

DEB'S DISTRICT UPDATE

Deb Jung • District Four

March 2024

Greetings

In recognition of Women's History Month, I want to celebrate the upcoming referendum to amend the State Constitution ensuring that women can seek appropriate health care without outside interference and have agency over their own bodies. This Constitutional amendment will be on our ballot for the November 2024 election.

Abortion in Maryland, a practice documented since the1600s, was first restricted in 1867 through a complete legislative ban. In 1868, the law was adjusted to allow physicians to perform abortions for the "safety of the mother." In 1968, a more liberalized statute was passed allowing exceptions for rape, incest, severe fetal deformity, and the life or health of the mother. Fast forward to 1973, the Supreme Court decided in Roe v. Wade to allow abortions without restrictions until the third trimester of pregnancy making Maryland's abortion law obsolete.

In 1991 the State Legislature passed a law codifying the right to an abortion that was later petitioned to a State referendum in 1992. I became involved in the effort to support the law by holding house parties throughout Howard County and distributing information from Maryland Planned Parenthood. Remembered by its ballot position, Question 6 was successfully ratified by a popular vote of 62% to 38%.

In anticipation of the overturning of Roe v. Wade, the Maryland Legislature passed a 2023 ballot measure to guarantee the right to reproductive freedom, defined to include "the ability to make and effectuate decisions to prevent, continue, or end one's own pregnancy." Thank you Maryland Legislators and the many women who have fought for these rights during the past 100 years. I appreciate all that you have done to ensure that women are able to make their own health decisions without outside interference.

Deb

Honoring the Key Bridge Victims

On March 26 at 1.30am, a container ship crashed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge. As the bridge collapsed, eight construction workers filling potholes on an overnight shift were plunged into the river and six of the men tragically died. Five of the victims' names have been released by authorities. They include

- Alejandro Hernandez Fuentes, the foreman of the crew
- Dorlian Ronial Castillo Cabrera
- Miguel Luna
- Maynor Yassir Suazo Sandoval
- Jose Lopez.

They were described by a coworker as "hard-working, humble men" performing an incredibly dangerous job that exposed them to speeding vehicles, high winds, and even catastrophic events like the sudden collapse of the Key Bridge. These men originally hailed from Mexico and Central America, but they built their lives in the Baltimore area over years and even decades. They were raising families, going to church, and doing an invisible but vital job for our State.

Baltimore City has created a community relief fund for the victims' families to assist in the financial burden that accompanies such a tragedy. Click here for more.

Only a year ago, six other workers doing road-work on I-695 died when a car crashed into them.

Let us honor the victims and recognize that road crews keep Maryland moving: taking care of our roads and allowing all of us to travel from one place to the next.



Immigrants are Essential

I attended the March 29 press conference in honor of the victims at the CASA's office in Baltimore. The speakers called for President Biden to support the families of the victims with temporary protected status and other recognitions of the essential services that immigrants provide to the operations of our Country.

Click here for more.

Council Updates

March-April

CB13 Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, Return I introduced CB13 at the request of several cat advocacy groups. I support their efforts to reduce the feral cat populations, which in turn reduces the predation of birds. Protecting birds is an important issue for me. CB13 makes it legal to care for "community cats," which means a free-roaming, sterilized, vaccinated, and ear-tipped cat.

The Public Hearing on CB13 was held on March 18. The majority of the testimony was in favor of CB13 and included representatives from the Maryland SPCA, the Humane Society, Laurel Cats and other caretaker groups.

The Problem

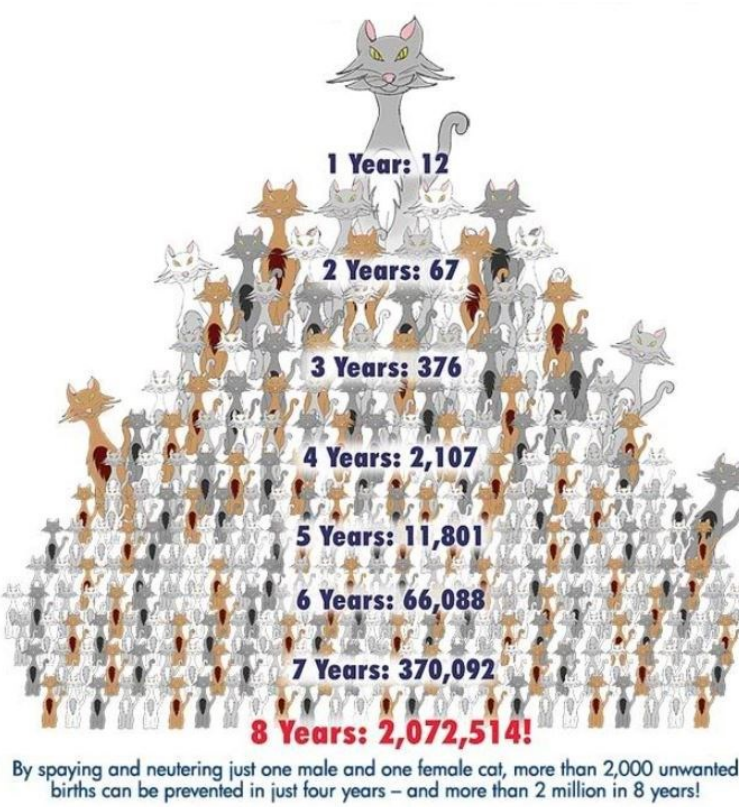
Our code requires that owners of domestic animals must not allow the animals to be at-large (known as "leash laws"). Feeding and caring for a domestic animal is considered ownership. This is problematic for volunteers who care for feral cat colonies. Restricting the movement of these unsocialized animals is impossible and is a deterrent to care.

TNVR Efforts

In order to control feral cat populations, community volunteers humanely trap the animals and take them to low-cost vets for sterilization and vaccination. The animals' left ears are clipped to indicate that they have been sterilized. The volunteers also feed and care for the animals on a regular basis.

Benefits of TNVR

- Reduce bird deaths. Cats account for the largest number of bird deaths per year. An estimated 1.3 to 4 billion birds are killed by cats each year in the US, and 69% of those kills are attributed to feral or un-owned cats.
- Reduce the number of feral cats that are euthanized. Feral cats that lack social skills to be adopted are euthanized if they end up in the Howard County Animal Control shelter.



Current legislation: click here.

Council Updates

CB14/ZRA 205 Add Storage facilities to Planned Office Research (POR). This Zoning Regulation Amendment will apply to two properties (at Route 32 and Route 144 in West Friendship) within the POR district and 1800 feet from an interstate highway ramp. In the affidavit of contributions, the petitioner, Corridor 70/302, LLC, and affiliated businesses made $55,000 in campaign donations to the Calvin Ball team and $1000 to Friends of Opel Jones from 2019-2022. *Council Chair*

February-March

CR19 Electric Scooter Permit Fee Reduces the permit fee from $10,000 to $2,000. This program was created in 2022 and had one operator that is no longer in business. The fee reduction is intended to encourage at least one application. *County Executive; passed unanimously*

CB7 Government Reorganization Moves the Office of Consumer Protection to the Department of County Administration, creates an Office of Agriculture, establishes an opioid restitution fund office and assigns the distribution of restitution funds to the Department of Community Resources & Services, and consolidates housing staff in the Department of Housing. *County Executive; passed unanimously. .*

CB8 Open Meeting for Environmental Waivers The Department of Planning and Zoning must hold open meetings to consider waivers for protections of wetlands, streams, and steep slopes. I voted in favor of this bill as it is an obvious step towards government transparency. *Liz Walsh; failed.*

CB9 Gas Station Pricing The highest price of gas (including transactional fees) must be displayed on pricing signage. Along with Dr. Opel Jones, I co-sponsored this legislation. *Christiana Rigby*; *passed*

Upcoming Meetings



April 1, 7pm — Legislative Session
April 15, 7pm — Public Hearing
April 16, 9:30am — Monthly Meeting
April 23, 9:30am — Legislative Work Session

Budget Meetings
April 16, 6pm — Public Hearing
April 17, 10am — Work Session #1
April 19, 10am — Work Session #2
April 24, 10am — Work Session #3
Click here for more.

Legislation Search Tool: click here.

Council Updates

March Monthly Meeting

The Council meets periodically to discuss topics outside of legislation. At the March 12 Monthly Meeting, we discussed hospital wait times, which is an issue I have received a lot of complaints about from constituents.

Emergency Department Wait Times

Johns Hopkins Howard County Medical Center President, Dr. Ahmed, explained that behavioral health patients account for a larger portion of emergency room visits than the current space can accommodate. The hospital is generally 95% full every day but that it hasn't added capacity since 2010.

Of the emergency visits, 80% are for behavioral health issues. This rise in cases shrinks the hospital's capacity for other medical emergencies. About 75% of the emergency patients come from Howard County and the remainder from other counties. Our County is a well insured County and only a small percentage of visitors are un-insured.

Patients admitted for overnight stays (called "boarding") have increased due in part to a 40% decrease of nursing homes in the County. There are usually 24 to 29 boarding patients per day.

The County has funded the following capital improvements at the hospital:

- $2m for a behavioral health unit and the addition of 24 beds that will be completed in December 2024.
- $16m over three years, of which $15m is for an observation unit and $1m for the behavioral unit. An area of the hospital will be refurbished and 29 new observation beds are proposed.



Tax Talk

Maryland Comptroller Brook Lierman gave a briefing to the County Council on modernization efforts at the State's tax collection agency. Maryland Tax Connect is a self-service portal that allows taxpayers to file their taxes online. This service is useful for businesses making tax payments, filing returns, and applying for or renewing licenses. Click here for more.

Council Meetings: click here.

Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance

The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) is a growth management tool to ensure that the County has enough school and road capacity to accommodate new growth. The following components of APFO are adopted annually:

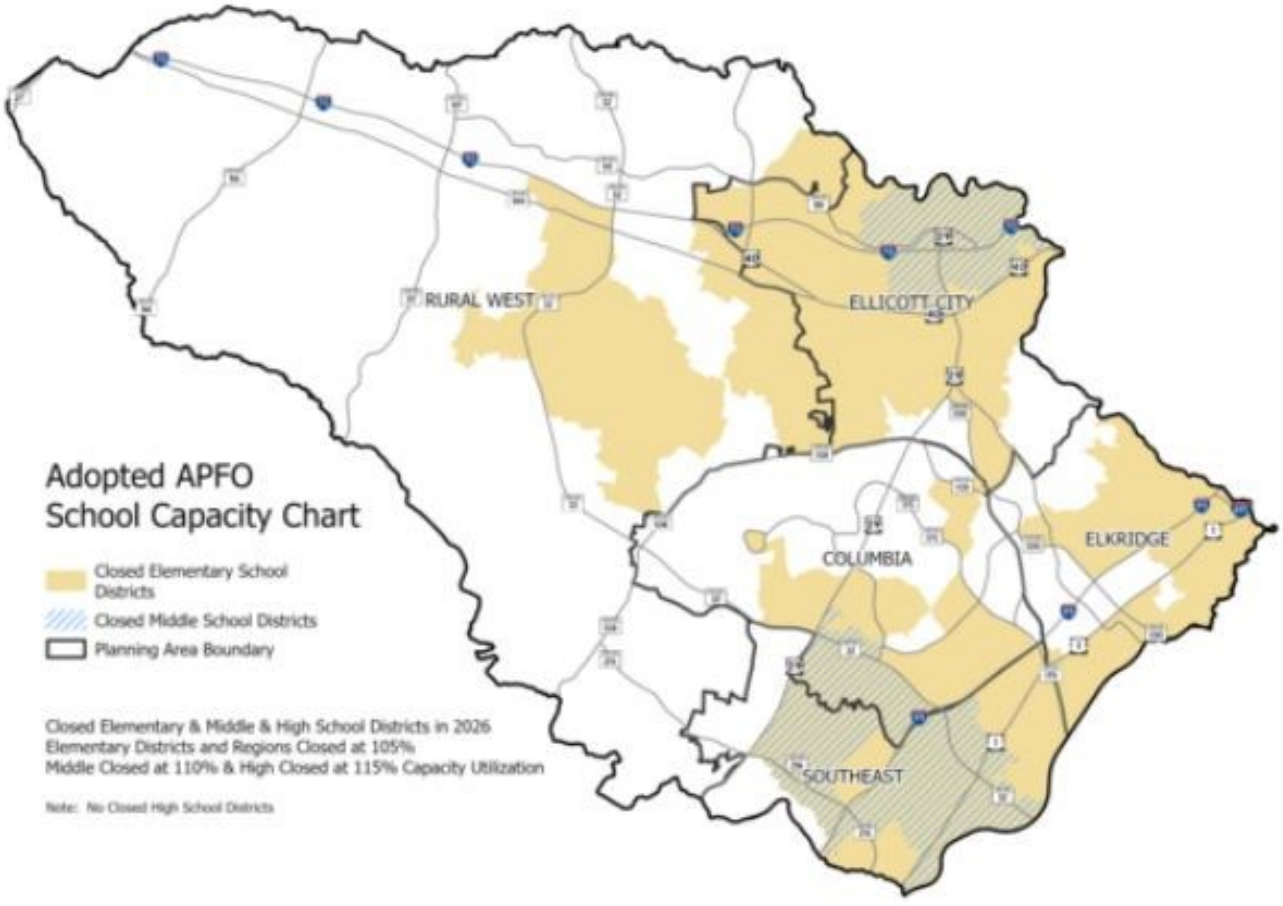
Housing allocations chart

- sets the number of units that can be built in one year in certain geographic planning categories.

School capacity chart

- includes the current and projected capacity of all Howard County schools.
- determines which schools are "open" or "closed" to new residential development based on utilization rate thresholds.

During the decennial General Plan, housing allocations and categories are altered, and recommendations for APFO changes are made for future consideration. An APFO Review Committee is required by law one year after the adoption of the General Plan and a new review committee is required five years later following the completion of the committee's work (Sec.16.1100.b.3.iv; enacted by CB1-2018).



Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance

APFO Review Committees

Prior to the 2018 requirement for APFO review committees, County Executives convened review groups via Executive Order. Not all committee recommendations were adopted and some changes occurred outside of the review process through legislation. Below is a summary of previous Review Committee recommendations.

2000 Committee Recommendations

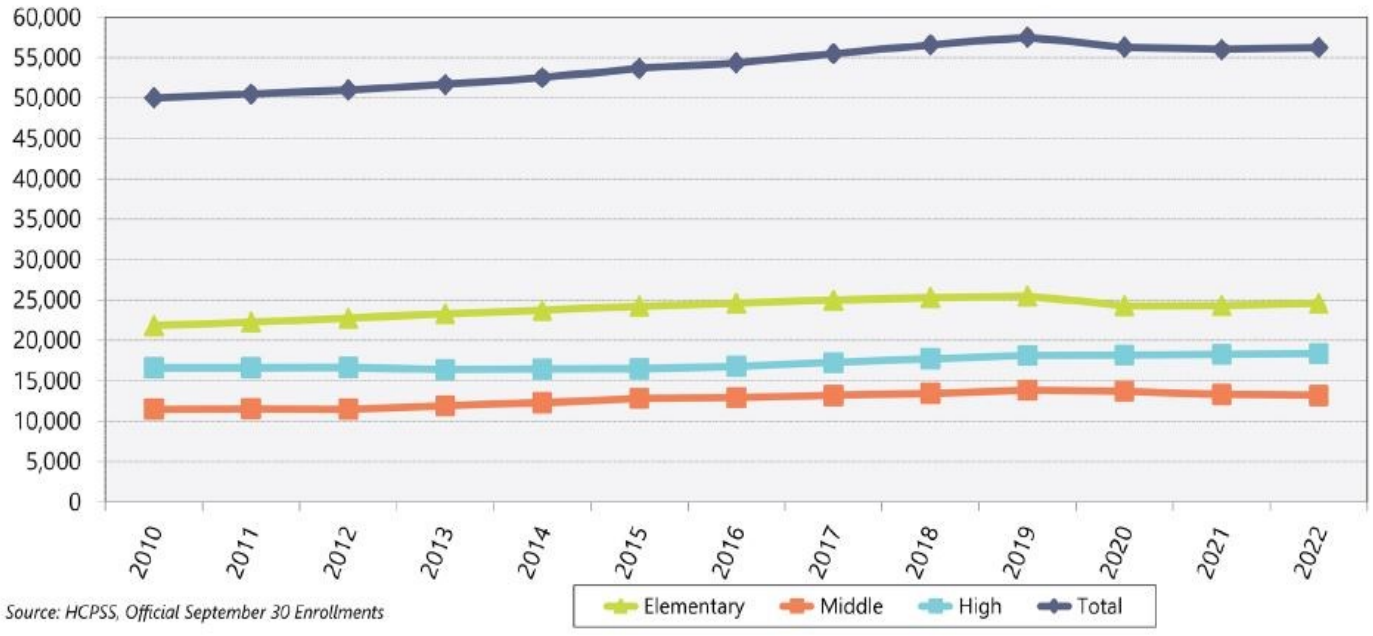
- adopt a middle-school capacity test.
- lower elementary school capacity threshold from 120% to 115%.
- limit allocations to 300 units per year in a single elementary school district if the region exceeds 100% capacity.
- increase road test from one mile to 1.5 miles on new projects.
- adopt planning areas instead of elementary school regions for housing unit allocations.

2016 Committee Recommendations

Click for report and appendices.

- exempt MIHU from allocations test (enacted by CB1-2018).
- allow new allocations for properties rezoned to a higher density.
- exempt Downtown Columbia from the 300 unit annual allocation for a single elementary school district if the school region is at 100% capacity (enacted by CB55-2016).
- exempt age-restricted projects from the school test (adopted).
- allow for an increased school facilities surcharge to be paid for projects to move forward in closed school districts.

Graph 8-1: Howard County Public School System Enrollments 2010 to 2022 (official Sept. 30 count)



Source: HCPSS, Official September 30 Enrollments

Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance

CB1-2018

The most significant changes to APFO in the recent past occurred during the previous Council's tenure in 2018.

- adjusted "open" school capacity to at or below the following:
  - Elementary school region 105%
  - elementary school 105%
  - middle school 110%
  - high school 115%
- allowed affordable housing waiver from APFO school tests
- set maximum waiting periods for projects in closed schools
- required APFO improvements, including roads, to be included in the developer's agreement
- created timeline and composition for an APFO review committee
- required a special meeting for the County Council, Board of Education, and the County Executive to discuss capacity needs

Other APFO Amendments

- updated APFO to reflect changes in the General Plan (CB41-2023).
- removed rollover allocations (CB14-2020).
- created Public School Facilities surcharge on residential construction (2004 MD General Assembly); increased to $7.50 per square foot (CB42-2019).
- added Downtown Columbia housing unit category and specific road test (CB55 & CB53-2016).

APFO School Capacity Chart
2024-25 Countywide Totals

School Levels	Projected Enrollment	Utilization Percentages
Elementary School	26,592	103.6%
Middle School	14,491	107.7%
High School	19,720	103.2%

FY25 Budget

Spending Affordability Advisory Committee (SAAC)

This committee reviews County revenues and debt obligations and makes recommendations for the upcoming fiscal year. Click here for the FY25 report.

SAAC Budget Projections

General Fund revenues: $1.44b
Revenue growth: $50.6m
Expenditure growth: $127.4m
Funding gap: $76.8m
Recommended GO Bonds: $70m

Planning Board FY25 Review

The Planning Board reviews the proposed capital program and any new or substantially changed capital projects for the impact on the General plan and the growth of the County.

Recommendations:

Capital total: $463.778m
PayGo: $252.2m
GO Bonds: $164.6m

The Planning Board approved the following new or substantially changed capital projects:

Project Name	Total Proposed Amount
Historic Courthouse	$10.1m
Elkridge Community Center	$41.5m
Troy Park Indoor Track	$32.5m
Data Center	$6m
Ice Rink	$34.5m
HS #14, Land Acquisition	$15m
Park systemic improvements	$33.3m
Resurfacing	$7.2m
Historic Structures Rehab	$9.2m
Public gardens	$2.4m
Mayfield Woods MS renovation	$18.5m
LPWRP – Sewer capacity	$35m
Pedestrian & bicycle access to Gateway	$10.6m
Pedestrian & bicycle access to Troy Park	$2.5m
Green Streets improvements	$6.5m
Easement acquisition	$19.4m

FY25 Budget

Board of Education Budget Request

The Howard County Board of Education (BOE) adopted its Operating and Capital Budget Requests for the 2024-2025 school year (Fiscal Year 2025) during its meeting on March 7. Click here for more.

The County Executive is currently reviewing the budget request. In April, the County Executive submits the proposed Capital and Operating budgets to the County Council for its consideration. The Council will hold the following public hearings and work sessions to review the proposed budget.

- April 16, 6pm — Public Hearing Capital Budget
- April 24, 6pm — Public Hearing Operating Budget
- May 22, 12pm — Adoption of Budget



High School Graduations

The Howard County Public School System Class of 2024 graduation ceremony schedule is now available. Congratulations to all of our graduating students. Click here for more.

HCPSS Superintendent Search

Families are reminded of the opportunity to provide input on the search for a permanent Howard County Public School System Superintendent by Friday, April 5. Click here for more.

HCPSS Summer School Programs

Enrollment opens April 2 at 6pm

During its March 7 meeting, the Board of Education funded the BSAP Summer Institute and G/T Summer Institutes for Talent Development at 50% enrollment for Summer 2024. Click here for more.

Wilde Lake HS Senior Abisola Ayoola

Abisola Ayoola continues to impress. After serving as the former Howard County Student Member of the Board, Abisola now spends 8-12 hours a week engaged in activities related to her role as the Student Member of the Maryland State Board of Education (State SMOB). Click here for more.



Police Update

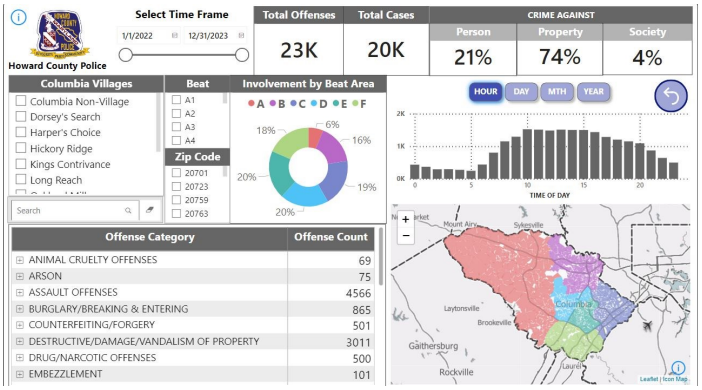
Crime & Traffic Dashboard

I recently received an introduction to the Police Department's new Crime and Traffic Dashboards that provide a comprehensive review of all stops and arrests along with geographic and demographic information of the violations and violators. Click here for the dashboards. Statistical analysis from 2022 can be found here.

During my meeting with the Police, I learned that statistical analysis of arrest data should include considerations of neighboring jurisdictions. In 2023, 30% of the perpetrators were from Howard County, 30% from other jurisdictions, and 30% unknown. Warrants accounted for the largest percentage of arrests in the County at 36.6%. Officers are trained in implicit bias and the inaccuracies of eyewitness reports. Follow-up investigations by detectives are critical components of responding to community reporting, though the majority of the County's 911 calls contain no racial descriptions of the alleged offenders.

The information in the Traffic Dashboard reflects vehicle stops at spots where a high volume of collisions have occurred. A map of the hot spots can be viewed on the dashboard. Stops are intended to reduce accident-causing behavior rather than issue citations with 71% of the stops resulting in a warning and only 3% of the stops resulting in a search of the vehicle. A large percentage of stops are of residents who do not live in Howard County as many of the patrolled roads are major throughways.

In 2022 the reporting of crime offences was changed by the Federal government to provide standardization across the country. The old system classified the highest offense only. The new system classifies all offenses per offender. The transition between the two reporting requirements doesn't have enough data yet to yield conclusive information. The Crime Dashboard is updated once a quarter with data from 2022. The dashboard includes the most serious offenses. Statistics fluctuate based on shifting investigations and charges.



Police Accountability Board

This citizen board is tasked with issuing an annual report containing trends in disciplinary matters of police officers to improve policing. The board received six reports from the public alleging misconduct. All cases are pending internal affairs investigation. The annual report is available online.
Click here for more.

Police Update

Body Worn Cameras

In 2023, 13 complaints were filed against the police. In comparison, Baltimore County received 897 complaints. Click here to file an online complaint. Body worn camera footage gives officers an opportunity to review and guide interactions by younger officers. The Body Worn Cameras will soon have a software upgrade to collect use of force incidents and synopsis of complaints that will be available for the public.

SHOW YOUR COLUMBIA PRIDE!

Show the ♥ for your neighborhood with a high-quality reprint of Gail Holliday's Columbia -themed posters



Columbia Housing Center

LIMITED STOCK

Visit **https://bit.ly/ghposterschc** to order - local pickup is available!

More designs to come - let us know which ones you want to own!

Keeping up with Deb



East Columbia 50+ Senior Center Grand Opening



Tuerk House Opening



Cookie Crumbl Grand Opening

Keeping up with Deb



Planned Parenthood Fundraiser



Tables for Connection Ribbon Cutting





Grassroots' First Annual Volunteer Recognition



Women's Giving Circle Annual Celebration

Community Updates

Community Donations

Turning Point Energy recently developed a 2MW community solar project in Clarksville. This company makes charitable donations where they develop their solar projects. Recipients include

- Bryant Woods Elementary PTA $1000
- Harpers Choice Middle School PTA: $1000.

Columbia Flier Building

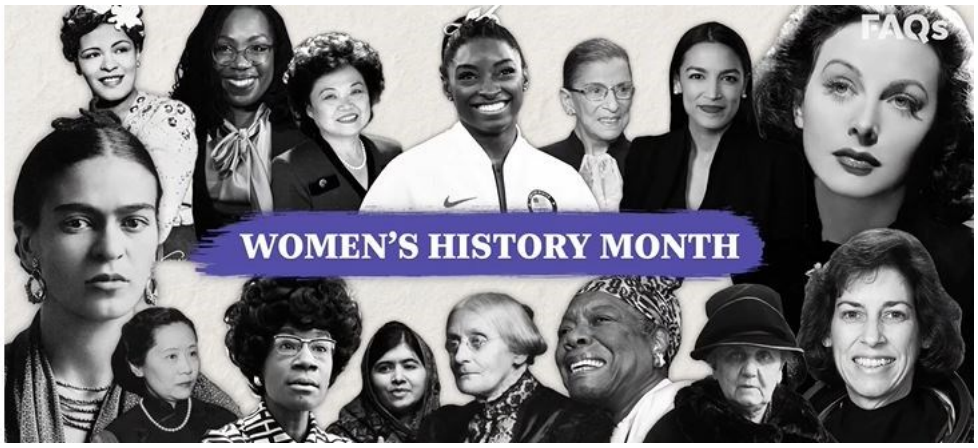
The County has selected Columbia Concepts LLC as the purchaser of the Flier building for the sale price of $3 million. The building will be converted into a community center.

Spelling Bee Winner

Congratulations to Navya Dwivedi from Clarksville Middle School for winning the 2024 Howard County Library System Spelling Bee. Navya will go on to the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Best of luck. I'm rooting for you.

Battle of the Books Volunteers

Help Howard County Library System and the Public School System host the annual Battle of the Books for 5th graders on Friday April 19 at Merriweather Post Pavilion.
Click here for more.





Columbia Library Sites

The County is conducting an online survey of residents' preference for the proposed Downtown Library. Options include the former Lord & Taylor site at the Mall, two Lakefront properties, the current Library, and a location in the Merriweather District. Click here for more.



Upcoming Events



HCC Horowitz Center

Click here for more.

April 11-14 Mouse on the Move from Imagination Stage

April 13, 27 & 28 HCC Concert series

May 2-5 Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical



Click here for more.



Wine in the Woods

May 18-19, 2024 | Symphony Woods (by Merriweather Post Pavilion)
10475 Little Patuxent Pkwy Columbia, MD 21044
Featuring beer for purchase from local breweries!

Click here for more.