



**Oakland Mills Community Association**  
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**County Executive Ball's first Citizens Budget Hearing**  
**Testimony from the Oakland Mills Board of Directors**

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to discuss the budget with you. My name is Jonathan Edelson; I am the Chairman of the Oakland Mills Community Association and am speaking on its behalf tonight.

**SCHOOLS and EDUCATION**

Talbott Springs Rebuild – The Oakland Mills community was dismayed to learn that the rebuild of Talbott Springs Elementary may be delayed again due to funding issues. Talbott Springs should be a top capital priority for this county. Children and teachers are exposed to mold, failing systems, inadequate classrooms, and overcrowding on a daily basis. If our county is serious about equity and providing top-quality education to all children, this must be funded now. Recently, members of our Board of Education stated that the new High School 13 should not open with 45 percent or more of its students receiving free and reduced meals. Why then, is it acceptable to have an old school with more than 50 percent of its students receiving FARMS in this condition? Top quality educational environments should not be predicated upon what students are in the building.

The redistricting has also turned students who were walkers into bus riders. One group of students in particular, who live in Columbia Pointe and Verona in Oakland Mills, are leaving Stevens Forest for Thunder Hill. This polygon has much higher than average poverty. We request that the county fund a pilot “activity bus” program to ensure these students are able to participate in any after-school activities offered at Thunder Hill since they are no longer going to attend either of the two schools within walking distance. This program could be evaluated in Oakland Mills during the next school year to determine whether it is beneficial and needed elsewhere.

The Howard County School System needs funding beyond maintenance of effort. Because MOE is a lagging indicator, HCPSS is constantly behind in its budget as a growing system. We need to do all we can to get ahead of this, rather than remaining behind, as the recent cuts to programs have affected our most vulnerable students more acutely.

## **TREE AND STUMP REMOVAL AND TREE REPLACEMENT**

### **Tree Removal and Replacement Program**

We strongly advocate for the hiring of additional county personnel or contractors responsible for tree removal, stump removal, and tree replacement. Currently we have been informed that there is a backlog at step of the process which could amount to almost 3 years from the time a tree is removed to the time that a new tree is planted. And, in many cases the area where trees have been removed will never be replanted. One factor is the lack of personnel. Neighborhoods throughout the county that were once tree lined are now barren of trees, stumps remain, and many areas have not had replacement trees planted.

In addition, the Oakland Mills Board recommends that funding be included for succession planting of young trees throughout Howard County. Being proactive with replacement trees would ensure that our tree-lined streets and forested areas remain as such when older trees die and/or are removed.

## **TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVES**

Oakland Mills is uniquely positioned at the center of Columbia and between the major commercial zones of Downtown and Snowden River Parkway. Many of our residents rely on alternative transportation having only a single car or no car per household. To this point, Oakland Mills encourages the county to continue investing heavily in alternative transportation and Complete Streets within our neighborhoods. By investing in the major thoroughfares and connector roads in Oakland Mills with protected bike lanes and by working with the state to provide more accessibility on 175 and 108, county residents will be able to rely upon safely traveling across Columbia without a car.

We encourage continued investigation into the Transitway. With our location, socioeconomic needs, and resident willingness, we ask you to focus on alternative transportation funding in Oakland Mills.

These solutions have lower maintenance costs without adding congestion to existing roadways.

Finally, Columbia already has so many pathways in place, used by cyclists, strollers, runners, and walkers alike. But most of these pathways lack curb cuts, making it difficult for those on wheels to make use of the existing infrastructure.

## **LEAF REMOVAL/MEDIAN MAINTENANCE AND LEAF VACUUM MACHINES**

Oakland Mills has a large tree canopy even with the removal of the Emerald Ash trees. The leave from roadways and medians are so abundant that they leave they now are covering the medians and turn lanes on our major roads in the village and throughout the County. The leaves create an environmental clogging storm drains and streams and polluting our waterways. Turn

lanes are completely obscured by the accumulation of the leaves. This is creating a hazardous situation.

The only type of maintenance the medians get in Oakland Mills is through a mowing agreement with Columbia Association during the spring and summer months. There is not maintenance to the medians at any other time. Funding for leaf removal maintenance to alleviate the leaf problem is warranted and requested.

For years the Oakland Mills Board has advocated for the county to invest in Leaf Vacuum Machines. Given the large number of mature trees and excessive amount of leaves, it is very arduous for residents to rake and bag leaves. The process of raking and bagging is also a challenge to our residents who are older and chose to age in place. Most concerning, as outlined about, is the environmental problems associated with leaves.

One again we suggest that the County study the feasibility and costs associated with the current method of recycling bagged leaves, the costs associated with street sweepers (which do not remove leaves) and the costs to have leaf vacuum machines.

### **ICE RINK**

The Columbia Association's ice rink, located in Oakland Mills, is the only ice rink in the County. The current facility, with only one sheet of ice, is too small for the high demand of hockey teams, figure skating clubs, and open skating to the general population. Skaters are spending more revenue outside the County. The Oakland Mills Board recently reaffirmed their support for a second sheet of ice. We encourage a partnership between the County and CA along with the private sector to upgrade and expand the rink.

### **BLANDAIR PARK**

We continue to refer to Blandair Park as a gem in Oakland Mills. We are anxiously waiting for the next phase to open, especially the "playground for all".

Each phase of construction brings more new and recurring users to the park. We continue to advocate for the strong link between Blandair park and the Oakland Mills village center.

We would like the county to invest economic development funds into promoting the OM Village Center within the Park, so patrons know where there are options for shopping and dining within walking/biking distance or just a short drive. The investment in signage throughout the park directing patrons to the Oakland Mills Village Center will promote the economic development of one of Columbia's oldest village centers. A strong community/county partnership will hopefully lead to thriving business for our new and longstanding merchants.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to testify tonight.