



Oakland Mills Community Association
The Other Barn • 5851 Robert Oliver Place
Columbia, MD 21045
410-730-4610 • oaklandmills.org



December 11, 2023

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.

Deferred School Renovations

Each year we continue to testify in support of timely funding of deferred renovation projects for Oakland Mills Middle and Oakland Mills High School. **We are asking you to include funding of long overdue deferred renovations of OMMS and OMHS. More specifically, funding for OMMS must continue in FY 2025 so that the plan is completed on time.** 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 renovation projects ensures that ALL schools meet the same health and safety standards and provide modern amenities to students regardless of their backgrounds.

Traffic Safety

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.

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. We greatly appreciate the recent upgrade to the traffic signal at Stevens Forest and Kilimanjaro, which prohibits right turns while pedestrians cross Stevens Forest. **On behalf of the community, we would like to ask 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 to determine what other improvements are necessary.**

Tree Removal and Timely Replacement

Dead/dying trees that pose a safety risk must be removed.

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 must 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.)

Removal of Leaves in Bike Lanes

We are very grateful for the wonderful bike lanes that were installed along Oakland Mills Road and other locations throughout our community. However, these lanes become unsafe and ultimately unusable with the large amounts of leaves that pile up in them. **We**

ask that the County please find a regular maintenance routine that will work to keep the bike lanes clear of leaves and other debris throughout the year.

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.

Howard County Hospital

An area that is not specifically located in Oakland Mills, but is certainly used by most

Oakland Mills residents, is the Howard County Hospital. **The Oakland Mills Village Board supports the exploration of an expansion along with enhancements to the Howard County General Hospital to better accommodate Oakland Mills residents as well as Howard County as a whole.**

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.