



**Oakland Mills Community Association**  
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## **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 support of timely funding of deferred maintenance projects for Oakland Mills Middle and Oakland Mills High School. This year we are asking you to include **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. The request to provide timely funding for deferred maintenance projects ensures that ALL schools meet the same health and safety standards and provide modern amenities to students regardless of their backgrounds.

#### **SAFE and COMPREHENSIVE 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. While we are appreciative of the aesthetically enhanced

Whiteacre Road, we are concerned that the project did not address the many safety issues that exist 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. and, recently, an accident directly in front of Stevens Forest Elementary School at dismissal time.

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 ten 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 have had several productive meetings with County officials who understand the issues of concern. On behalf of the community, we would like to ask, once again, for a comprehensive study of Stevens Forest Road, including and from the roundabout at Stevens Forest Rd. and Farewell Road to the intersection of Stevens Forest and Whiteacre Road.

### **TREE REMOVAL AND TIMELY REPLACEMENT**

Dead/dying trees that pose a safety risk must be removed. Without prior knowledge, this past summer **13 large trees were removed from the Robert Oliver Place** entrance into the Oakland Mills Village Center. Two years ago, several large mature trees were removed from Thunder Hill Road, the gateway entrance to the Oakland Mills Village Center. The entrances to the village center are now barren with the canopy of trees gone.

We understand the difficult budget decision that County must make across all departments. At the same time, we support funding for Public Works for the staffing and equipment necessary for a timely and comprehensive tree removal and replacement program.

### **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.

Currently, the leaves that have fallen on median strips will remain until the spring when the median is mowed, clogging storm drains and piling up on roads.

Residents continually face arduous task of raking and bagging leaves on and around their property. There has to be a better solution for residents.

Once again, we ask the County to follow the lead of other local jurisdiction and fund a **leaf vacuum removal process and begin with a pilot program in Oakland Mills.** (Locally Montgomery County, University Park and the Village of Rockville have such programs.)

### **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. 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.

Oakland Mills supports the park and provides the county accessory playing fields and parking for Blandair events. 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.

Investing economic development funds by providing directional signs promoting the Oakland Mills merchants would provide 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.**