

NORTH EAST PLANNING COMMISSION
North East Town Hall Meeting Room
106 South Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901
Tuesday, May 5, 2026
7:00 P.M.

Chairman Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. Present for the meeting included Members Judy Duffy, Calvin Wilson and Michael Evans. Chris Mink, Town Engineer, Melissa B. Cook-Mackenzie, Zoning Administrator, Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant were present for the meeting. Commissioner Hilary Crothers-Moore, ex-officio was absent from the meeting.

-MINUTES-

March 5, 2026; March 24, 2026 and April 14, 2026

Ms. Duffy made a motion to approve the March 5, 2026 and March 24, 2026 North East Planning Commission meeting minutes and the April 14, 2026 Comprehensive Plan Open House Report as presented. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

-OLD BUSINESS-

Case-A-2025-01-SE: Special Exception, Live for Thomas Foundation, 22 North Main Street: Annual Review of extended hours.

Ms. Ocasio of Live for Thomas Foundation and Den 22 would like to request a continuation of the extension of hours. Ms. Ocasio reported that she has been working to add more staff to be able to extend the hours of operation for her business. However, to date they have not yet extended the hours. Ms. Ocasio also stated that they do not want to lose their approval because the plan is to still extend the hours once there is adequately trained staff.

Ms. Duffy inquired where the children would be going, after leaving the facility, at midnight. Ms. Ocasio replied that sometimes parents pick them up and sometimes they drive themselves. Ms. Ocasio added that she is trying to get transportation set up to and from the facility as well. Ms. Ocasio stated that the reason for the overnight hours is because they have found its during these hours that people struggle the most. Mrs. Vennell reported that the reason they are coming back before the boards is because of the condition placed on the original approval.

Chairman Dobbins stated that, in the future, once they have adequate staff the board would consider an extended time between reviewing the extended hours.

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Mr. Wilson made motion to recommend, Case-A-2025-01-SE, the continuation of the extended hours to midnight to the North East Board of Appeals. Ms. Duffy seconded the recommendation and the recommendation was approved by all.

Ms. Ocasio reported that April Maynard will be representing the business at the Board of Appeals meeting on May 28, 2026.

-NEW BUSINESS-

Draft North East Comprehensive Plan: Comment review from the April 14, 2026 Open House for the Draft 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Mrs. Vennell reported that three rounds of letters were sent out to property owners of parcels of land that were selected by the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and the North East Planning Commission for rezoning. In addition, there were several property owners who were interested in having their properties rezoned.

23 North Main Street

Mrs. Vennell reported that the property owner of 23 North Main Street was very excited about changing the zoning designation of his property from “R-2” Two Family Residential to “VC” Village Commercial.

Parcel 23 Thomas Avenue/Mauldin Avenue

Mrs. Vennell reported that a request to change the zoning district on Robert and Virginia McKnight’s property located on Thomas Avenue and Mauldin Avenue, listed as 0 Mauldin Avenue, from “R-1” Single Family Home to “VC” Village Commercial was received at the Comprehensive Plan Open House.

Mrs. Vennell reported that Mr. McKnight has requested that his property be rezoned for at least the last 10 years. Mrs. Vennell also commented that during the Comprehensive Plan review the Steering Committee and the Planning Commission also concurred that “VC” would be a good zoning designation for this property. However, the Planning Office had not heard from the property owner at that time.

Mrs. Vennell also reported that the Planning office spoke with:

4 West Race Street

Jeri Peters, property owner, regarding the proposed change in zoning designation from “R-3” Multi-Family Residential to “VC” Village Commercial. Ms. Peters was in favor of the zoning designation change and had no additional comments.

5 Mauldin Avenue

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Ray Heidel, property owner, who wanted to confirm that his permitted uses would not include his current business and was very pleased to hear that the “VC” Village Commercial zoning district offered more uses.

1 North East Isles Drive (previously Lots 98, 99, 100)

Kim Isenhour, property owner, had been sent a letter notifying her of the zoning designation change from “PRD”- Planned Residential Development to “R-2” Two Family Residential. The property owner stopped in to the Town Hall to speak with the Planning Office to inquire if this would have any effect on her plans to build a single-family home. Mrs. Vennell informed her that a single-family home is a permitted use within the “R-2” zoning district. The property owner had no further comments.

Chairman Dobbins inquired how did Lots 98, 99 and 100 become separate from North East Isles Development. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie reported that Mrs. Langdon, a previous owner, had purchased the properties separately and the three lots were never part of the original North East Isles subdivision. Therefore, the property, now know as 1 North East Isles Drive, is not part of the North East Isles Homeowners Association. Mrs. Vennell also reported that the current owner has combined the three lots into one lot.

Ms. Duffy inquired about the vacant lot the Fire Company owns which is directly across Thomas Avenue from Parcel 23 Mr. McKnight’s property. Mrs. Vennell reported that she had spoken to a Fire Company Board member who stated that the Board was unsure what they wanted to do regarding the rezoning. Mrs. Vennell invited them to come in to speak to the Planning Office, however, they never reached out.

Mrs. Vennell reported that the next step would be to send the Draft North East 2040 Comprehensive Plan including all proposed Land Use Map changes to the Maryland Department of Planning Clearing house and to Cecil County for their required 60 Day review.

Chairman Dobbins asked to review the properties proposed for Village Commercial one more time. Mrs. Vennell displayed the Future Land Use map and pointed out the properties proposed to be changed to Village Commercial. Chairman Dobbins wanted to confirm that the properties on the Future Land Use Map where the properties approved for change by the Planning Commission and he concurred that they were.

Mr. Wilson made a motion to forward the Draft North East 2040 Comprehensive Plan to Maryland Department of Planning Clearing house and to Cecil County for their required 60 Day review. Ms. Duffy seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Annual Planning Report-2025

Mrs. Vennell reported that Maryland Department of Planning the Annual Report. Mrs. Vennell stated our Planning Office reports additional information than is required as this is a

record for the Town. Mrs. Vennell inquired if there were any additions or amendments to the Annual Planning Report-2025.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that on Page 6 wording should be added under the Election Boards information regarding the unexpected passing of Grant Demond prior to taking his Oath of Office.

-MISCELLANEOUS-

Chairman Dobbins commented that the realtors listing for the home for sale at 15 Mauldin Avenue still listed the home as being located within the Village Commercial zoning district. Mrs. Vennell reported that Mrs. Rhoades had contacted the realtor after it had been reported at a previous Planning Commission meeting. Mrs. Rhoades concurred that a request to correct the listing had been made.

-REPORTS-

North East Retail

Mrs. Vennell reported that the property owner would like to discuss a different name for the North East Retail Shops instead of the Planning Commissions choice of the Gateway Shoppes of North East. The property owner would like the name to include “pavilions”. The Planning Commission disagreed as it is a shopping center, not a development and there are no pavilions.

Chairman Dobbins stated that there needs to be a separate turning lane into the North East Retail Shopping Center. Mrs. Vennell stated that State Highway approved the Traffic Impact Study without the need for any improvements. However, that being said there is a need for another lane. Mrs. Vennell stated that it is important to have the State Highway Administrations backing and therefore a meeting with the developer, SHA, and the Town is needed. Chairman Dobbins stated that if the developer wishes to build the shopping center they must install a right hand turning lane into the shopping center. Mrs. Vennell replied that that information was not clearly conveyed to the developers’ engineers at the workshop.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that Texas Roadhouse should also be considered when thinking about the Route 40/Route 272 intersection. In addition, the two projects should share the cost of any improvements. Mrs. Vennell reported that there are two different engineering firms handling the projects. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated both developers should be at the meeting. Ms. Duffy added that it is the same owner for both projects. Chairman Dobbins stated that he does not feel Texas Roadhouse is a factor. Mrs. Vennell added that the Traffic Impact Study did include Texas Roadhouse. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that although both developments received an approved Traffic Impact Study, both developments are impacting the area and should both be at the meeting and share the cost of improvements. In addition, Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that the Planning Commission should add a condition to the Preliminary approval of the Texas Roadhouse that the approval is subject to petitioning SHA to require a turning lane be installed on Route 272 into the North East Retail Shopping Center due to the pending impacts of the added Texas Roadhouse traffic.

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Mrs. Vennell commented that the owner and developer could be invited to the June 2, 2026 Planning Commission meeting to discuss the SHA/MOT improvement plan requirements for the proposed shopping center. Chairman Dobbins commented that it is clear to him that a separate turning lane needs to be installed. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie would like to inquire if Texas Roadhouse is of the option that Texas Roadhouse should be sharing in the cost of improvements. Ms. Duffy inquired if the property owner is covering all of the costs for both sites. Mrs. Vennell replied that the property owner is covering the all of the improvement costs for both sites. Mr. Evans commented that if you link the two projects together and the proposed improvements are approved than that is good. However, if you link them together and the property owner does not want to fund the improvements than both projects could die. Mrs. Vennell commented if the Texas Roadhouse came in by themselves, a turning lane may not be required. The Planning Commission concurred that a right-hand turning lane should be required for the shopping center. Mr. Evans added that the SHA has a group of engineers that specialize in reconfiguring intersections and this should be presented to them as they may have a resolution. Mr. Wilson concurred. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie wanted to ensure that the Texas Roadhouse developer is not to far along in the approval process before this topic or expense is presented. Chairman Dobbins stated that he understands but does not feel the two projects should be required to cost share. Mr. Evans stated he strongly feels that SHA engineers will be able to come up with a reconfiguration. Mr. Wilson does not want this turning lane to be a game changer for these two developments. Mrs. Vennell stated that the Planning Office will add the discussion of the SHA/MOT improvement plan to the June meeting agenda.

-MISCELLANEOUS-

North East Preserve

Ms. Duffy inquired if there were any updates on the Preserve. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie reported that the cleanup is almost complete and most of the debris has already been removed.

-NEXT MEETING-

The next Planning Commission meeting will be an Open House to view the Draft 2040 Comprehensive Plan which is scheduled for June 2, 2026.

-ADJOURNMENT-

With no further business, Ms. Duffy made a motion to adjourn at 7:55 P.M. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Respectfully Submitted:

Attest:

APPROVED
June 2, 2026

Lisa Rhoades,
Planning and Zoning Assistant

Mark Dobbins,
Chairman

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