5 acre site done prior to Phase 1 all environmental features were identified at that time. Mrs. Vennell reported that in 2015 the Floodplain maps were updated and therefore, the information on the original Forest Stand Delineation may not be accurate at this time. Mr. Ensor reported a field survey to locate the actual Floodplain line has been done.
8. Water Plan: A water plan was submitted to the Town for review. Mr. Ensor inquired about the best way to service their property and other properties adjoining Route 40 beyond their property. Mr. Mink reported that Mr. Ensor is currently with ENEngineering on this matter and metes and bounds will be required for the easements. Mrs. Vennell commented that the Easement Agreement(s) are required prior to the Final Site Plan submittal.

Landscape Comments

Mrs. Vennell stated that Jodie Shivery, Ecologically Sound Landscapes, the Town's Horticultural Consultant would be performing the review and inspections for the Riverwoods Phase 2 Landscape. Ms. Shivery would be willing to meet onsite to discuss the required Landscape. Mrs. Vennell commented that she will forward Ms. Shivery's contact information to Mr. Ensor as requested.

Mr. Ensor reported that he had spoken to Jeff Isaacs, North East Fire Company, who commented that it would be helpful to have firefighting ability from the other side of the property. Mr. Ensor stated that he would like to discuss the species and location of trees with Ms. Shivery. Mr. Mink stated that the HCOD requires a certain amount of trees and tree sizes, this should be considered during the planning of the landscape. Mr. Mink added that screening is required between

residential and commercial properties. Mr. Ensor commented that understory trees and other landscaping can create that required barrier and still allow the fire company the ability to fight a fire if necessary. Mr. Ensor clarified that his team is willing to work with the Town, Ms. Shivery, and Mr. Isaac to provide the best outcome for the Town. Mrs. Vennell stated that she can coordinate this meeting.

Water Allocation

Mrs. Vennell commented that Water and Sewer allocation is required prior to the Final Site Plan submittal. The Towns Water allocation application can be found on the Towns website. Once the application has been approved by the Mayor and Commissioners the property owner will be sent a water service agreement. The Water Allocation Policy details the process and the Town Planning Office can assist with any questions. Mr. Mink requested that the water demand, water main and service line detail be forwarded to him for review. Mr. Zemicheal reported they are currently working on this process and will forward it upon completion. Mrs. Vennell requested the information also be forwarded to the Planning Office as well.

Sewer Allocation

Mr. Ensor report that an application for (48) units of Sewer allocation was submitted to the County on May 12, 2025.

Attorney Questions

Mrs. Vennell inquired if the Towns Attorney, David Beste, should have any questions who should they be directed to. Mr. Zemicheal responded Attorney Kevin Davidson, Gallagher Evelius & Jones Attorney at Law.

Mr. Mink inquired if upon completion of the project would the two parcels ever be combined into one parcel and ownership. Mr. Zemicheal responded that do to funding and tax credits that is not possible.

Chairman Dobbins had no additional comments, planning commission had no comments.

Preliminary Site Plan

Ms. Duffy made a motion to approve the Preliminary Site Plan subject to the following conditions:

1. Chris Mink, ENEngineering, letter dated May 12, 2025 (attached).

Mr. Wilson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Highway Corridor Overlay District – Architectural

Mr. Wilson made a motion to approve the Highway Corridor Overlay District –Architectural Plan subject to the following conditions:

1. Chris Mink, ENEngineering, letter dated May 12, 2025 (attached).
2. Lighting Plan shall be excluded from this approval as it has been included with the Electrical Permit Package.

Ms. Duffy seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Landscape Plan

Ms. Duffy made a motion to approve the Landscape Plan subject to the following conditions:

1. Chris Mink, ENEngineering, letter dated May 12, 2025 (attached).
2. Waterline Easement shall be resolved with the coordination of ENEngineering, Bay State Land Services, Enterprise Community Development, Incorporated and the Planning Office.
3. Jodie Shivery, Ecologically Sound Landscapes, Town's Horticultural Consultant comments on the ENEngineering letter dated May 12, 2025.
4. Fire Company comments in regards to the required landscape species and location.

Commissioner Crothers-Moore second the motion and the motion was approved by all.

2024 Annual Planning Report

Mrs. Vennell presented the 2024 Annual Planning Report and commented that the Planning Office adds a lot of additional information, more than what is required by the Maryland Department of Planning. The Annual Planning Report report is a good reflection of our Town and what takes place annually. Ms. Duffy commented that she thought the 2024 Annual Planning Report was the best one yet. Chairman Dobbins stated that he was excited to read about the grant money for the playground.

Ms. Duffy made a motion to adopt the 2024 Annual Planning Report. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

-REPORTS-

None.

-MISCELLANEOUS-

Chairman Dobbins inquired about the status of the Elk River Brewing at the Ford House. Mrs. Vennell reported that the owners have received there Renovation Permit and Commercial Occupation License from the Town but have not yet received occupancy.

Chairman Dobbins reported that he had seen the rendering of the old North East Grocer and commented that the architectural drawing was very nice.

Chairman Dobbins inquired about the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Meeting on May 22, 2025. Mrs. Vennell gave a brief update of the meeting stating that the Future Land Use Map and areas for rezoning were discussed. Mrs. Vennell added that once a property is decided has been decided to be rezoned on the Future Land Use Map, the Planning Office has 1 year to rezone the property.

Chairman Dobbins inquired what the next steps were for proposed changes to Mauldin Avenue to make it a two way road. Mrs. Vennell replied that there are a couple of meetings scheduled however, nothing has been decided at this point. Residents on Mauldin Avenue and Businesses on Main Street have been invited to the meeting. The Planning Commission members inquired why they were not apprised of the meetings as members of the public have been asking them questions. They expressed that this made them uncomfortable as they were unaware of the meetings. Ms. Duffy also inquired as a resident Wallace Avenue, a side road which enters and exists off of Mauldin Avenue why these residents were not also invited to these meetings. These proposed changes to Mauldin Avenue would have a direct affect for the residents entering and existing from Wallace Avenue.

Commissioner Crothers- Moore stated that she would bring their concerns to the Town Board meeting.

-NEXT MEETING-

The next Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for June 3, 2025 and has been cancelled. .

-ADJOURNMENT-

With no further business, Ms. Duffy made a motion to adjourn at 8:46 P.M. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Respectfully Submitted:

Attest:

Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant

Mark Dobbins, Chairman