

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026

NORTH EAST PLANNING COMMISSION
North East Town Hall Meeting Room
106 South Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901
Tuesday, January 6, 2026
6:00 P.M.

Chairman Dobbins called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. Present for the meeting included Commissioner Hilary Crothers-Moore, ex-officio; Members Judy Duffy, Calvin Wilson and Michael Evans. Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant, Stacey Dahlstrom, EPR and Alan Simpson, EPR were present for the meeting. Kelly Benson, Mayor, Melissa B. Cook-Mac Kenzie, Zoning Administrator, Amy Yackanech and Grant Handley were absent from the meeting due to a prior commitment.

-MINUTES-

December 2, 2025 – Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Ms. Duffy made a motion to approve the December 2, 2025 Planning Commission meeting minutes, as presented. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all. Ms. Hilary Crothers-Moore abstained from voting as she was not present for this meeting.

-OLD BUSINESS-

None.

-NEW BUSINESS-

1. Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

Ms. Duffy made a motion to re-elect Mark Dobbins as Chairman of the North East Planning Commission. Ms. Crothers-Moore seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Ms. Crothers-Moore made a motion to re-elect Judy Duffy as Vice-Chairman of the North East Planning Commission. Mr. Evans seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

2. North East Comprehensive Plan -Revisions/Amendments

Chapter 5. Natural Resource and Sensitive Areas

Mrs. Vennell reported updated State and Federal information had been updated since the 2012 Comprehensive Plan and she revised Chapter 5 incorporating these updates.

Page 1 Bullet 3

Chairman Dobbins and Mr. Evans commented that only North East Creek had been noted and North East “creeks” and river should be noted, along with tributaries and streams. Mrs. Vennell stated that she will make this update.

APPROVED
February 3, 2026

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026
Page 2

Mrs. Vennell reported that the Town recently adopted, updated, Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Regulations and therefore some information was removed from this section as the updated regulations are part of the Towns Zoning Ordinance.

Mrs. Vennell inquired if Mrs. Dahlstrom would be aligning the objectives under the goals and Mrs. Dahlstrom replied yes.

See attached Chapter 5. Updates.

Chapter 6. Housing Element

Mrs. Vennell reported that Mrs. Rhoades researched and added data into Chapter 6 about apartment complexes and developments within the Town of North East as well as some developments outside the incorporated limits, that the Town supplies public water to. Mrs. Vennell commented that the State is advocating for more affordable multi-family housing units throughout the State. The Town's data shows that there are currently adequate affordable housing options within North East per the minimum suggested units.

Page 6-11 2nd sentence.

Mrs. Dahlstrom commented that the word "accessory" apartment should be replaced with "efficiency" apartment.

Ms. Duffy inquired about Air B and B's and why the calculations for this type of rental facilities would not be included with apartments. In addition, Ms. Duffy inquired about the method for calculating apartment units. Mrs. Dahlstrom replied that only permanent housing opportunities are included in the calculation. Mrs. Vennell explained that each apartment/living unit is charged one (ERU) Equivalent Residential Unit of water and therefore we can use the number of billed ERU's to determine the number of living units. In addition, the Planning Office can refer to approved site plans for developments in Town limits.

Chapter 8. Implementation

Mrs. Dahlstrom commented that the Implementation chapter is a great reference as it contains a summary of all of the chapters.

Mrs. Vennell reported that she made some updates to this chapter using language from the State Land Use Plan as a resource.

Page 8-5 paragraph 5

Mrs. Vennell stated that the words "should amend" were updated to "will continue to implement" as the Town currently utilizes Master Planned Zoning.

APPROVED
February 3, 2026

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026
Page 3

Page 8-7 paragraph 2

Mrs. Vennell commented on the wording stating that residential streets should be narrow. The Town has received many complaints regarding a recently built community I which narrow streets were installed. Mrs. Dahlstrom suggested using the wording “context sensitive” instead of “should be narrow” which means that the interpretation, appropriate action depends on the surrounding circumstances, data or environment. Therefore, this wording will allow the Planning Commission more flexibility in determining where narrow streets would and would not be appropriate.

Chairman Dobbins would like the paragraph re-worded and would also like the word “dominant” removed. Mrs. Vennell suggested that bicycles and pedestrians are also considered during the design process. Mr. Evens added that the County initially looked at narrower roads as a way to use less asphalt in a development which is better for stormwater, however, they too have seen issues with more narrow roadways. Mr. Evans reported that now the County requires off street parking areas when narrower roads are installed. Mrs. Vennell suggested adding wording for off-street parking accommodations or off-street parking opportunities.

Page 8-7 last paragraph

Mrs. Vennell stated that the Towns Zoning Ordinance contains appearance standards. Therefore, the wording should be changed from “consider applying appearance standards” to “shall continue to apply appearance standards”

Page 8-8 paragraph 3

Mrs. Vennell reported that the infill language was removed from this paragraph as it is no longer relevant.

Mr. Wilson commented that “Rte” was removed in the second sentence but not further down in the paragraph. The sentence needs to be corrected to U.S. Route 40 and be constant throughout the document as well.

Page 8-8 paragraph 4 bullet 8

Mr. Evans commented that the wording should be changed from “including more narrow streets.” to “context sensitive” and include provisional parking or off-street parking.

Page 8-9 paragraph 3

Mrs. Vennell inquired what was the resource for the statistic of 166 units. Mrs. Dahlstrom replied that on the Existing Land Use Map vacant parcels are noted and on the Future Land Use Map a Land Use category is assigned to them. There is a calculation done using the total existing vacant acreage (that has a future land use category as residential) along with the average density which calculates the approximate potential living units that could be developed in the future.

APPROVED
February 3, 2026

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026
Page 4

Ms. Duffy inquired if the vacant North East Fire Company lot would be considered in this calculation. Mrs. Vennell replied yes as the lot is zoned residential.

Page 8-12 paragraph 2

Mrs. Vennell inquired if the “State Highway Administration’s Neighborhood Conservation Program” still exists. Mrs. Dahlstrom replied that she would verify this information.

Mrs. Vennell inquired if the transportation goals have already been updated. Mrs. Dahlstrom replied yes.

Page 8-16 Bullet 7

Chairman Dobbins inquired about micro-mobility travel and why it is a goal. Mrs. Vennell explained that this goal would be required to be able to apply for grant funding for things such as bike lanes, trail systems and paths. Mrs. Dahlstrom commented that the objective associated with this goal is more descriptive. Chairman Dobbins suggested adding wording to separate bike lanes away from vehicles lanes such as construction of an alternative route. Mr. Wilson concurred.

Page 8-18 Bullet 10

Ms. Duffy inquired about the Round-about on Route 272 South of Town. Mrs. Vennell replied that although a traffic signal is proposed currently, a Round-about may also still be part of the future plan, however, the statement could be re-worded. The Planning Commission concurred.

Page 8-23 Bullet 2

Ms. Duffy inquired about the mid-block crosswalks on Mauldin Avenue and commented that currently there is only a sidewalk on the east side of Mauldin Avenue. Mrs. Dahlstrom replied that the paragraph also states that crosswalk designs would need to be carefully coordinated for long term planning purposes and crosswalks also provide traffic calming. There are areas that may have homes currently however, those areas may be redeveloped in the future. Sidewalks may be a requirement of new development. Mrs. Vennell suggested rewording the statement to “reviewed and carefully coordinated”. The Planning Commission concurred.

Page 8-27 paragraph 4

Mrs. Vennell commented on the wording of the second sentence will need to be reworded. The Planning Commission concurred.

Page 8-29 paragraph 1

Mr. Evans commented that North East has been spelled incorrectly. Mrs. Vennell concurred.

APPROVED
February 3, 2026

Page 8-32 and 8-33

Chairman Dobbins suggested adding a goal for descriptive plaques or markers, for historic structures and places of interest around the Town, which would be good for walkability and tourism. Mr. Evans concurred and commented that there should be wording to ensure that they are all uniform or of a like style and font. Mrs. Dahlstrom added that there are plaque programs and funding often available to help fund a plaque project. Mrs. Dahlstrom also added that some Towns create a Heritage Society to help facilitate the project and maintain the plaques throughout the years.

Page 8-43

Mrs. Dahlstrom reported that the Maryland Department of Planning had created a chart containing State Planning Principals for one of their workshops. The Maryland Department of Planning granted permission for Town to adapt the chart for the Town to use in the Comprehensive Plan.

Chapter 9. Municipal Growth Element

Mrs. Vennell reported that the 2040 Land Use Plan, displayed, reflexes the proposed zoning changes. The Planning Commission confirmed that the plan reflected the proposed zoning changes per the decisions made at the August 20, 2025 North East Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan Workshop. Mrs. Vennell stated that this 2040 Land Use Plan will be displayed at the April open house. Mrs. Vennell commented that if requests are received from other property owners, to change the zoning of their property, during the open house, the steering committee can consider making those requests.

Mrs. Vennell reported that she has drafted the first of several letters to be sent to property owners to notify them that their properties are proposed for a zoning change to Village Commercial and that the Town will be holding an open house in April 2026. The letters will be mailed out next week.

Mrs. Dahlstrom commented that the revised Existing Land Use Plan was used in comparison to the 2012 Existing Land Use Map to calculate the total acres within the Towns incorporated limits. This also shows the total number of acres annexed into the Town since the last Comprehensive Plan update in 2012. Mrs. Vennell distributed a data comparison sheet (attached) comparing the Existing Land Use Categories, Acres and Percentages against the Future Land Use Categories, Acres and Percentages. In doing the comparison, it is clear there are more categories in the Future Land Use. Mrs. Dahlstrom added that the State considers all forested land including community open space, as well as cleared vacant land, as a land use parcel therefore developable. Therefore, these areas have been included in the calculations for buildable acreage within the Town.

Chairman Dobbins would like to see the current Existing Land Use data along with the Future Land Use projected data.

Chapter 10. Water Resource Element

Mrs. Dahlstrom reported that Grant Handley, Assistant Town Administrator, has provided information for this chapter. Mrs. Dahlstrom commented that the Town wanted to an

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026
Page 6

Appendix with analysis information could be added in the back of the chapter.

Page 10-34

Chairman Dobbins commented that he was unaware of the Town partnering with High Five and Bay Venture Chairman for river clean-ups and this information should be verified. The Planning Commission suggested rewording the sentence to state that the Town partners with various local organizations during river clean-ups.

-REPORTS-

Mrs. Vennell reported that the Planning Office will prepare a final draft of the Comprehensive Plan for the April 14, 2026 open house.

Texas Roadhouse

Mrs. Vennell reported that the Concept Plan for the Texas Roadhouse is scheduled to be heard at the February 3, 2026 meeting.

North East Preserve

Mrs. Vennell reported that the North East Preserve clean-up is going to start January 7, 2026 and is expected to be completed in 5 days. The contractor will be using Route 7 to access the site for the clean-up. Mrs. Vennell also reported that there is a “Coming Soon” sign on order which is expected to be delivered and installed in February.

Critical Area Commission

Critical Area Commission had two public hearings and approved our Critical Area Ordinance Regulations. However, one of the Critical Area Commissions conditions of the approval is that the Town adopt the new revisions. The Town has 180 days to adopt the new revisions.

Elk River Brewing at the Ford House

Chairman Dobbins inquired if there were any updates on the opening of Elk River Brewing at the Ford House. Mrs. Rhoades replied that the last update the Planning Office received was that they were planning on opening by the end of the year 2025. However, they have not opened to date and there has been no indication that they are ready for occupancy.

APPROVED
February 3, 2026

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026

North East Planning Commission
January 6, 2026
Page 7

Dredging

Ms. Duffy inquired if the dredging of the North East River was going to be resumed this year. Mrs. Vennell replied that she does not have any new updates regarding the dredging.

-MISCELLANEOUS-

Chairman Dobbins commented that he would like to set up a workshop to discuss complaints or feedback that the Town has received from residents, police, maintenance, fire company among others, regarding developments recently built so that the Planning Commission can be aware of items that were not considered at the time or can be improved on in the future.

-NEXT MEETING-

The next Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for February 3, 2026.

-ADJOURNMENT-

With no further business, Mr. Wilson made a motion to adjourn at 8:42 P.M. Mr. Evans seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Respectfully Submitted:

Attest:

Lisa Rhoades,
Planning and Zoning Assistant

Mark Dobbins,
Chairman

APPROVED
February 3, 2026