

Minutes – Howard County Food Council General Meeting

Friday June 12, 2026 at 10:00 – 12:00pm

In-Person at the Howard County Office of Agriculture

Members Present:

Annika LaFave, Maryland Department of Emergency Management
Ari Cacopardo, Howard County Health Department
Cameron Thomas, Howard County Office of Agriculture
Carrie Ross, Community Action Council of Howard County
Claudet Miranda, Maryland Hunger Solutions
Irma Iribe, Howard County Department of Community Resources & Services
Jackie Scott, Howard County Department of Community Resource & Services
James Zoller, Howard County Office of Agriculture
Kathy Johnson, Howard County Office of Economic Development
Liz Banach, Morgan Food Pantry
Petra Guiland, Howard County Office of Human Rights and Equity

Staff Present:

Reena Rambharat, Howard County Health Department
Emily Harris, Howard County Food Council

Topic/Agenda	Discussion	Action/Follow-up
Welcome and Introductions	Ms. Reena Rambharat, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Assessment, Planning and Community Engagement at Howard County Health Department, called the meeting to order at 10:00a.m. She provided a welcome to members in attendance and indicated that the minutes will be shared after the meeting and available on the Food Council's webpage. She reviewed the meeting schedule for the remainder of 2026. Ms. Rambharat stated that the goals for this meeting were to learn more about and tour the New and Beginning Farm Program (NBFP) through the Howard County Office of Agriculture. Ms. Rambharat then invited members to introduce themselves.	Howard County Food Council information can be found on the Local Health Improvement Coalition's (LHIC) website: https://www.hclhic.org/council
New and Beginning Farm Overview	James Zoller, Administrator for the Howard County Office of Agriculture provided a brief presentation about the NBFP at 12985 Frederick Road, West Friendship, Maryland. Approximately 24 quarter acre plots are open to new and beginning farmers who undergo an application process. Currently, twelve plots are utilized. Farmers accepted into the program have the plot for 1-5 years. The	Howard County New and Beginning Farm Program information can be found on the Office of Agriculture website:

	program offers infrastructure (land, sheds, irrigation, deer fences), shared equipment, and educational training. The educational training is provided by a pre-existing program at the University of Maryland Extension. Channels exist to help sell products through Roving Radish, Merriweather District Market, and Rosie's Deli. They are working on establishing additional channels like Senior Farmers Market vouchers. The area also includes a teaching and learning plot for interested people who may not be ready for a .25 acre plot. It will also be open for tours. The grounds remain under construction with a 5-year plan. Currently, an existing structure was renovated to store the Mobile Marketplace and walk-in fridges and freezers. The walk-in freezers will allow for meat to be processed onsite. There will be a prep and pack station and classroom space. The future new Ag center will house the Office of Agriculture, University of Maryland Extension, and other organizations. It will include multi-purpose rooms and a demo kitchen. It may also include a commercial kitchen, however, these are not in the current drawn plans. This building has already been budgeted; \$4-5 million is already budgeted for initial stages. An Eastern Howard County Agricultural Task Force has been created to determine how the Agricultural Land Preservation Program can be applied to the eastern part of the county. A report is expected in November 2026. At the conclusion of the presentation, meeting attendees went on a tour.	https://hocofarms.com/office-of-agriculture/ Eastern Howard County Agricultural Task Force information can be found in this article: https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News051826b
Tour	Attendees started the tour at the building storing the Mobile Market and walk-in systems. Four farmers were onsite and provided the group with more information about the focus of their farms which included regenerative farming, Latin American staple crops, AI integration, and medicinals. Attendees toured the teaching and learning plot and several of the quarter acre plots observing the shared equipment shed, irrigation system, deer fencing, sheds, and other infrastructure provided by the NBFP.	
Next Steps and Action Items	Farmers expressed interest in joining the Food Council. Mr. Zoller will share the contact list for farmers who are part of the New and Beginner Farmers Program. Ms. Emily Harris, Food Council Administrator, will share details of the next meeting.	
Wrap Up and Adjournment	Ms. Rambharat announced the conclusion of the meeting and thanked the participants for joining. • Shared plans to distribute meeting minutes • Expressed gratitude and bid farewell. Ms. Rambharat adjourned the meeting at 12:00pm.	

Respectfully submitted by
Ms. Emily Harris, MS, RDN, LDN
Food Council Administrator,
Howard County Food Council

Future Meeting Dates:

Food Council General Meeting (2nd Wednesday every 3 months) *

- *Thursday*, August 13, 10:00 – 11:30 am; (In-Person) Clarksville Facility, 4240 Folly Quarter Road, Ellicott City, MD 21042
- Wednesday, October 14, 10:00 – 11:30 am; (In-Person) Harriet Tubman Cultural Center
- Wednesday, December 9, 10:00 – 11:30 am; (Virtual) Zoom Meeting

**In case of inclement weather, in-person meetings will switch to virtual or cancelled if the Howard County Health Department and the University of Maryland, Extension – Howard County are closed.*