

Spring 2007



oakland mills
we value connections

Oakland Mills Village Center Master Plan

Presented by
Oakland Mills Village Center Master Plan Committee

Our Mandate

The Oakland Mills Village Center is ripe for change.

In January 2005, about 200 residents of Oakland Mills came together for a 5-hour work session to finalize a Revitalization Plan for their community. One of the main priorities they set was to “energize the village center.” This plan is the response to that mandate.

The Master Plan for the Village Center is only one part of the larger revitalization effort in Oakland Mills. That effort includes about 150 core resident volunteers working to beautify our community, improve housing, support village businesses, maintain safety, bring an arts and music presence to the village, engage youth, and increase communication and neighbor-to-neighbor interaction throughout the village.

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THE PLAN IN BRIEF

In January 2005, the community came together for a Town Hall Meeting to finalize and begin implementing the revitalization plan for its village. About 200 residents engaged in a 5-hour work session to identify priorities. Energizing the village center was at the top of its list.

The OMVC Master Plan Committee was formed as a subcommittee of the Community Vibrancy Committee to fulfill that mandate. We knew that simply “filling in the spaces” was not the answer; that had been tried before. So we pulled together the community, the property owners, the Howard County (HC) government, the Columbia Association (CA), and the merchants to devise a comprehensive strategy. We wanted a plan that would not only address specific issues that had been identified, but would also create a broader vision for a unique identity, greater vitality, and cohesive and well-planned redevelopment for the Oakland Mills Village Center.

The Vision:

The Oakland Mills Village Center will become a true destination with a clear identity that is cohesive and well planned, supports thriving businesses, and serves as a real center of community life.

The Goals:

- Retain and enhance our current assets—The Barns, the Interfaith Center, the Ice Rink, the merchants
- Support commercial success
- Create a unique identity for the village center
- Enhance the center’s prime location between Town Center and Blandair Park
- Make the village center easier to find
- Improve its appearance
- Increase cohesiveness among the parts of the village center
- Create more energy and vibrancy in the center

The Strategy:

Relatively Simple Improvements

- Enhance the connections to Town Center and Blandair Park
- Raise awareness/profile of the OMVC through improved signage
- Maximize potential of current configuration
- Create an International Arts and Entrepreneurs identity for the OMVC
- Increase activity and vibrancy at the OMVC
- Make OMVC more pedestrian- and bike-friendly and inviting.
- Improve appearance and consistency of roads and streetscape, including lighting and plantings

Moderate Improvements

- Upgrade/Remodel The Barns to serve as the center of the community and village
- Maintain a grocery store/food market as the retail anchor.
- Create enhanced public and civic spaces
 - Create pocket gardens
 - Install open air ice rink
 - Create dog park along pedestrian path
 - Create labyrinth at Interfaith Center
 - Create areas for social gathering
 - Extend and enhance the courtyard
 - Enhance landscaping and plantings
- Improve traffic and pedestrian flow

Significant Improvements

- Encourage well-planned cohesive mixed use development
- Create a strong “gateway” from OMVC to Town Center
- Promote high environmental standards for new and redevelopment
- Upgrade housing in OMVC area

INTRODUCTION

What is a Master Plan?

A master plan is a comprehensive but flexible strategy that describes and maps the overall long-term development of an area in order to achieve a cohesive and desired vision. A master plan puts ideas and goals to paper to help people work toward a common vision.

Why Does the Oakland Mills Village Center need a Master Plan?

At the January 2005 Town Hall Meeting at which 200 residents finalized and voted on the OM Revitalization Plan, the residents clearly charged the Community Vibrancy Committee to “**Energize the Village Center**”.

In addition, the community wanted to be proactive in maintaining the village center concept, but redefining it so it works for today

The center is currently a patchwork of properties with 8 different owners, a large vacant space, multiple parking lots, no directional signage, and no cohesive plan. Simply filling the vacant spaces is not enough.

The Master Plan Provides a Roadmap

The master plan provides a **unified vision and community-based guidelines** to guide redevelopment. The Master Plan and its drawings are intended as a guide to create a new direction for the village center. It presents concepts for revitalization that the community in general would support. Although the community does not own or control the property, it does have a vested interest in seeing that the center grows and thrives.

Businesses and developers realize that community support is important to the success and vitality of their undertakings. The plan provides them with a useful blueprint for making business plans and financial decisions. It provides predictability and allows investors to make economic decisions based on density and types of uses.

Who Put the Plan Together?

This has been a grassroots resident effort in response to a mandate from the community. The Master Plan Committee is a subcommittee of the Community Vibrancy Action Committee, which was charged by residents to “energize the village center.”

The Master Plan Committee is composed of representatives from the village board, village staff, and the Revitalization Action Committees. It includes volunteers from the community with relevant expertise, in particular Charlie Bailey, a landscape architect who produced the drawings, and Phil Engelke, an expert in environmental graphics, who created the signage package. Since April 2005, the committee has been meeting twice monthly to work on the plan.

The Howard County (HC) Department of Planning and Zoning (in particular planners Randy Clay and Bill Mackey), HC Housing and Community Development and HC Economic Development Authority have provided support and expertise.

In addition, the Stakeholders (the property owners and merchants in the center) as well as the community at large have had significant input into the plan.

The Goals

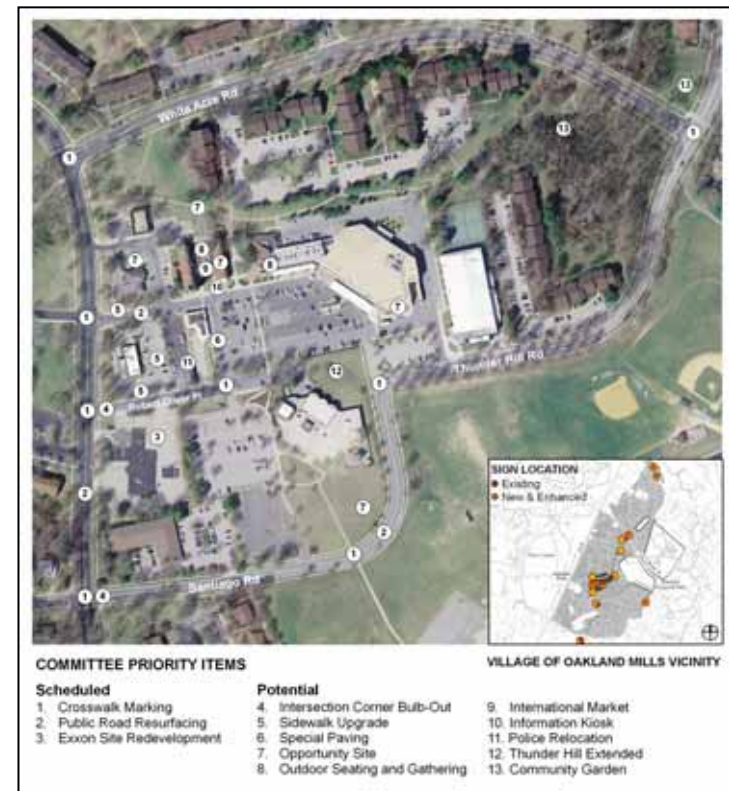
- Support commercial success
- Create a unique identity for the village center
- Enhance the center’s prime location between Town Center and Blandair Park
- Make the village center easier to find
- Improve its appearance
- Increase the cohesiveness among the parts of the village center
- Create more energy and vibrancy in the center
- Retain and enhance our current assets—The Barns, the Interfaith Center, the Ice Rink, the merchants

The Process so Far

- Initial assessment with County Department Directors
- Survey of merchants
- Survey of residents (over 500 responses)
- Market consultations
- Design/planning consultations
- Three meetings with village center property owners and stakeholders
- Meetings with the former and current County Executive and County Council members
- Presentation to the Community Vibrancy Committee
- Presentation to the Street Captains
- Presentation to the President of the Columbia Association
- Presentation to the Director of Planning and Zoning
- Presentation to residents of the Village of Oakland Mills
- Presentation to the Columbia Association External Relations Committee
- Presentation to General Growth Properties
- Presentation to Rouse Company Foundation
- Presentation to The Columbia Foundation

THE COMMUNITY’S VISION FOR ITS VILLAGE CENTER

*The Oakland Mills Village Center will become
a true destination
with a clear identity
that is cohesive and well planned,
supports thriving businesses,
and serves as a real center of community life.*



Priority items identified by the Master Plan Committee and the Village Center Stakeholders.

Open spaces that could be considered for expanded use

Existing plaza could be expanded and include more activity with more programmed events:

- Ice cream festival
- Pumpkin carving/painting
- Movie night
- Easter egg hunt
- Karaoke contest
- Need more/better advertising

Improved signage

Quality of existing edge is poor. Could consider sidewalk improvements, upgraded lighting, better signage at portals, crosswalks in street.

Façade improvements to existing facility

Expand Ice Rink – possible outdoor rink

Each parcel can be improved on a lot-by-lot basis:

- Improve existing structures and site features (sidewalks, landscaping, parking lots),
- Redevelop sites with new configuration of buildings, parking, etc.
- Could develop design guidelines for the center

Existing Conditions and Opportunity Areas

REVITALIZATION OPTIONS

Revitalization plans for the Oakland Mills Village Center are divided into three options:

1. Relatively Simple Improvements:

- Could be accomplished relatively easily by a partnership of the community, the County, the property owners and the merchants
- Could be accomplished in 3-24 months

2. Moderate Improvements:

- Would require greater investment by the County, the Columbia Association, property owners and some investment by developers
- May take 2-5 years, although some could be done sooner

3. Significant Improvements:

- Would require very significant investment by developers and investors
- May take 5-20 years to accomplish

Relatively Simple Improvements

These could be accomplished relatively easily by a partnership of the community, the County, the property owners and the merchants.

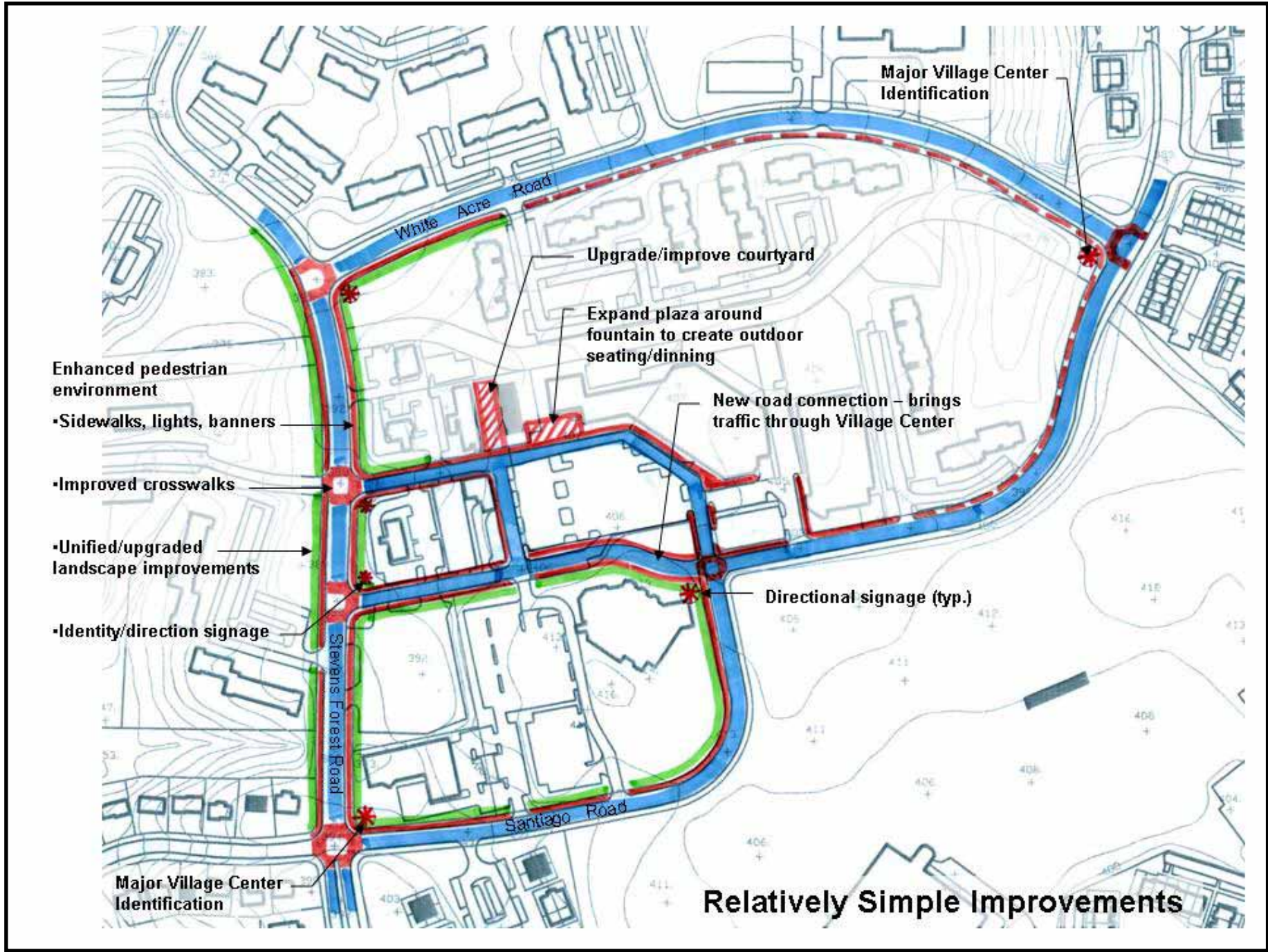
Investment: Incremental Investments

Timeframe: 3-24 months.

1. Enhance the connection to Town Center and Blandair Park
2. Raise awareness/profile of the OMVC through improved signage
3. Maximize potential of current configuration
4. Create an International Arts and Entrepreneurs identity for the OMVC
5. Increase activity and vibrancy at the OMVC
6. Make OMVC more pedestrian- and bike- friendly and inviting
7. Improve appearance and consistency of roads and streetscape



Ties between the OM Village Center, Town Center, and Blandair Park, need to be strengthened and enhanced.



1. Enhance the Connection to Town Center and Blandair Park

The Oakland Mills Village Center should capitalize on its prime location within a half-mile radius of Columbia Town Center and the future Blandair Regional Park. Existing pathway along the edges of Town Center, Blandair Park, and the Oakland Mills Village Center provide opportunities for enhancing connectivity.

Proximity to Town Center will be an extremely valuable asset with improved connectivity.

Town Center is entering a phase of significant growth, with increased residential, business, retail, and civic development. The distance from the Oakland Mills Village Center to Lakefront activities in Town Center is just 0.7 miles.

Connection to Blandair Regional Park also needs to be emphasized and enhanced.

Blandair is a 300-acre nature and recreational park scheduled to be completed in 2011. It will include historic buildings, recreational activities, and a children's garden. It is located just 0.5 miles away from the Oakland Mills Village Center.

The pathway that connects Oakland Mills to Town Center is the only pedestrian access between east and west Columbia.

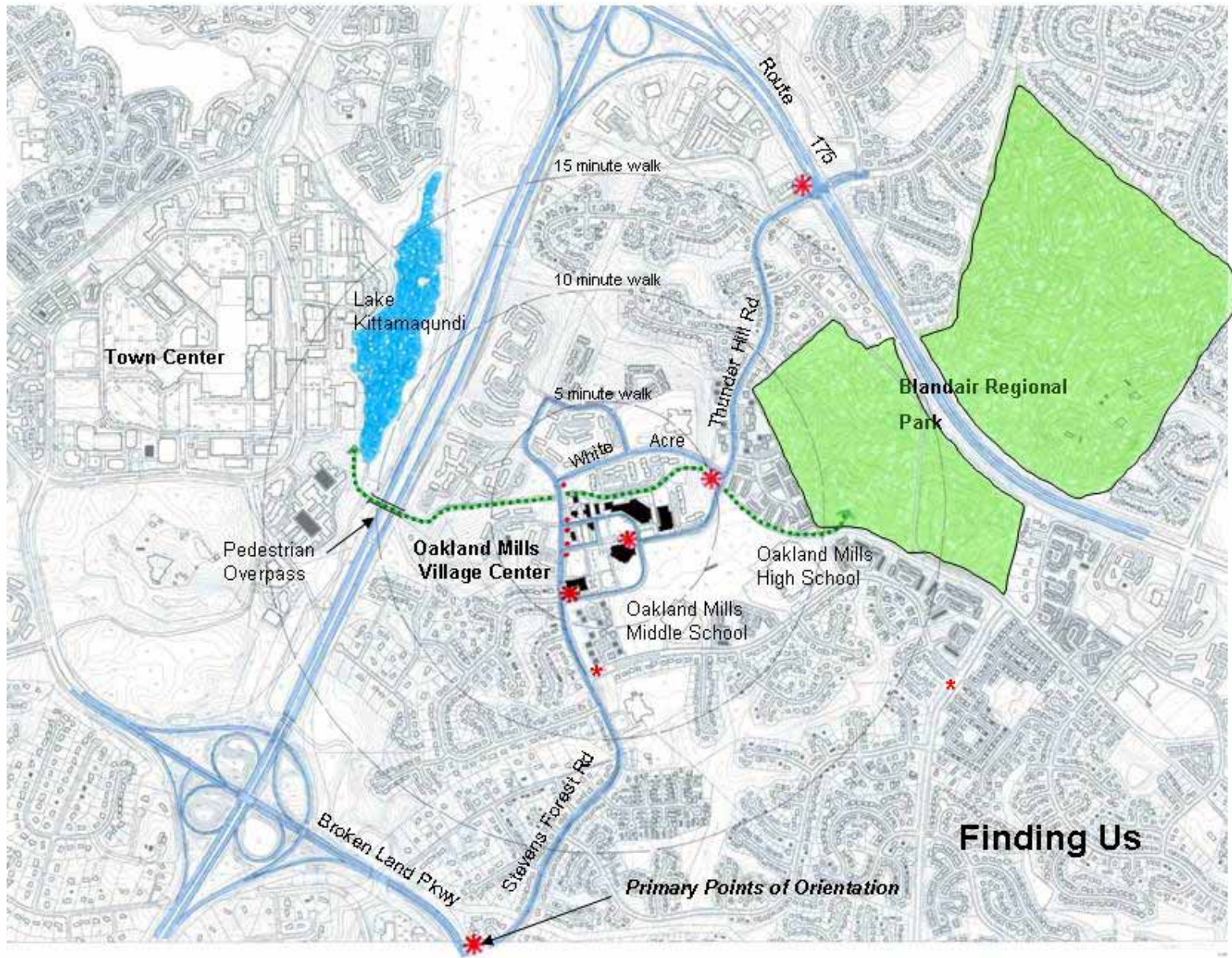
Improvements to this path could convert it into a greenway or "horizontal park" that would connect busy Town Center with the natural environment and recreational assets of Blandair Park. It was resurfaced in August of 2006. However, significant changes are still needed to improve the bridge and pathway.



An illustration of how improvements to the pathway could enhance recreation and leisure activities.

Improvements should include:

- Trees trimmed up and brush cut back
- Mowed turf and landscaping installed to improve safety and visibility
- Pathway widened and regraded to make it handicapped accessible
- Signage indicating the route to the Town Center lakefront, Oakland Mills Village Center and Blandair Regional Park
- Separate lane created for bikes
- Additional lighting installed
- Stairways installed from path to apartments
- Creation of a dog park along the path to increase activity and safety
- An (electric) shuttle bus traversing the path
- Appropriate security measures



2. Raise awareness/profile of the OMVC through improved signage.

Since OMVC is not located on a major traffic route, good signage is essential to its visibility and vitality.

Guide people to the center

- Install wayfinding signs of more significant size at 175 and Thunder Hill as well as Broken Land Parkway and Stevens Forest Road which indicate the presence of retail at the village center
- Install banner-type signs along Thunder Hill Road and Stevens Forest Road to lead people into the center



Temporary signage located during the redevelopment of the center nearly seven years ago still exists today.



Example of an entry sign

Create a clear sense of arrival

- Install entry signs with substantial plantings at Stevens Forest Road and Robert Oliver Place as well as Thunder Hill Road and Santiago Road
- These signs should differentiate the village center from surrounding residential areas
- They should communicate the identity of the village center and strengthen the relationship between place and person
- The signs should be designed with scale and sight lines in mind

Help people navigate the village center



- Directional signs should create an overview of the village
- They should help people find destinations within the center
- They should make points of interest apparent



Maintain consistency

- It's all in the details: repeated elements like brick and oak leaves add to the identity and help maintain a consistent feel throughout the center

Use Oakland Mills Village's new logo

The Oakland Mills Community Association has created a new logo for the village as a whole that could be used as the starting point for new signage.

It keeps the traditional oak leaf, but gives it a fresh, updated look. The logo says, "This is still Oakland Mills, but with a new and brighter outlook."



The new Oakland Mills Community Association logo was based on village qualities identified by focus groups representing the diversity of the community.

3. Maximize potential of current configuration

A thriving center depends on full use of available space and community support of the businesses.

- Fill vacancies in the village center with quality merchants
- Continue community support of current merchants through the "Support Business" and "Merchants of Oakland Mills" committees
- Encourage residents to shop locally

4. Create an International Arts and Entrepreneurs identity for the OMVC

Creative and talented people that hail from all parts of the world have made Oakland Mills their home. It is a diverse, tolerant, and resilient community, whose signature event is the annual OM International Fall Festival.

This global spirit that distinguishes and defines Oakland Mills suggests a natural identity for its village center--an International Creativity Center. This would provide the village center with a unique identity, unlike anything else in Columbia, and make it a true destination.



From Rural Roots to Global Village: Oakland Mills celebrates its annual October International Festival.

Businesses and activities that could further support this identity include:

- A range of ethnic restaurants with outdoor seating , perhaps a restaurant pavilion with seating on the 2nd floor, offices above
- An international marketplace with food, art, and crafts from around the world
- A small theatre for foreign and art films
- A “creativity incubator:” work and retail space for budding artists, entrepreneurs, and small businesses.
- Artist live/work space
- Include art display space in buildings

5. Increase activity and vibrancy at the OMVC.

Concerts, markets, and events in the courtyard, The Other Barn, and public spaces bring people to the center and create a lively atmosphere.

Capitalize on the natural “market atmosphere” with outdoor activities that complement businesses in the center. Such activities could include:

- Concerts and other entertainment
- Weekly seasonal Farmers Market (set for Sunday mornings in 2007)
- Seasonal International Market
- Outdoor art displays
- Fourth of July activities in conjunction with Town Center
- Movie nights
- Art nights
- A display of the history of Oakland Mills

6. Make OMVC more pedestrian- and bike-friendly and inviting.

The many parking lots, narrow or non-existent sidewalks, and unmarked pedestrian crossings make the center hazardous and uninviting to pedestrians and cyclists.

Improve and clearly identify pedestrian connections:

- Repair/replace deteriorating sidewalks
- Widen sidewalks and include curb cuts for handicapped and bicycle access
- Install distinctive crosswalks that welcome people from the surrounding residential areas
- Take into consideration pedestrian traffic from schools
- Install corner “bulges” along Stevens Forest Road to increase pedestrian safety
- Include bicycle parking spaces



Clearly marked crosswalks, corner “bulges”, and handicapped curb cuts welcome pedestrians and increase safety

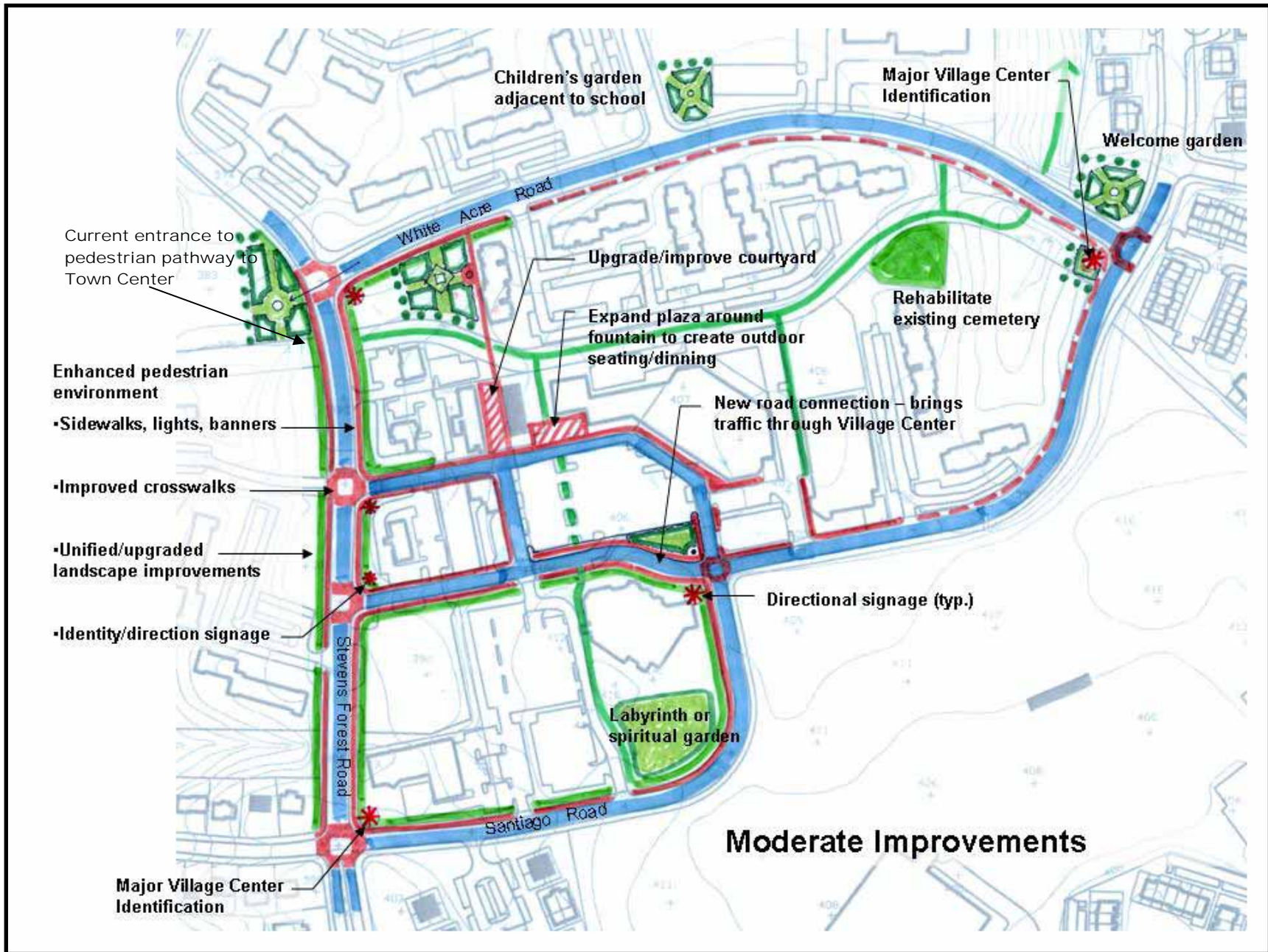


Distinctive and consistent lighting, plantings, sidewalks, and streetscape create an attractive, unified feel.

7. Improve appearance and consistency of roads and streetscape:

A unified and upgraded streetscape will improve the cohesiveness of the center and create an attractive, distinctive atmosphere.

- Repave roads in the village center area
- Install improved landscaping and plantings
- Create guidelines for edge treatments/streetscapes, such as distinctive plantings, curbs, and lighting; install as development proceed



Moderate Improvements

These would require greater investment by the County, the Columbia Association, and property owners, and some investment by developers.

Financial Obligation: Sizeable Investment

Timeframe: 2-5 years

1. Upgrade/remodel The Other Barn
2. Maintain a grocery store/food market as the retail anchor
3. Create enhanced public and civic spaces
4. Improve traffic and pedestrian flow

1. Upgrade/Remodel The Barns to serve as the center of the community and village.

The Barns are the only original buildings in the village center. Chosen for preservation when Columbia was built, they are a reminder of our rural heritage and a distinguishing characteristic of our village. The Columbia Association (CA) is planning a redesign and upgrade of The Other Barn for 2008.

Establish The Barns as the focal points of the village center

- Retain The Barns as historic structures
- Incorporate the courtyard and outside spaces, with enhanced greens, gathering areas, and outdoor events

Work closely with designer to upgrade The Other Barn

- Redesign space for meetings, events, offices
- Create a more pleasant and attractive lobby area
- Upgrade lighting
- Consider installing wireless internet
- Consider a stage in The Loft for musical events
- Consider an atrium covering for the courtyard



The Barns – Heart of our Community

Preservation and enhancement of these unique and historic structures should be the central focus of the revitalization of the village center.

- Create an “Oakland Mills Historical Museum” (perhaps in stairway through the silo to the Loft)

Consider repurposing The Barn (the Teen Center) if appropriate space could be found for teen programs.

- The two barns, and the courtyard between, could be used to create a unique and impressive destination, such as an international market or an artist work/retail space, that would complement the village center identity and highlight these historic structures
 - Authorize study to consider alternate uses for The Barn
 - Teen and after school programs could be housed at nearby schools with outside play space and athletic facilities (Trenton, NJ model)



Columbia Archives

The original design of the village center incorporated symbols of the area's rural roots in shaping its identity. The use of The Barns has continued to change to meet the evolving needs of the community.



The courtyard connecting The Barns presents endless possibilities. Imagine artists' kiosks in The Barn that could be open to shoppers enjoying the courtyard.

2. Maintain a grocery store/food market as the retail anchor.

A food market that serves the needs of the Oakland Mills community should remain an essential part of the village center.

A food market in Oakland Mills should be responsive to the diversity of the community. Possibilities include:

- a market with unique food offerings that support the international theme
- a variety of specialty and ethnic niche markets
- a grocery store that tailors its stock to the community

3. Create enhanced public and civic spaces in the OMVC

Public spaces provide opportunities for people to gather, celebrate, socialize, play, and relax. Enhanced spaces in the OMVC will create a more inviting and social atmosphere.

A. Extend and enhance the courtyard beyond The Other Barn to create a more visible public space.



This diagram illustrates how the courtyard between The Barns could be expanded to serve as a public plaza

The courtyard is a wonderful space, but it is not visible from most of the village center. The street directly leading out from it could become a plaza that would extend the courtyard.

- This would connect the two major community facilities-- the community center and the Meeting House

- The pavement could be stamped with brick or custom-designed pattern
- Trees and landscaping could distinguish it as a special place
- The road could still be used on a daily basis, but cordoned off for special event

Could this space...



The road between The Barn and the Interfaith Center (above) could be converted into a market plaza or town square (below)

..become a bustling public plaza?



B. Install pocket gardens or a greenway leading people from busy Town Center to peaceful Blandair Park (see map for possible locations)

- The Cooke family cemetery is being restored as an Eagle Scout project
- The Cinnamon Tree North quads would like to enhance their open area at the corner of Thunder Hill and Whiteacre Roads.
- Other possibilities include a scented gardens, an herb garden, and a tactile gardens for children



Themed gardens could create gathering spaces for relaxing and enjoying the outdoors

C. Create a dog park and skateboard park along the pedestrian pathway between OMVC and Town Center

- This would increase safety and activity in the pathway area and would be easily accessible from both Town Center and Oakland Mills



Outdoor dining and gathering spaces help create a sense of welcome and vibrancy.

D. Provide spaces to eat, gather, and socialize.

- Encourage restaurants to provide outdoor dining spaces
- Provide tables and chairs in the courtyard for working, relaxing, and socializing

E. Consider a labyrinth at The Interfaith Center

- Labyrinths are a popular way to meditate and reflect on life
- There is currently no labyrinth in Columbia

F. Install an open air ice rink/pavilion

- There is a pressing need for additional ice space and time in Howard County. Many teams leave the county to rent ice space. Installing a smaller outdoor rink that could be used for recreational skating would free the indoor rink for team practices.
- Installing the outdoor rink next to the current rink would allow shared use of personnel and equipment.
- During the off-season, the pavilion could be used for roller skating, rollerblading, dancing, or other events.



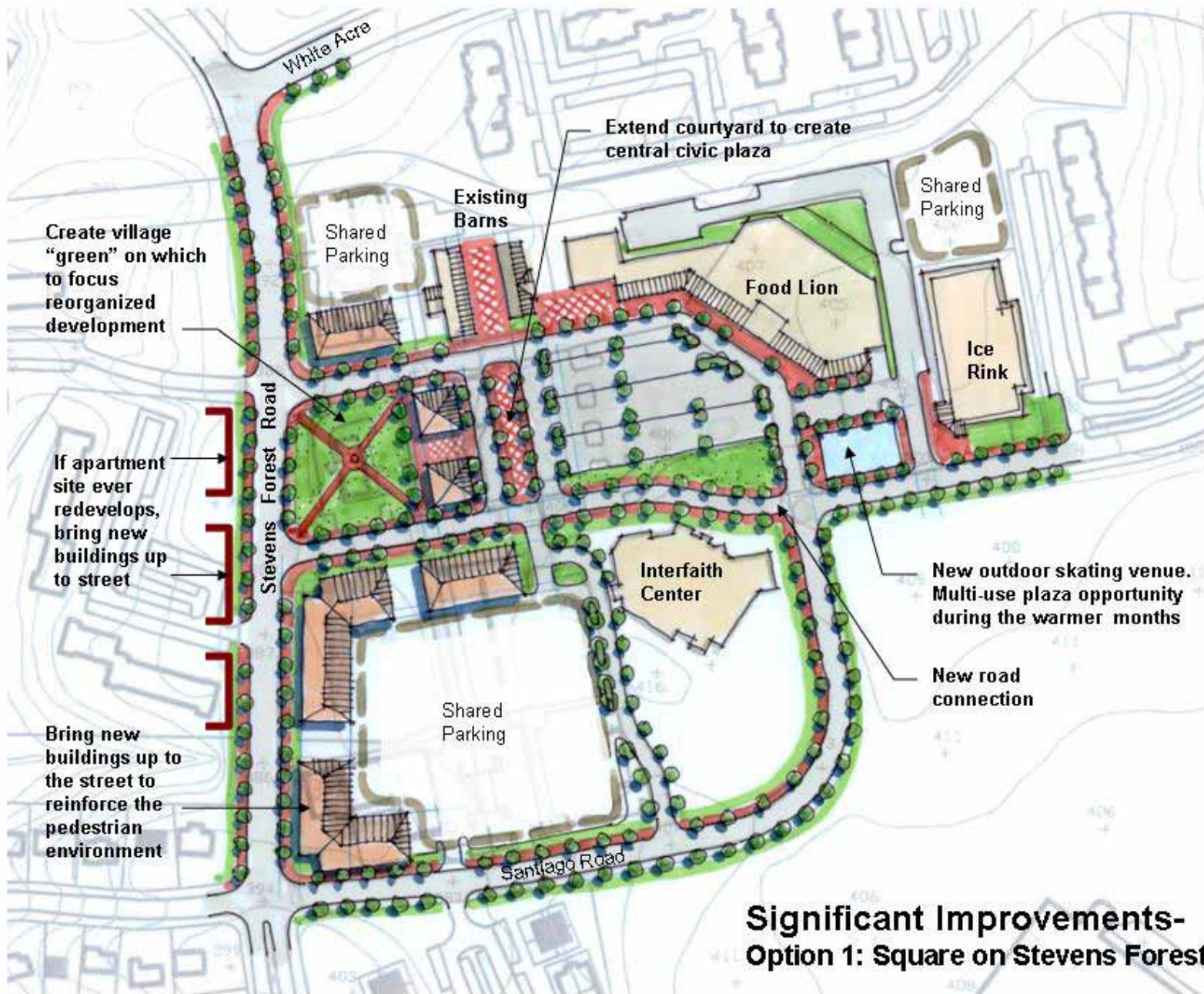
An outdoor rink/pavilion could provide year-round entertainment and activity.

4. Improve traffic flow into and through the village center

Traffic into the village “dead ends” at the Interfaith Center. Traffic patterns are confusing, and Robert Oliver Place is indistinguishable from parking space.

Authorize study to improve traffic and parking patterns, including accessibility and usage of existing roads

- Consider continuing Thunder Hill Road directly into the village center



**Significant Improvements-
Option 1: Square on Stevens Forest**



Significant Improvements
Option 2: Square extends from courtyard

Significant Improvements

These changes would require significant investment by developers and investors.

Financial Obligation: Significant Investment

Timeframe: 5-20 years

1. Encourage well planned, cohesive mixed use development
2. Promote high environmental standards for new and redevelopment
3. Create a strong “gateway” from OMVC to Town Center
4. Upgrade housing in OMVC area

1. Encourage well-planned, cohesive mixed use development

Any future redevelopment in the village center area should add to the vitality and viability of the center. Mixed use development, consisting of a mix of housing, commercial, and retail space (e.g., storefronts with apartments above) would increase foot traffic and provide the essential mass necessary to support businesses and activity in the center. It would allow people to live, work, shop, and socialize in and around an attractive, lively, and walkable village center.

- Development should center around a clearly defined, pedestrian friendly “town square” focused on The Barns
- Materials and construction should be high quality and appropriate in color and scale
- New buildings should frame streets and define areas
- Assemblage of property should be considered for more integrated and cohesive redevelopment
- Parking should be coordinated and shared



Although more urban than the village center, these pictures illustrate cohesive, well planned development incorporating shared parking, green spaces, and clearly defined pedestrian walkways.



- The community policing station should be integrated into the center
- The feel of a village center should be retained—this is a village center, not downtown
- Provide design guidelines
 - Limit heights generally to 4 stories
 - Create consistent streetscapes and lighting

An aerial view of the Oakland Mills Village Center and the immediate vicinity to the west highlights the potential for a strong gateway to Columbia Town Center.



2. Create a strong “gateway” from OMVC to Town Center.

The area between Stevens Forest Road and Route 29 is prime property with the tremendous potential to become a clearly defined gateway connecting Town Center to the Oakland Mills Village Center.

- Study the feasibility of extending Robert Oliver Place from the village center to pedestrian bridge
- Study the feasibility and desirability of vehicular connection to Town Center via overpass over Rt. 29
- Create mixed use development along the gateway
- Include attractions along the gateway to encourage activity: ice cream shop, bike rental, etc.
- Consider including a non-profit, shared-facility office complex

3. Promote high environmental standards for new and redevelopment.

Oakland Mills should be a model for “green” development and sustainability. Redevelopment should be designed to respect the land, protect the environment, and save energy.

- Encourage projects to include performance standards adopted by the U.S. Green Building Council’s (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Energy Star. Standards evaluated by these systems include:
 - Energy efficiency
 - Water Conservation
 - Materials beneficial to the environment
 - Waste management
 - Community linkages—compact and connected development
 - Environmental protection
 - Green building
- In order to protect stream quality, development should be environmentally low impact, employing a systematic approach to water management that uses such technologies as rain gardens, green roofs, and impervious surface to manage storm water.

4. Upgrade housing in the OMVC area.

Housing in the village center area is nearing 40 years old. Apartments that were once considered the best in Columbia, with beautiful views of the lake, are now in need of significant work. Renovation and possibly even redevelopment could once again make this area a highly desirable location.

- Upgrade and renovate housing in the area directly west of the village center
- Consider increasing density in exchange for redevelopment
- Create upscale housing to help diversify housing stock in the area
- Include a full spectrum of housing
- Encourage senior housing in particular to provide seniors with easy access to village center amenities
- Create incentives for Howard County teachers, police, firefighters, and civil servants to purchase in Oakland Mills



Option of Expanded Gateway to Town Center

Major redevelopment on the horizon

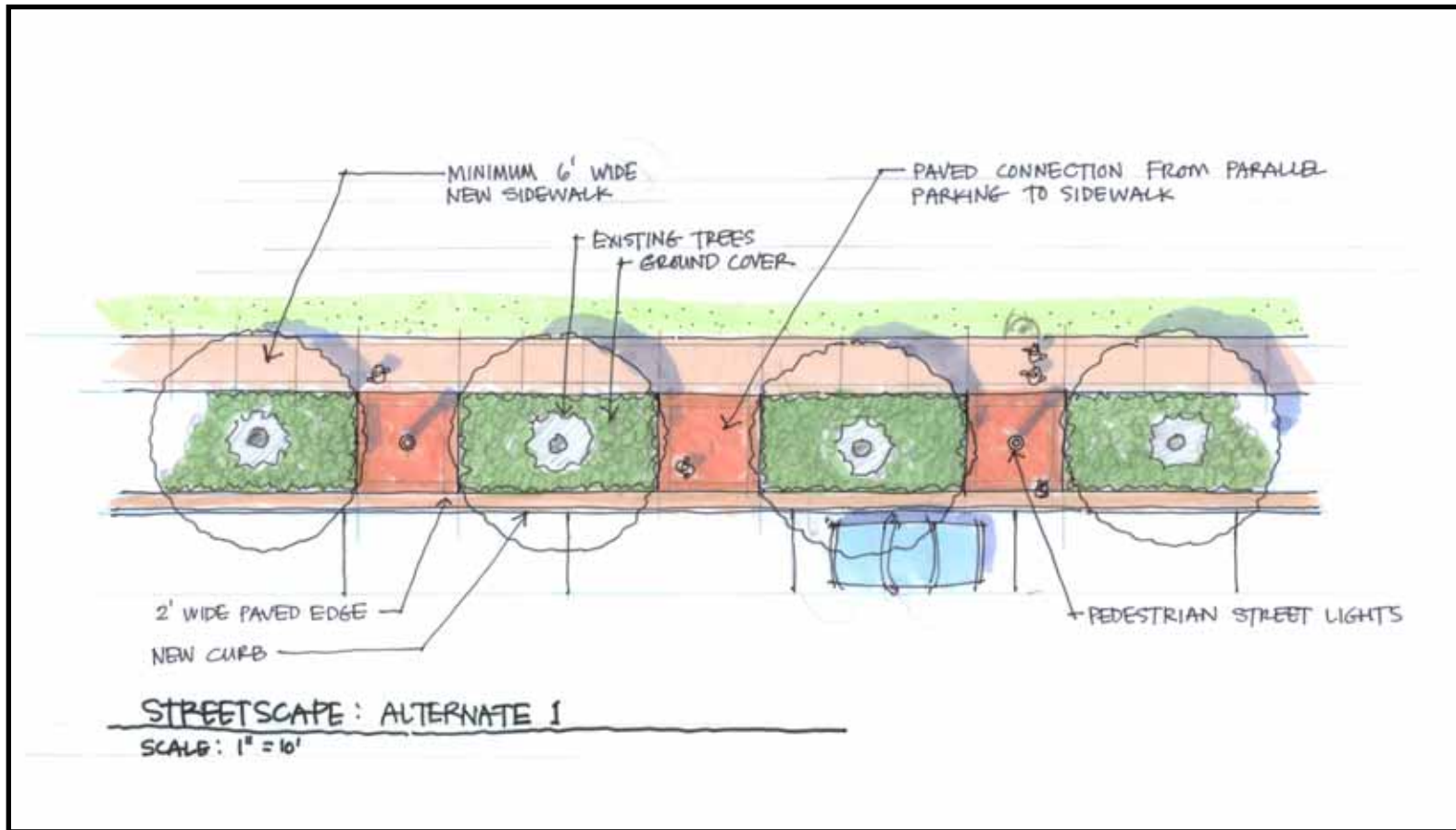
The first manifestation of the significant changes envisioned for the Oakland Mills Village Center is already in the works. Metroventures USA/Inc. is planning a 50,000 square-foot mixed-use project for the former gas station site in the OMVC. The project includes ground-floor service and retail space that will front on Steven Forest Road. In addition, three upper level floors will be targeted to professional office users. The building will be accessible from both Stevens Forest Road and the parking lot behind the building. Construction is expected to begin in 2008.

Metroventures was impressed by the vision of the community and is working closely with the community to make certain that the project will fit well with the goals of the master plan. Metroventures has agreed to coordinate with the Master Plan Committee so that the finalized streetscape design can be used as a guideline for any further redevelopment. We are very excited about the potential of this project and its impact on our Village Center.

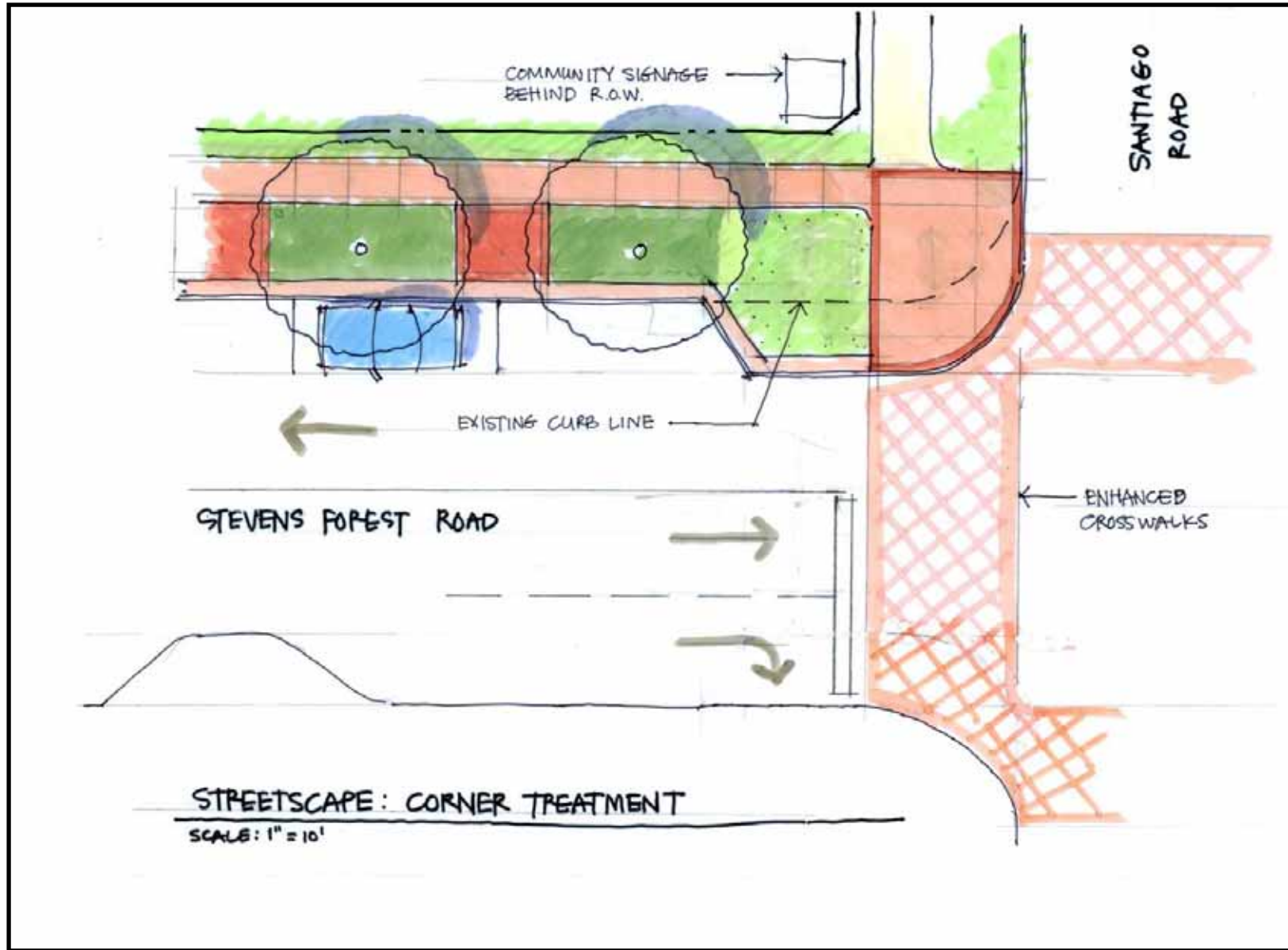


APPENDIX

Create consistent streetscape



Streetscape/Crosswalk Improvements—Corner Treatment



Lighting: Install consistent decorative lighting throughout center



Current lighting (left to right): Stevens Forest Road, Columbia Association property, Cedar Shopping Center's property.

Standard lighting fixture for public right-of-way or private property



Left to right: Post Top, Acorn, Tear Drop.

Signage Concepts

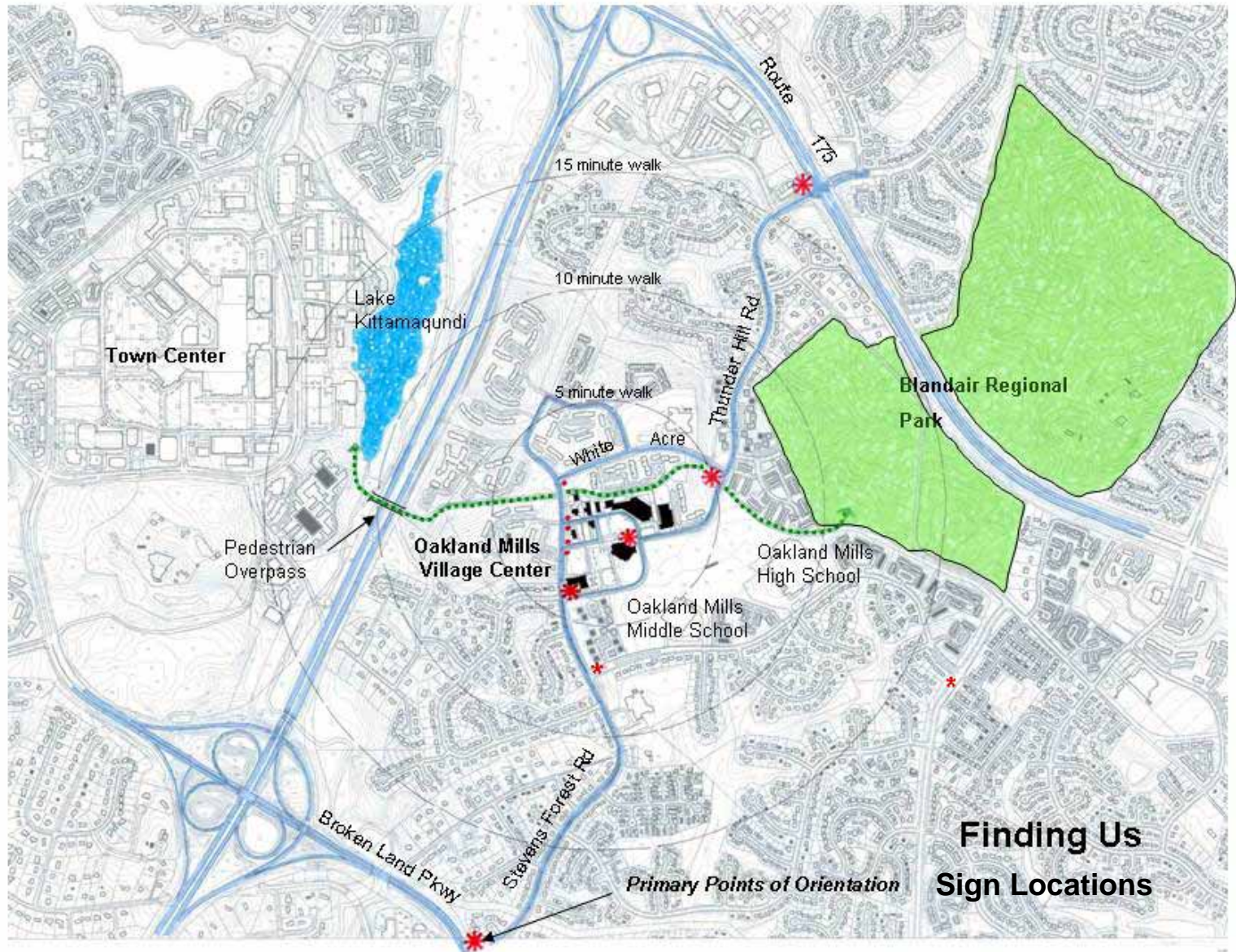
- Enhanced village markers at major roadways (Rt. 175, Rt.108, Broken Land Parkway)
- Wayfinding signs on residential roads that lead to the center
- Entrance signs and landscaping that clearly defines the center
- Frontage signs outside awning that can be seen from vehicles
- Directional signs within the center to identify businesses and guide customers

Enhanced Village Markers

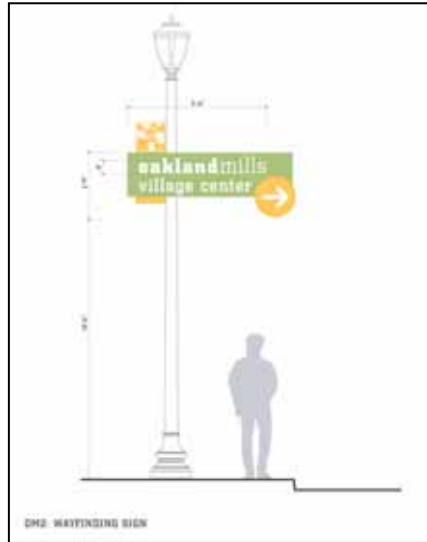


Thunder Hill Road and MD 175





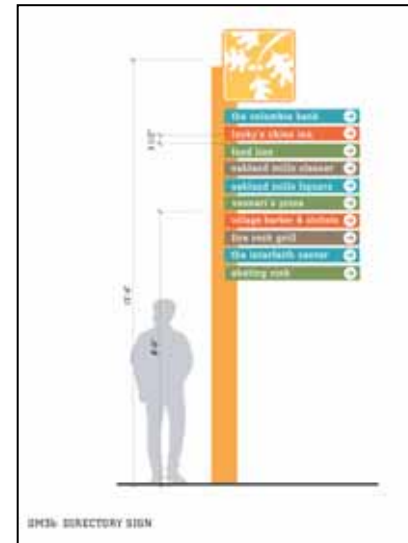
Wayfinding Signs



Broken Land Parkway and Stevens Forest Road



Directional Signs

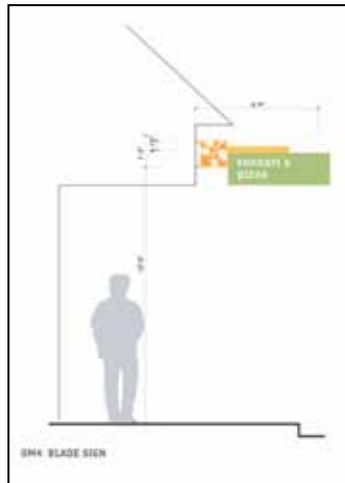


Stevens Forest Road and Robert Oliver Place





Directional Signs—from left to right: Grass area in front of The Barn, Thunder Hill Road approaching Santiago Road, grass parking lot island approaching Food Lion.



Frontage Signs along awning