



# DEB'S DISTRICT UPDATE

Deb Jung • District Four

May-June 2025

## *Greetings*

Happy Fourth of July! I hope that everyone gets to enjoy the great weather this weekend. I will be at the River Hill parade and the Lakefront fireworks, and I hope to see you there. This newsletter covers updates on the FY26 Budget and WR Grace's proposed pilot plant.

This year's budget includes a \$1.63 million County operating budget and an \$814.5 million County contribution to HCPSS operating budget. Despite this funding amount, HCPSS still had a budget gap that I tried to close with a \$4.2 million amendment that failed. Without this extra funding, the school system eliminated many important positions and programs.

The Hearing Examiner issued a scathing Decision and Order (D&O) on the WR Grace zoning complaint appeal. The D&O stated that the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) failed to investigate, document, and apply the law. Here are some of the best points in the D&O:

*"As recently stated by the Hearing Examiner in BA-806, investigation is defined as 'carry out a systematic or formal inquiry to discover and examine the facts of (an incident, allegation, etc.) so as to establish the truth.' ... This duty is mandatory, and involves more than a cursory saunter through the alleged violative property."*

*"Instead, when confronted with complexity in the form of a novel, industrial-scale operation masquerading as familiar 'Research and Development,' DPZ defaulted to semantic comfort rather than substantive inquiry-and in doing so, invited every future nonconforming use to do the same."*

Thanks to the Hearing Examiner for making my summer. This is such a big win for the community after so many disappointments.

*Deb*

# Breaking News: WR Grace Zoning Complaint

## Hearing Examiner's Decision

On June 30, the County Hearing Examiner issued a final Decision and Order (D&O) on the case filed by Cedar Creek community members appealing the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ)'s determination that there were no zoning violations for the proposed pyrolysis pilot plant at the WR Grace facility.

The Hearing Examiner remanded the complaint back to DPZ for a thorough investigation into the nonconforming applicability of the proposed use. The D&O also froze the issuance of all County issued permits for changes to, or uses in, Building 30, where the proposed pilot plant will be located.

The Hearing Examiner discussed four questions in the D&O:

**Question 1:** Did DPZ err in permitting a use previously prohibited by the 1955 conditional use issued to WR Grace that excluded pilot plants from the site?

**D&O answer:** The 1955 conditional use decision was superseded by a Zoning Regulation Amendment that classified WR Grace activities as research and development (R&D). R&D was later removed from the regulations in 2013. The D&O stated that since WR Grace now operates under a nonconforming use, the proposed activity is either nonconforming or prohibited and the burden of proof is on WR Grace to prove that a pyrolysis pilot plant is an allowed nonconforming use.

**Question 2:** Did DPZ adequately investigate whether or not the proposed pyrolysis pilot plant differs in intensity and use from existing activities?

**D&O answer:** DPZ issued a two sentence statement in response to the zoning complaint that pyrolysis pilot plants are not a type of R&D. DPZ did not include appropriate findings and conclusions or other requirements established by law. "By all accounts, it appeared that DPZ made up its mind a year before reviewing the zoning complaint," stated the D&O.

**Question 3:** Did DPZ err in the classification of the pilot plant as R&D?

**D&O answer:** DPZ's determination of the pilot plant as an allowable use was insufficient. The issuance of the MDE permit is non-binding to County zoning decisions and doesn't establish safety certifications. "Maryland case law permits continuing a nonconforming use, but does not permit the transmogrification of an approved nonconforming use into a new and different use. The latter constitutes an unlawful extension even if there is no outward change in the appearance of the facility being used."

## More Information

View the D&O on the Hearing Examiner's Decision and Order [webpage](#) under BA 813-D Aidan and Sara Morrell, et al.

# Breaking News: WR Grace Zoning Complaint

The Hearing Examiner also rejected the counter arguments, repeated by DPZ, that zoning complaints cannot be prospective.

**Question 4:** Did DPZ err in not finding adverse impacts to neighbors

**D&O Answer:** The D&O determined that it is

premature to answer this question because of the legal errors by DPZ.

## What Comes Next

A person aggrieved by this decision may appeal it to the County Board of Appeals within 30 days.



WR Grace and the Cedar Creek community

## MDE Air Permit Update

The Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) granted WR Grace's air permit effective June 20. MDE determined that there will be no adverse impact to public health or the environment from the proposed pilot plant. A petition for judicial review of MDE's determination can be submitted by July 28 to Howard County Circuit Court.

There are over 150 children who live in the neighborhood next to WR Grace and many

more children live in the surrounding communities of Robinson Overlook, River Hill, and Hickory Ridge. Residents and advocates opposed to the project can find out more by visiting the Stop Grace Coalition [website](#).

I was interviewed by the *Baltimore Sun* about the recent announcement in this [article](#): "As Columbia's W.R. Grace gets green light for air quality, Jung and neighbors vow 'the fight's not over'."

# Budget Updates

## FY26 Budget

The County Council adopted the FY26 Budget on May 21.

### County Operating Budget Totals

- County Departments: \$1.63 million
- HCPSS: \$814.5 million (County-funded portion).

### HCPSS Operating Budget

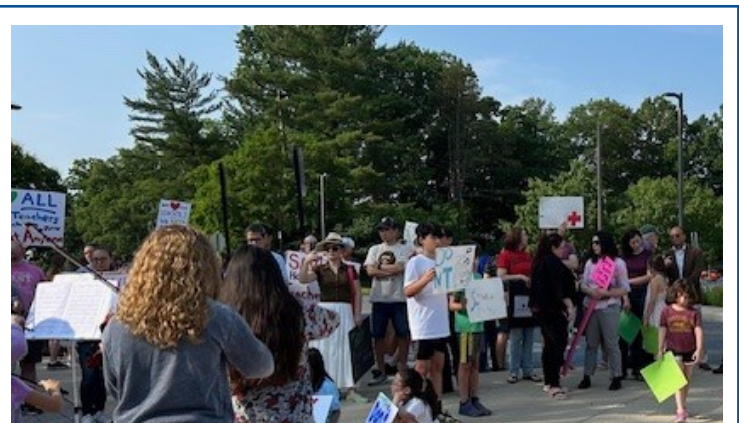
On May 12, the County Executive filed emergency legislation to tap into excess surplus funds totaling \$14.5 million for HCPSS' operating expenses. These new funds came unexpectedly after the County Executive's April announcement of \$800 million in County funds to HCPSS in the FY26 Operating Budget. (HCPSS' total budget equals \$1.2 billion, which includes State funding.)

The emergency legislation of \$14.5 million still fell short of the BOE's request of \$868 million designed to maintain current level of services and new programs required by the State's Blueprint initiatives.

I sponsored several amendments to move an additional \$4.2 million to HCPSS's operating budget. My amendment identified surgical cuts to internal County services that were over estimated; these cuts would have had no impact to the quality of services to our

residents. I also included a modest reallocation of surplus funds that would have had little impact on the County's commitment to meeting future recurring obligations.

Unfortunately, three of my Council colleagues did not think that additional funds were needed by HCPSS and voted against my amendment. Due to a continued budget gap, the BOE later voted to cut a total of 103.5 positions, including elementary Gifted & Talented and 3rd grade strings teachers, some paraeducators, and health assistants. This is the second year in a row that HCPSS has reduced services and cut positions. I maintain that the County has the funds to fully support education but the priority is lacking. I provided more detail on this topic in my [Special Update: FY26 School Budget newsletter](#). It can be viewed on the Newsletter section of my Council webpage.



HCPSS elementary orchestra students playing to the participants at the Save Our Schools rally on June 6.

**View Budget Publications: [click here.](#)**

# Budget Update

## FY26 Revenues

Income tax revenues for FY26 are projected to increase by \$26.3 million (4.1%) from the FY25 budgeted level. The County Budget office reported strong year-to-date collection in the current fiscal year, but it is likely to soften in FY26 due to reductions in Federal spending for workforce and contractors and a potential economic downturn.

Due to high interest rates, interest revenue has increased, resulting in a total of \$24.1 million (an increase of \$12.1 million) in the General Fund. In prior Budget years, interest revenue was not a substantial income source. Grant funding is estimated to decrease by \$9.6 million across all departments, including community services and emergency management due to eliminations of Federal grants.

## Fee Increases

See the next page for a chart of standard taxes and fees that have increased since FY20.

For FY26, the 911 System fee is increasing to \$0.75 per telephone line. Fees will also increase for Animal Control services, except rabies vaccination, will remain at \$20. Many of the landfill fees for commercial users will increase as well.

Water and Sewer rates will increase for the second year in a row. The Administration explained that rate increases were needed to purchase drinking water from Baltimore City, treat wastewater, and pay related salaries. I voted against this increase because the scheduled increases create a significant fund balance over time and contributes to our high cost of living.

## Comparison of FY26 Budget - County Government & Schools



**School**  
**\$1.2B Budget**



**County Government**  
**\$1.63B Budget**

**Search for Legislation: click [here](#).**

# Budget Update

County residents have paid higher property taxes due to an increase of the fire tax (from \$0.176 to \$0.236) in FY20 and escalating State assessments on home values. Starting in FY24 fees and service charges have risen as well. I voted against the increases in FY26 to water and sewer rates and in FY25 to the Watershed Protection fee.

## Taxes and Fees Comparison (in dollars)

TAXES & FEES	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY22	FY24	FY25	FY26
Real property tax (per \$100 of assessed value) <i>*0.03 shifted from fire tax</i>	1.014	1.014	1.014	1.014	1.014	1.044*	1.044
Fire tax (per \$100 of assessed value)	0.236	0.236	0.236	0.236	0.236	0.206	0.206
Transfer Tax	1%	1.25%	1.25%	1.25%	1.25%	1.25%	1.25%
Watershed Protection annual fee for townhouses & condos	15	15	15	15	15	40	40
Watershed Protection annual fee for single family homes less than 0.25 acres	45	45	45	45	45	115	115
Watershed Protection annual fee for single family homes greater than 0/25 acres	90	90	90	90	90	225	225
Water service charge: winter/summer, rate per 100 cubic ft	1.93/ 2.15	1.93/ 2.15	1.93/ 2.15	1.93/ 2.15	2.12/ 2.37	2.33/ 2.61	2.56/ 2.87
Sewer service charge: rate per 100 cubic ft	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.41	3.754	4.13
Trash annual fee for weekly refuse & recycling collection	310	310	310	310	350	376	376
911 monthly fee on telephone bills	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	1.50

Search for Legislation: click [here](#).

# Budget Update

During the review of the Budget, the County Council received updates about ongoing initiatives and programs. I'm sharing below items that I think you might find relevant:

**New Town Task Force:** Required by the General Plan, the New Town Task Force will review potential changes to the zoning laws and make recommendations to the County Executive and Council. The consultant JMT was recently selected to help develop recommendations. The task force started in June 2025 and is expected to conclude within 10 to 12 months.

**Before & After-School Care:** The Department of Recreation & Parks operates the child care program in the local elementary schools. The Department shared with us the expansion of the program to accommodate the recent return to work order for Federal workers. Child care space is limited by the size of the school building and available staffing but the Depart-

ment is working to increase access to the maximum licensing level.

**Community Services:** The Local Children's Board oversees several State grants, including the FY26 Enough Capacity Building grant for high-poverty census tracts. Howard County's qualifying census tracts are Harper's Choice and Wilde Lake. The Community Partnership grant will support Pride Youth Services, Inc., which runs both the AMEN and AFFIRM programs at Wilde Lake Middle and Wilde Lake High School in school year 2025-26. Both programs are free to participants. It also funds the Boys and Girls Club for a free summer middle school program serving Harper's Choice and Wilde Lake middle school students.

The County's Department of Recreation & Parks is expanding its summer program "Teen Kick Back," to Wilde Lake High School, starting Fridays, 5-8pm, June 20-August 22.

## Community Center in Wilde Lake

The Columbia Flier Building is being redeveloped into a multi-use community center, offering a sports complex, food and social hall, and a variety of support services. The community is invited to a pre-submission meeting to view the site development plan, ask questions, and provide feedback to the Petitioner before the plan is submitted to the County for review.

- Pre-submission meeting: July 7 at 6pm, Central Library, Maxine White Warfield Room



Community leaders gathered at the Columbia Flier building to commemorate the home of our hometown newspaper, the *Columbia Flier*.

# Budget Updates

## Housing

The Department of Housing & Community Development presented a comprehensive summary of the County’s comprehensive portfolio of housing supports..

**Family Home Start Program:** County funding was provided to the non-profit Bridges to Housing Stability to secure housing for 55 homeless families with HCPSS students.

**HCC Rental Assistance Program:** The Columbia Housing Center received County funds to provide rental assistance for 50 HCC students last year.

**Homeless Services:** Shelter capacity at Grass-roots Emergency Shelter was expanded through County funds from 50 to 88 beds. The Department of Housing & Community Services secured increased Federal funding for homeless services and permanent supportive housing. The FY26 Budget includes funding for a new non-congregant shelter.

**Housing Opportunities Trust Fund:** This dedicated fund received \$12 million for low- and moderate-income housing programs, including rental assistance for older adults. The County’s foreclosure prevention funding received \$1 million so homeowners can stay in their homes and maintain equity.

### FY26 Housing Initiatives:

- \$2 million for the purchase of for-sale apartments, hotels, and motels to preserve or be converted into low- and moderate-income housing developments.
- \$2 million for homeownership programs and financial education for first-time homebuyers.
- \$600,000 for the home repair loan program for current homeowners.
- \$1.5 million for rental assistance to families with children enrolled in HCPSS and students enrolled at HCC.
- \$1.6 million to non-profits working on homeless issues.
- \$100,000 additional funds to staff the Leola Dorsey Day Resource Center.

Funding Comparison for Department of Housing & Community Development		
Sources of revenue	FY25	FY26
Transfer tax	\$5.9 million	\$5.8 million
MIHU fee-in-lieu	\$1.5 million	\$750,000
Plan to End Homelessness	\$1.5 million	\$1.6 million
Capital Budget	n/a	\$5 million for a non-congregate shelter
Fund balance	\$16.5 million	\$5.5 million

# Budget Updates

## Department of Police

**Community Safety:** The Police Department now has a full-time satellite office and beat assignment at the Mall. In an effort to prevent pre-trial release violations, officers have also been attending parole visits and pre-trial hearings involving teens as well as quarterly meetings with Department of Juvenile Services staff. In a *Baltimore Sun* article dated June 5, 2025, ASAP home detention service was ordered to return its license to the Maryland Commission on Correctional Standards and to discontinue its supervision contracts. Click [here](#) for more.

**Automated speed enforcement:** In the County, speed cameras are located only in school zones and on school buses. State legislation limits the location of speed cameras to school zones only. The number of speed cameras in the County is currently limited to eight by the County; recently filed bill to be voted on in July eliminates the limit on the number of

cameras. Collected fines from the cameras are used first to pay the vendor for the cost to lease the equipment and the remainder goes to public safety marketing materials that accompany the tax bills and other awareness efforts.

The County also has red-light cameras with locations that are determined by the State Highway Administration.

## Department of Public Works

The following traffic signals will be upgraded as a part of the Highway Safety Improvement Program to enhance pedestrian safety. Locations include:

- Harpers Farm Road at Beaverkill Road
- Long Gate Parkway at Wheatfield Way
- Cedar Lane at Freetown Road
- Cedar Lane at Owen Brown Road
- Broken Land Parkway at Cradlerock Way South

## Justice for Rabiah Ahmad

Howard County Police have solved the 2020 cold case involving the fatal shooting of Rabiah Ahmad. Rabiah was 28 weeks pregnant and was visiting her partner in his home in Columbia. She did not know the individual who was charged for her and her child's murder and she was not the intended victim. More about the case can be found on the Police Department's [News webpage](#).



Press conference in 2020 with then Police Chief Lisa Myers and Rabiah's family members.

# Council Updates

## Recent Legislation

The following will be voted on July 7.

### CB24 Building Code Update

Every three years, the County adopts updates to our local building codes issued by the International Building Council. This year, I anticipated that the building code would include the all-electric requirements as recommended in the decarbonization report from the County Administration pursuant to CB5-2023. Unfortunately, this year's update included no changes that would implement the recommendations in the report. In response, the Council requested assistance from Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), a clean energy policy group, to pursue code amendments.

Thanks to technical advise from RMI and Electrify HoCo, I worked with my Council colleagues to sponsor amendments that adopt five electrification and green infrastructure appendices from the International Energy

Conservation Code (IECC), developed by building professionals. These appendices are optional and reach further towards clean energy goals than the 2024 code updates. It is likely that many of these appendices will be part of the main code update in 2027. These appendices also include enough flexibility that they have not been legally challenged like outright non-electric prohibitions.

Amendments that I'm co-sponsoring include:

- **Amendment 1:** Appendix RB & CB, solar ready infrastructure for residential and commercial buildings
- **Amendment 2:** Appendix CF, energy credits that promote energy efficiency for commercial buildings; the 2024 IECC doesn't have a companion residential appendix.
- **Amendment 3:** Appendix CG, electric vehicle charging infrastructure. The companion residential appendix was not included because Howard County has more stringent local requirements.

## Upcoming Meetings

- July 7, 7pm: Legislative Session
- July 14, 9:30am: Monthly Meeting
- July 21, 7pm: Legislative Public Hearing
- July 28, 9:30am: Work Session
- July 30, 10am: Legislative Session

Click [here](#) for more.



Read current legislation: click [here](#).

# Council Updates

- **Amendment 4:** Appendix CH, electric readiness for commercial buildings.
- **Amendment 6:** Appendix RK, electric readiness for residential buildings.

The Council held a worksession on CB24 on June 23. *Sponsored by the County Executive.*

## CR113 School Capacity Chart

This resolution adopts the annual update of school utilization rates projected for 2028 to 2038 and determines which developments can proceed in school districts that are not overcrowded. The County's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) sets capacity thresholds of 105% for elementary, 110% for middle, and 115% for high school.

For the 2028-2029 school year, the Northern region at the elementary level is the most

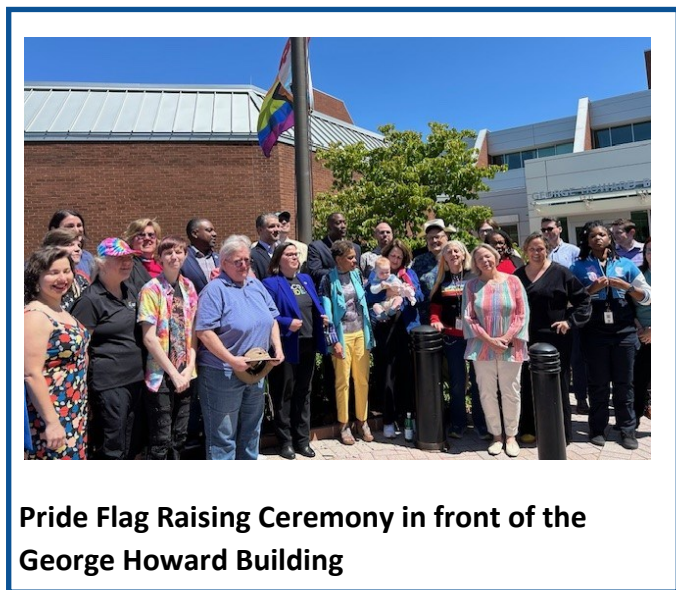
overcrowded region with a utilization rate of 103.6%; four schools exceed 105% utilization.

The Southeastern region is the next most crowded region with 101% utilization and two schools exceed 105%. By 2033, the Southeastern region is anticipated to exceed 105%. A new Southeast elementary school is anticipated for occupancy in 2034. Additional capacity is also planned through renovations and expansions at Dunloggin, Oakland Mills, and Murray Hill Middle Schools.

The APFO Review Committee is currently reviewing the County's growth control laws and will provide recommendations by summer 2025. One potential proposal from the APFO Review Committee is to eliminate the school test and instead allow developers to pay a fee if the assigned school is overcrowded. I testified against this proposal at the May 20 public hearing. More information can be found on the County Government's website under Boards & Commissions, [APFO Review Committee](#) webpage.

## CR114 Housing Unit Allocation Chart

This housing unit chart accompanies the school capacity chart and sets the number of units that can be built in a designated area. A new housing allocation chart was adopted during the 2024 General Plan.



View legislative meetings: click [here](#).

# Council Updates

This new chart allows for more than 600 units to be built in so-called Activity Centers, envisioned by the General Plan as a mixed-use commercial-residential area. The County has yet to adopt new regulations to implement the policy goals of the General Plan for Activity Centers and has yet to change the Zoning Map to identify Activity Centers.

But this is the second year in a row that the County has awarded Activity Center allocations without implementing General Plan policy goals. The chart below shows the apartment buildings that were awarded Activity Center allocations:

Development	# of Allo-	Zoning	APFO Schools
10010 Junction Drive	552	TOD	Failed third test
Corridor Road Apartments	155	TOD	Not tested yet
O'Donnell Properties	242	TOD	Failed second test
Weinman Apartments	218	CAC	Passed test

The Weinman Apartments successfully petitioned for a Zoning Regulation Amendment to allow self storage buildings in the CAC zoning district. Self storage was not a feature addressed in the General Plan. The other three developments in the TOD zoning districts can receive an APFO school test exemption if they comply with the affordable housing requirements in CB18 (see March-April Legislation).

## March-April Legislation

The following legislation was introduced on March 3 and was voted on April 7.

### CB18 Tax Breaks & APFO Exemptions in TOD

This bill allows new apartment projects in transit-oriented development (TOD) zones to receive tax breaks, exemptions from the APFO school test, and a reduced school surcharge if they include a certain percentage of disability income housing units. When first introduced, the bill proposed an inadequate increase in disability housing units to warrant such large incentives. The County already has laws requiring moderate income housing without tax breaks and APFO exemptions. The bill ultimately passed with an increased requirement of 5% disability income units and an additional 15% affordable units.

I proposed several amendments to remove the exemption from the school capacity test because the TOD zones (Route 1 and the Southeast region) have some of the most crowded schools in the County and I do not support exempting developments from the important growth controls that protect healthy learning environments. My amendments failed and I voted against the bill. *Sponsored by Councilmember Christiana Rigby; passed as amended.*

# HCPSS

## Redistricting 2025

The Board of Education (BOE) will undertake a boundary adjustment for the following:

- Elementary schools: Bryant Woods, Running Brook, Swansfield, Longfellow, Clemens Crossing, and Centennial Lane
- Middle schools: Wilde Lake, Harper's Choice, and Burleigh Manor
- High schools: Centennial and Wilde Lake high schools

## Important Dates

Redistricting Scenarios

- July 17, BOE meeting

Community meetings:

- July 21, 6-7pm, Wilde Lake MS
- July 30, 6-7pm, Burleigh Manor MS
- August 7, 7-8pm Harpers Choice MS

## Newly Elected Student Member

Congratulations to Erin Alistar of River Hill High School, who has been elected Student Member of the BOE for the 2025-2026 school year. Alistar's campaign focused on reviewing the BOE cell phone policy, renovating older buildings, and reevaluating exams.

## U.S. Presidential Scholars Program

Five HCPSS students are among only 11 students statewide who have been named semi-finalists in the 2025 U.S. Presidential Scholars Program. The HCPSS students are:

- Rahul Kumar Goyal – River Hill High School
- Yehji Hwang – Centennial High School
- Kelly D. Liu – Marriotts Ridge High School
- Mehin A. Pandya – Mount Hebron High School
- Ryan Gui Zhou – Howard High School

## Congratulations to D4 HCPSS Educator & Staff Award Winners

- Principal of the Year: Lisa Smith, Hammond Middle School
- Teacher of the Year: Tyrone Page, Oakland Mills Middle School
- Teacher of the Year: Natalie Pretzello, Hammond Middle School
- Student Access & Achievement Liaison of the Year: Vanessa Morales, Hispanic Achievement Liaison, Wilde Lake High School



More school [news](#)

## Keeping up with Deb



## Safe Skies-Bird Safe Buildings Social at Robinson Nature Center



## High School Graduations



## Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Tau Pi Chapter's 50th Anniversary

# Keeping up with Deb



**Howard County Veterans & Military Families Monument Groundbreaking**



**Korean War Memorial at the Koreatown Arch**



**Memorial Day, Ellicott City, VFW**



**Military Enlistee Ceremony**

# Upcoming Events



## Lakefront Live

Fridays & Saturdays  
Visit the Lakefront Live [webpage](#)

Columbia Lakefront's

summer festival runs all summer long with live music, movies, and dancing under the People's Tree.

## AMPED in the Park

Visit the Merriweather District's summer series [webpage](#)

Live music is featured in Color Burst Park, the Merriweather District's central square.

- July 24: Las Karamba
- August 7: New Jazz Underground
- August 21: Zar Electrck
- September 4: Butte & Friends

## Summer Events at The Chrysalis

Visit the Inner Arbor Trust [webpage](#)

- Mondays, 6pm: Yoga in the Park
- June 29, 12-4pm, Maker Faire Downtown Columbia

- July 4, 1-2.30pm, Fourth of July Concert with the US Navy Band

## Summer Concerts at the Village Centers

Harpers Choice

- July 25: Breaking 12, 70s, 80s, & 90s hits
- August 14: Guava Jelly

Hickory Ridge

- July 17: Guava Jelly, family entertainment
- August 7: Deni Starr Band, classic rock
- August 28: David Bach Consort, jazz

River Hill Village Center

- July 24: Diamond Alley -- dance & rock
- August 14th: Deni Starr Band -- classic rock

Wilde Lake

- July 10: Breaking 12, 70s, 80s, & 90s hits
- July 31: Tracey Eldridge, family entertainment
- August 21st: Magical Mystery Girls - Beatles tribute band

## Fourth of July at the Lakefront

Visit Howard County's July 4th Fireworks [webpage](#).

Howard County Recreation and Parks, in partnership with the Columbia Association and the Merriweather Arts and Culture Center, will present July 4th fireworks. The Lakefront opens for blanket placement at 3pm, with food trucks at 5pm, and music at 6pm. Fireworks start at 9.15pm.

