



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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit budget testimony once again to you. My name is Jonathan Edelson; I am the Chairman of the Oakland Mills Community Association and submitting this testimony on behalf of the Oakland Mills Board of Directors.

### **SCHOOLS and EDUCATION**

#### **Deferred School Maintenance**

Each year we continue to testify in for requesting funding of deferred maintenance projects for Oakland Mills Middle and Oakland Mills High School. This year we are asking you to plan ahead for the **timely funding** of long overdue deferred renovations of OMMS and OMHS in fiscal years 2024 and 2026, respectively. Over \$100 million in deferrals equates to health and safety repairs-including replacing an HVAC system that the school system concluded could no longer support an environment conducive to learning.

This is a serious issue that needs serious attention and commitment of future collaboration between the county and the school system to ensure these long-neglected schools, which serve much higher-than-average populations of students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, can provide safe and healthy environments for students and teachers before another decade passes. This year we ask that the County continue to work with HCPSS and our state delegates to provide timely funding for deferred maintenance projects ensure that ALL schools meet the same health and safety standards and provide modern amenities to students regardless of their backgrounds.

#### **SAFE and COMPLETE STREET PROJECT FOR ENTIRE LENGTH OF STEVENS FOREST ROAD**

Several years ago, the community was approached by HC DPW to discuss two streetscape projects. After community collaboration and several meetings, the

county went ahead with a streetscape project on a small portion of Whiteacre Road. While we are appreciative of the aesthetically enhanced road, we are concerned that the project did not address the many safety issues on Stevens Forest Road.

The severity of this is sadly highlighted by a preventable traffic crash at the intersection of Stevens Forest Road and Kilimanjaro Road. A car hit a middle school student in the crosswalk as the student rode their bike to school.

Members of the Oakland Mills Board and Public Space committee sent numerous letters, including videos, documenting the unsafe conditions along the entire stretch of Stevens Forest Road. Stevens Forest Road is the main road into Oakland Mills and the only main roadway in the 10 villages of Columbia that have residential driveways directly on the road. Most importantly, Stevens Forest Road has four nearby schools that students walk to and from.

We honestly feel that our documented concerns have not been heard. Our numerous letters to the county detailed each intersection and pedestrian crossing along Stevens Forest Road and included suggestions to address the safety issues with short-term immediate fixes to long-term projects.

We would like the County to study the intersection of Whiteacre Road and Stevens Forest Road and present to the community the safest option for that intersection. We also feel traffic signal upgrades, including a lead pedestrian interval, at Kilimanjaro Road and Stevens Forest Road would make that intersection safer.

## **ROADWAY MAINTENANCE**

We support the Columbia Association's request that the county immediately remove several miles of dead trees in the center medians of, and along, Broken Land and Governor Warfield Parkways. Specifically, the request is to remove dead trees and prune the center median of Broken Land from Stevens Forest Road to Snowden River Parkway; and to remove dead trees and prune the center median of Governor Warfield Parkway from Little Patuxent Parkway to Twin Rivers Road.

### **Routine Roadway Median Maintenance**

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 no maintenance to the medians at any other time. Funding for leaf

removal maintenance to alleviate the leaf problem is warranted and requested. Therefore, we continue to advocate for the county to invest in Leaf Vacuum Machines.

Currently, the leaves that have fallen on median strips will remain until the spring when the median is mowed. The leaves now blow into the streets, blocking the roadway and finding their way into the storm drains, severely clogging the drains.

### **BLANDAIR PARK**

The popularity of Blandair Park is evidenced by the number of large events held throughout the year along with the great playgrounds and ball fields. The park is a “gem” in our backyard. However, the Oakland Mills community often feels the burden of the popularity of the park and does not receive all the benefits it could from having this great amenity in our cOMmunity. Each week park users are directed into Oakland Mills to park in overflow event parking at Oakland Mills High School and Oakland Mills Middle School. The county provides bright parking signs directing vehicles to the parking locations.

Each year the Oakland Mills board asks the County to work with us and install signage directing park users to the merchants at the Oakland Mills Village Center, located with walking distance to the event parking and the park itself. We are asking for more than small wayfinding signs on posts. We are asking the County to help support the Oakland Mills village merchants in the same spirit that our community supports the large-scale events that draw thousands to Blandair.

The county’s support of older villages is vital to the existence of the aging village centers. Investing economic development funds by providing directional signs promoting the Oakland Mills merchants provides a simple and unique opportunity for the County to work with Oakland Mills merchants and promote our village shops and restaurants. A strong community/county partnership will hopefully lead to thriving business for our new and longstanding merchants.

### **Orchard Green Path Extension along Route 108**

The Oakland Mills Village Board of Directors supports extending a path from the Orchard Green tot lot to the Red Branch Road light on MD 108, providing safe and legal pedestrian and bicycle access to the Red Branch Rd. businesses. However, we need a small budget and commitments from the state, Howard County, and the Columbia Association to make this connection.

The relatively inexpensive solution is to add a pedestrian crosswalk at the light at Red Branch Rd. However, the crosswalk requires a connecting pathway. The Bike Howard plan suggests adding a shared-use pathway along the south side of MD 108 (about 50 yards). The Columbia Association has an existing path to the Orchard Green tot lot that could be extended to the shared-use path. This solution involves three parties: MDOT for the pedestrian crosswalk, Howard County for the shared-use pathway, and the Columbia Association for the Orchard Green tot lot path extension.

We are requesting the County's help to facilitate a budget for the shared-use pathway and gain commitments for this much-needed Complete Streets solution.

**Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit testimony and thank you and your team for making our County such a great and "happy" place to live, work, and play.**