

NORTH EAST PLANNING COMMISSION
North East Town Hall Meeting Room
106 South Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901
Tuesday, August 4, 2026
7:00 P.M.

Chairman Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. Present for the meeting included Commissioner Hilary Crothers-Moore, ex-officio; Members Judy Duffy, Calvin Wilson and Michael Evans. Grant Handley, Assistant Town Administrator, Amy Yackanech, Grant Writer, Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant, were present for the meeting. Melissa B. Cook-Mac Kenzie, Zoning Administrator, was not present due to a prior commitment.

-MINUTES-

July 7, 2026 – Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Ms. Duffy made a motion to approve the July 7, 2026 Planning Commission meeting minutes, as presented. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

-OLD BUSINESS-

-None-

-NEW BUSINESS-

Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development:
2026 Commercial Façade Grant Applications Review

Mr. Grant Handley, Assistant Town Administrator and Amy Yackanech, Grant Writer presented 5 applications received for the 2026 Commercial Façade Grant. Mr. Handley gave a brief description of the grant's parameters. Mr. Handley also reported that he and Mrs. Yackanech had created an appropriate priority scale rubric to help the Planning Commission determine the distribution of the grant funds. The 2025 Commercial Façade Grant was a 50/50 split where the grant would reimburse 50% of the total value of the project and the property owner would be responsible for the other 50%. The 2026 Commercial Façade Grant is for \$50,000 and has an 85/15 split where the grant will reimburse 85% of the value of the project and the property owner is only responsible for 15%. Mr. Handley stated that it is the Planning Commission's decision on how they would like to see the money distributed for the façade grant.

Mr. Handley also reported that Woody's Ice Cream Alley was a previous recipient of the 2025 Commercial Façade Grant.

Mrs. Vennell inquired how much of the 2025 grant money was not used. Mrs. Yackanech replied approximately \$2,000.

Mrs. Yackanech gave a brief description regarding each of the (5) applications received.

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13 South Main Street – Untamed Hair

The applicant submitted a total budget quote of \$6,790.00. The proposed project would consist of (2) new signs and (2) new awnings. The applicant would receive a reimbursement of \$5,771.00 and would pay out of pocket \$1,018.50 with the 85/15 percent split.

Mrs. Duffy commented that Untamed Hair has been a long-standing business in Town for many years and the building they are in could use some work to the façade.

The Planning Commission would like to grant the full amount requested \$5,771.00 as the request was minimal and the changes will enhance the façade.

20 South Main Street - Harlan Williams

The applicant submitted a total budget quote of \$23,000. The proposed project would consist of window replacement, painting window frames and replacing rotted wood, painting the wrap around porch, benches and trim. The applicant would receive a reimbursement of \$19,550.00 and would pay out of pocket \$3,450.00 with the 85/15 split.

Ms. Duffy and Mr. Wilson both commented that this building is very old and the proposed changes will be a big impact to the façade. The Planning Commission concurred and would like to grant the full amount requested \$19,550.00

26 South Main Street- Casagave

The applicant submitted their application on time however, the original total budget did not include the labor costs and therefore they did submit a new quote including the labor after the deadline. The applicant submitted a total budget quote of \$11,500.00. The proposed project would consist of adding a new pergola to add to the façades appearance and provide shade to outdoor seating. The applicant would receive a reimbursement of \$9,775.00 and would pay out of pocket \$1,725.00 with the 85/15 split.

Ms. Duffy commented that Casagave is a new restaurant which seems to becoming a popular place and the building could use some work to the façade. Their proposed changes will add a lot to front of the building.

The Planning Commission commented that they liked the proposed changes with the bamboo posts, covered pergola and bamboo around the fencing and would like to grant the full amount of \$9,775.00.

29 South Main Street- Woody's Crab House

The applicant submitted a total budget quote of \$33,600. The proposed project would consist of sanding, staining, and painting the building, pergola, deck and doors as well as the soffit, fascia and gutters. The applicant would receive a reimbursement of \$28,560.00 and would pay out of pocket \$5,040 with the 85/15 split.

Mr. Handley reminded the Planning Commission that Woody's was a recipient last year of the façade grant for the ice cream shop and did fulfil the grant requirements and completed the

renovation. Mrs. Yackanech reported that this project came in under budget which is why there is a little extra funds left from last year's grant.

Mr. Evans commented that some of the work proposed was on the side and rear of the building which may not be visible. Mrs. Vennell added that the grant funds are intended for visible sides of the building.

After some discussion, the Planning Commission determined that Woody's would be able to use the balance of the grant funds left, approximately \$16,000, to renovate most of the items on their list.

6 South Main Street-Horton Properties, LLC

The applicant submitted a total budget quote of \$64,308. The proposed project would consist of window replacement, updated storefront door system and metal roof. The applicant would be requesting more than the amount of the entire Commercial Façade Grant. The reimbursement amount would be \$54,661.80 and the out of pocket for the applicant would be \$9,646.20 with the 85/15 split.

Mrs. Yackanech reported that the quote included costs for design. Ms. Duffy inquired if there was a quote for the actual store front improvements as the roof on top of the building and design costs are not part of the store front. Ms. Duffy stated that the applicant's quote seems extremely high. Mr. Wilson concurred and has compassion for the tenant however, some of the improvements are not for the façade. Mrs. Yackanech stated that the package did not include an estimate solely for the front façade of the building.

The Planning Commission discussed excluding the roofing and design cost. Mrs. Crothers-Moore stated that she would like to see this building renovated however after further discussion the Planning Commission felt that the estimates were high and it was determined that the quotes were confusing. Ultimately, it was decided to not award any funding this year for this project. However, the Planning Commission would consider their application should they submit again next year with a quote specific to the façade.

Ms. Duffy made a motion to award the grant funds as follows:

- 13 South Main Street - Untamed Hair-awarded \$5,771.50.
- 20 South Main Street - Harlan Williams- awarded \$19,550.00
- 26 South Main Street - Casagave-\$9,775.00
- 29 South Main Street - Woody's Crab House-\$14,903.50 for front and side façade facing projects plus the balance from the previous year if the State allows the funds to be rolled over to this year.
- 6 South Main Street-Horton Properties, LLC-has not been awarded any funding related to this grant.

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

Ms. Duffy inquired if there would be a Residential Façade Grant. Mrs. Yackanech reported there is a \$50,000 Residential Façade Grant which was just applied for next year in addition to another Commercial Façade Grant.

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Subdivision Regulation Discussion

Mrs. Vennell reported that Mayor Benson initiated the new proposed subdivision regulations. Mrs. Vennell briefly went over the proposed regulations and commented that some of the proposed regulations include changes that the Planning Commission has commented on previously. The changes to the regulations will prevent cookie cutter developments, there would be no identical styles within 4 lots and no homes in a straight row, for variation. The new ordinance proposes that the garage cannot be forward the front façade of the home more than five feet. Mrs. Vennell stated that some of the problems with Ridgely Forest include the width of the lots and the houses not being set far enough back on the lot to allow for an adequate driveway length. Mrs. Vennell reported that the proposed regulations require various lot widths. Mr. Wilson inquired if this regulation would apply to all new developments. Mrs. Vennell replied yes, for it is being proposed for developments with 25 homes or more. In addition, a developer would need to present several home designs for a more diversified development. Chairman Dobbins inquired what area does the Town have that would still be developed. Mrs. Vennell replied that there is a growth area south of Town that does have the potential of being annexed in someday. Chairman Dobbins inquired if annexation is still for contiguous properties. Mrs. Vennell replied yes. Mr. Evans commented that there could be 3 different front yard setbacks would help with off street parking and keep all of the homes from being in a straight row.

Mrs. Vennell reported that when the Planning Commission was reviewing plans for Ridgely Forest the State was encouraging narrow streets as a way of controlling speed and we have experienced problems with the width of the streets, specifically, the on street parking. Mr. Wilson is in support of the new regulations. Mr. Wilson, a resident of Ridgely Forest, reported that Ridgely Forest is a very nice community to pull into however, constructing bigger homes on small lots with big back yards was not a good idea as there is no parking in the community. Mr. Wilson commented if the development could be redesigned, the community would definitely have bigger front yards to provide for longer driveways. Chairman Dobbins commented that the smaller lots were constantly being pushed at the time. In addition, the Planning Commission had meetings with residents and they wanted to see the community finished. Mrs. Vennell stated that the Planning Commission required that each section must have the amenities installed, so that the residents who already lived there would have the amenities they were promised when they bought their homes. In addition, Ryan Homes was required to put accents on the front façade on the home as well as carriage doors.

Mr. Wilson inquired if the regulations could offer stone or blacktop as options for driveways. Mrs. Vennell replied that the driveways must be blacktop as the stone would ruin the roadways. Mr. Wilson reported that there is a lot of trouble with blacktop sinking in Ridgely Forest.

Town of North East Draft 2040 Comprehensive Plan Review agency comments

Mrs. Vennell reported that the Planning Office received comments came back from Cecil County and the State of Maryland Planning. Mrs. Vennell and Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie have discussed a plan to address the comments. Mrs. Vennell added that there are some comments on the letters that are easily remedied with some rewording and then there are some comments that need more review. A workshop

with the Planning Commission and the Mayor and Commissioners will be scheduled to work through the comments. Mrs. Vennell reported that the Cecil County would like to meet with some representatives from the Town to discuss the 2040 Draft Comprehensive Plan. Mrs. Vennell commented that the Town understands if Mr. Evans would not like to participate in the workshop as it may be a conflict of interest.

Mrs. Vennell reported that some of the data the consultant utilized is outdated and they will be revising this data. Chairman Dobbins inquired if the Town always receives this level of a review. Mrs. Vennell responded yes; it is not uncommon.

Mr. Handley commented that he handles the MS4 coordination and reporting for the Town. The Town is required to provide some environmental mitigation due to the existing impervious surface. Mr. Handley reported that in the section of the Comprehensive Plan that addresses the MS4, he defines how the Town addresses the impervious surface and water run-off. The Town participates in stream restoration and stream clean-ups, and additional fees are charged to offset the costs, which will lead to healthier streams, rivers and aquatic habitats. Unfortunately, a comment on the letter from the Department of Natural Resources, stated that there is no connection between MS4 and a healthy environment as there is no data that supports that theory. Mr. Handley reported that a lot of the comments on the County letter are centered around the Water Growth Element and the Sewer Growth Element and we want to make sure that we are all on the same page in regards to growth.

Mrs. Vennell stated that Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie would like to set up a 6:30 PM meeting with the Planning Commission and the Mayor and Commission on Thursday, August 20th or a date that works for everyone.

Ms. Duffy inquired if the workshop will be primarily to focus on the County comment letter. Mrs. Vennell replied yes.

-REPORTS-

North East Preserve

Mr. Handley reported that the heavy concrete and tires have been cleared from the North East Preserve. In addition, an exploratory trail has been installed however, no parking has been installed. The trail is not meant for pedestrian use quite yet as there has been no substrate installed. Mr. Handley commented that Carl Anderton, Director of Rural Economic Strategy for the Maryland Department of Commerce, walked the Preserve with Mr. Handley and will be making a request for \$200,000 from the Governor's Capital Budget for fiscal year 2028 so that the Town can continue to develop the site.

Mr. Handley also reported that through the most recent Town Budget the Mayor and Commissioners have designated a budget of \$200,000 toward continued development of the preserve. In addition, the Town applied for a NOAA Grant almost two years ago and there is a meeting this month. Chairman Dobbins commented that this Federal agency is known for granting awards several years after the applications have been submitted. The Town is anxious to here if we will be awarded any NOAA grant funding. Chairman commented that he would prefer that the money be in place to complete the entire

parking area before cutting through the berm as there is a lot of landscaping currently in place. Mrs. Vennell commented that engineering would need to be done to develop the site which will be quite costly. Mr. Handley reported that he has received one engineering estimate for \$100,000. Mr. Handley offered to escort the Planning Commission through the Preserve trail in the fall if they are interested.

Route 272 Corridor

Mr. Handley reported the Maryland Route 272 Corridor Traffic study was created about a year ago. The Town, County, State Highway and WILMAPCO were looking at several potential traffic solutions. WILMAPCO created a steering committee to review high traffic areas and each year they have \$25,000 in funding to research solutions. This past year WILMAPCO conducted a feasibility study and looked at changing Mauldin Avenue two ways. What they found was that if 2040 was the target goal and nothing was done the traffic metric gets worse. If a traffic light or round about was installed traffic would improve from what the statistics show. This study is strictly statistical. WILMAPCO has asked the Town to make a request of what they would like to see next. Mr. Handley reported that there is a lot of traffic issues from Sunoco to the 95 Interstate exchange and therefore they asked to have this area studied. Mr. Wilson commented that the bridge on would need to be widened.

Cecil County Municipality WILMAPCO Representative

WILMAPCO had an election for a Cecil County Municipality Representative and Mr. Handley was elected.

Mr. Handley informed WILMAPCO about some projects that may be coming up. There also may be some new grants coming up that the Town will be applying for.

Turner Park

Ms. Duffy inquired if there were any updates on Turner Park. Mr. Handley reported that the Town spoke to the County Executive about turning the North East Middle School into a Cecil County recreation center as it backs directly to Turner Park. The County Council has since chosen another location, behind Calvert Park. However, the Town is still planning to develop the park. Mr. Handley reported that he recently toured the North East Middle School building and it is very old and will be expensive to maintain.

-MISCELLANEOUS-

None.

-NEXT MEETING-

The next Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for September 8, 2026. Mrs. Vennell reported there will be a Public Hearing for Sign Ordinance Amendments.

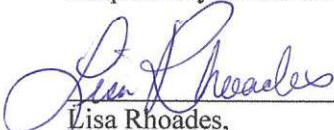
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-ADJOURNMENT-

With no further business, Ms. Duffy made a motion to adjourn at 8:38 P.M. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Respectfully Submitted:



Lisa Rhoades,
Planning and Zoning Assistant

Attest:



Mark Dobbins,
Chairman

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