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County Executive Ball Presents: The Ball Bulletin



December 22, 2025

Dear Friends,

[Howard County has earned SolSmart's highest honor, achieving Platinum designation for solar leadership.](#) This is a recognition of our county's whole-of-government commitment to expanding energy generation and becoming more energy independent.



This designation reflects years of work to streamline permitting, modernize planning and zoning, engage the community, and partner with industry leaders to make solar more accessible and affordable. Today, solar projects in Howard County generate more than half of the electricity used by county government buildings. They have grown local solar capacity to 150 megawatts, and will save taxpayers an estimated \$30 million over 25 years, all with no upfront cost. That progress is equivalent to removing more than 4,500 cars from our roads or planting over 323,000 trees!

This achievement belongs to the dedicated county staff who made it possible, including our Office of Community Sustainability and the Departments of Inspections, Licenses and Permits, Planning and Zoning, General Services, Public Works, and Recreation and Parks. Thank you as well to SolSmart, all of our clean energy partners, nonprofit advocates, state agencies, and the County Council for their continued leadership and collaboration.

With these partnerships, we are proving that energy action strengthens our economy, protects our environment, and helps move Howard County toward a cleaner, more resilient future for all.

Sincerely,



Community Updates

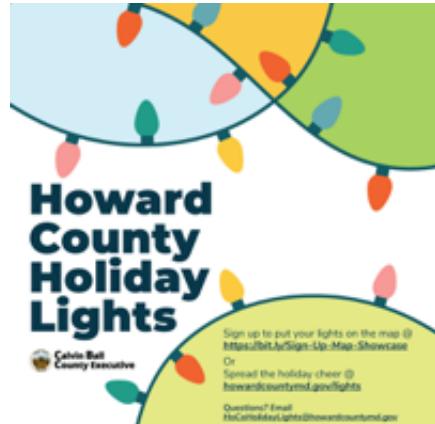
Flashing Lights

HoCo Holiday Lights Map is now live! Visit the page and explore the most festive light displays across our community.

From Columbia to Elkridge, Savage to Woodstock, and everywhere in between, residents and businesses are adding their brightest and most creative decorations. Explore the map, plan a family outing, and enjoy the glow all season long.

If you have a display you'd like to share, there's still time to add it!

Visit https://data.howardcountymd.gov/HolidayLightsFinder_View/main_Desktop.aspx to make a submission and see the numerous locations across Howard County.



Save Your Appetite!

Our restaurants continue to feel the impact of sales declines tied to the current economic climate in the US. Participating in Winter Restaurant & Craft Beverage Weeks is a powerful way to boost visibility, bring in new customers, and showcase the best of what you do.

Restaurant Weeks.

Running January 19 to February 1, 2026, this is an opportunity designed to support you. This year, to support our restauranteurs, Visit Howard County is waiving the restaurant participation fee for Winter

Businesses can register at <https://www.visithowardcounty.com/restaurant-weeks-sign-up-page/>.

This is the Solar Express!

This winter season, we're launching the innovative Solar Express! This impactful program provides instant approvals for residential rooftop solar permits. In turn, it helps reduce barriers and speeds up solar panel installation. Homeowners can apply online anytime. Once documents are submitted and payment is made, approval is immediate. Our team

then reviews submissions the next business day and schedules inspections once work is complete.

Learn more at

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/2025/12/18/solar-express/>.

**Calvin Ball
County Executive**
**'SOLAR EXPRESS' IN EFFORT TO ENCOURAGE
ROOFTOP SOLAR ON HOMES, HOWARD
COUNTY ROLLS OUT INSTANT APPROVALS**

December 18, 2025 THE BALTIMORE SUN

Howard County will now instantly approve residential rooftop solar permits under its new Solar Express program, which the county says aims to reduce barriers and encourage solar expansion.

The program allows homeowners to receive immediate approval without upfront human interaction, according to Howard County Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits Director Bob Frances.

"The county has taken several steps to encourage solar adoption from residential to commercial use," Frances said. "Programs like Solar Express will encourage residential solar adoption by reducing time between expression of interest and construction."

County Executive Calvin Ball said at a Tuesday news conference that the program would "reduce barriers" for homeowners looking to install solar panels.



Homeless Persons' Memorial Day

December 21st was Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. In recognition we joined communities across the country, on the longest night of the year to remember those who have lost their lives while experiencing homelessness.

In honor of this observance, we gathered with faith leaders, advocates, service providers, and community members for our annual Homeless Person's Memorial. Each name we honored represents a life with meaning, and a story that deserves to be remembered.

Homeless Persons' Memorial Day is not only a time for reflection. It is a call to action. It reminds us of our shared responsibility to ensure that no one in Howard County faces homelessness alone. That every resident has a pathway to safe, stable housing.

We're grateful to the Department of Housing and Community Development, Rev. Andrew James, Grassroots, the Coalition to End Homelessness, our faith community, frontline providers, and the many volunteers who work every day to bring care and dignity to those in need.

Through remembrance and sacrifice, we will continue advancing our Plan to End Homelessness and build a county where everyone has a place to call home.

Sign Up for Health Insurance

Marylanders have more time to enroll in health coverage. The state-run exchange is allowing residents to sign up for health insurance through December 31, giving families extra time to review options as federal subsidies change. If you or someone you know needs coverage starting Jan. 1, now is the time to act. Get help and explore plans at <https://www.marylandhealthconnection.gov/find-help/>.



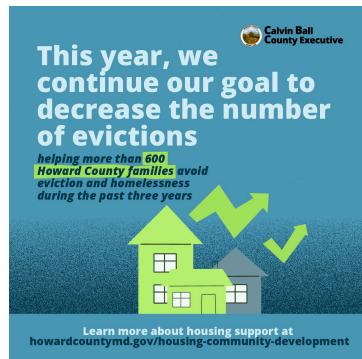
Delivering Holiday Cheer

For 10 years, Toys for Tots has provided free toys to thousands of children across our community. This year we were once again proud to serve our Howard County families. Programs like these are proof that with some teamwork and a little extra giving spirit, we can make holiday dreams come true.

Thank you to all who donated, to every single one of our volunteers who showed out, and to our Marines who started this important initiative. Happy Holidays, Howard County!

Struggling Doesn't Make You Weak

This winter, your mental health matters. If you're feeling down or overwhelmed, you can always call 988. Struggling doesn't make you weak. Remember, it's ok to ask for help this holiday season.



Decreasing Evictions

A home is more than four walls. For many, a home is also security, dignity, and peace of mind. We have made eviction prevention a priority, helping more than 600 Howard County families avoid eviction and homelessness during the past three years. This year, we continue our goal to decrease the number of evictions, as we continue supporting residents with the greatest need.

Raising the Bar for Dining

It was delightful to join the team at [Barrington Tap & Table](#) in Marriottsville to celebrate the opening of their new restaurant.

Owner Anthony DiGangi and Chef Chad Wells are continuing to raise the bar for dining in Howard County. From Walker's Tap & Table to Rosie's Delicatessen and now Barrington, they are building a culinary empire. One that's locally rooted, focused on great food, and great service.



Barrington Tap & Table brings new energy to Marriottsville, expands opportunities for events and gatherings, and builds on the success of a team that continues to grow right here in Howard County. Congratulations and happy holidays to the Barrington family! We're proud to support local entrepreneurs who choose to expand and thrive in our community. Remember to shop and eat local this holiday season!



Going Green this Winter

This winter, we want to remind you that upgrading appliances is energy efficient. Many utilities offer programs to recycle older, less efficient models, helping you save energy and reduce waste this winter. Check with your provider or visit www.energy.gov/save to learn more.

Huntington Park Upgrades

On Howard County's list of world-class parks, we have spaces like Huntington Park in Columbia. Since 2023, we've made a number of exciting upgrades at Huntington Park with help from our team at Howard County Recreation and Parks.

Improvements include three new paved pathways connecting to Vollmerhausen Road and nearby neighborhoods. We also added a new park entrance, benches, a water fountain, and a relocated basketball court to make room for the County's first-ever bicycle training area, also known as the Traffic Garden!



Explore more of what our parks have to offer at www.howardcountymd.gov/rap.

Expanding School-Based Mental Health Care

At Guilford Park High School, we kicked off an exciting new chapter for student mental health across Howard County.



Thank you to the Community Health Resources Commission for an impactful \$7 million award to our Office of the Local Children's Board. This award will expand school-based mental health services. In FY25, these supports reached 77% of our schools and served 9,747 students. Now, with this investment, we're expanding from 39 schools to all 78 Howard County public schools.

Thank you to CHRC and the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports, our state and local delegation, Howard County Public Schools and Superintendent Bill Barnes, our Department of Community Resources and Services, our Local Children's Board, and all of our partners who make this work possible. Most of all, we'd like to thank the students, parents, educators, and advocates who continue showing up for our kids. We're ensuring every student has access to help right where they learn.

Got a lot of Energy?

Tired of drafty rooms and high energy bills?

Here's your chance to fix both. The Energy-Efficient Home Improvement Credit offers up to \$3,200 back on improvements that reduce your home's energy use, including insulation, heat pumps, energy-efficient doors, windows, and home energy audits. Not only do these upgrades create a more comfortable living environment, they can also save money overtime on heating and cooling bills. Upgrades must be completed by December 31 to claim this benefit when filing 2025 taxes.

Learn more at www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/energy-efficient-home-improvement-credit.

Time is running out for the Energy-Efficient Home Improvement Credit!

 Calvin Ball
County Executive

Get up to **\$3,200** back for energy-efficient home upgrades! The Energy-Efficient Home Improvement Credit can help you save on bills and make your home more comfortable.

The deadline is December 31st.

Learn more at <https://bit.ly/4a8WfmI>



Spot a Pothole? Tell HoCo!

Winter weather can take a toll on our roads. With your help, we can keep Howard County moving safely.

If you notice a pothole, damaged sign, or other roadway issue after a storm, let us know through Tell HoCo. Your report helps our crews respond quickly and keep our roads clear and safe all season long.

Spot something? Report it at www.howardcountymd.gov/tell-hoco.

Chag Urim Sameach!

It was a joy to join our Jewish community at the

East Columbia 50+ Center to celebrate the third night of Chanukah. In a time when the world can feel unsafe, coming together peacefully to celebrate tradition matters now more than ever.

Thank you to all of the partners, volunteers, and families who made this celebration possible! We wish you all a Chanukah filled with hope.



An Investment in Connection

We joined the Lutheran Village at Miller's Grant community to celebrate the opening of their new Performing Arts Center and Chapel. This beautiful space is an investment in connection and quality of life for our residents. As part of the community's Phase II expansion, this multifunctional space will serve more than 400 residents. It will provide a welcoming place for performances, worship, and cultural programming.

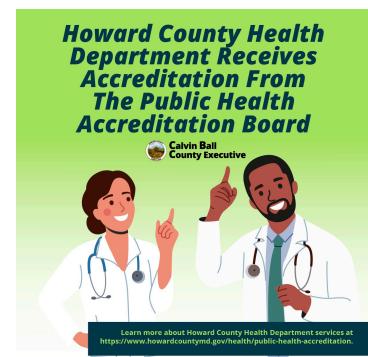
This project also comes at a critical moment. By 2030, one in five Howard County residents will be age 65 or older. Lutheran Village's expansion includes new independent living apartments, additional assisted living and memory care, and now this performing arts and chapel space. This helps meet a growing housing need while strengthening social connections and combating isolation.

Thank you to the leadership, staff, residents, donors, and partners at Lutheran Social Ministries of Maryland, including Jeff Branch, Michelle Rosenheim, Paige Mills-Haag, and the entire team, for their vision and commitment. As Howard County's older adult population continues to grow, projects like this help ensure our all of our residents can live and age right here in our community. Congratulations on this extraordinary addition!

Nationally Accredited

National accreditation matters because it strengthens public health systems and builds trust in the services residents rely on every day. By maintaining accreditation from the Public Health Accreditation Board for another 5 years, the Howard County Health Department has demonstrated its impeccable ability to serve our community. This distinction confirms that the department meets rigorous national standards for quality, accountability, and continuous improvement. It helps ensure residents receive effective and reliable public health services.

Learn more about the accreditation and how your Howard County Health Department serves you at www.howardcountymd.gov/health/public-health-accreditation.



Supporting Agriculture: It's un-beet-able!

**Calvin Ball
County Executive**

Howard County farms can now offer lodging, produce alcohol after agritourism rules overhaul

December 15, 2025 **THE BALTIMORE SUN**

Howard County will allow more farmers to host events, offer lodging, and produce alcohol on their farms in an effort to support the long-term viability of local agriculture.

"Times have changed, everything has changed, expenses have gone up. There's absolutely no money in farming right now," said Barbara Sullivan, co-owner of Woodbine's Oak Spring Farm. "I do believe that this will help."

The new rules reduce limits on permits, allowing more farms to run farm-related side businesses.

The changes also add definitions and update the rules, allowing farms of 5 acres or larger to host small activities that expose the public to farming practices — such as tours or seasonal events — alongside their regular farming operations.

The amendments were passed by the Howard County Council on Dec. 1 in a 4-1 vote and signed into law Dec. 8 by County Executive Calvin Ball.



Howard County is taking a major step to help local farms stay viable for the long haul. New agritourism rules now give more farmers the flexibility to save their farms for current and future generations.

The updates apply to farms 5 acres or larger and were approved by the County Council on December 1st.

Read the full story at

www.baltimoresun.com/2025/12/15/agritourism-expansion-howard-county.

Savor the Flavor

Howard County's Winter Restaurant & Craft Beverage Weeks returns January 19 through February 1, 2026. We want your restaurant to be part of it!

This year has brought significant challenges for our dining community, from the federal shutdown to broader economic pressures. To support our restauranteurs, Visit Howard County is waiving the participation fee for Winter Restaurant Weeks.



If you're a restaurant or craft beverage establishment, now is the perfect time to join. Sign up at www.visithowardcounty.com/restaurant-weeks-sign-up-page.

**Calvin Ball
County Executive**

Howard County to Add Flag Football, Leading to MPSSAA Sanctioning for the 2026 Season

December 10, 2025 **High School**

It was recently announced that Howard County, Maryland would be adding high school girls flag football for the 2026 season, a move which clears to state-wide varsity sanctioning of the sport.

The following Howard County high schools will take part in girls flag football next year: Atholton, Centennial, Glenelg, Hammond, Howard, Long Reach, Marriotts Ridge, Mount Hebron, Oakland Mills, Reservoir, River Hill, and Wilde Lake.



Who Runs the World?

Howard County is helping make history in Maryland high school athletics. With the addition of girls flag football for the 2026 season, Howard County will help push the number of teams statewide past 95. This clears the way for the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association or MPSSAA to officially sanction the sport and establish recognized state championships.

Twelve Howard County Public School System high schools will participate. Expanded opportunities for our student-athletes will be accompanied by support from partners like the Baltimore Ravens, who have hosted free clinics for players and coaches. This is a big win for our students and for

the future of girls sports in Maryland.

To read more, visit ["High School on SI" online article](#).

A Thoughtful, Intelligent, Qualified Leader

Congratulations to Delegate Joseline Peña-Melnyk on becoming the Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates.

Delegate Peña-Melnyk's story is extraordinary. Born in the Dominican Republic, raised in New York, and guided by a career as a federal prosecutor, public defender, and advocate for children and families, she has dedicated nearly two decades in the House to championing health care, equity, and opportunity for all. As Chair of the Health and Government Operations Committee, she has shaped some of the most significant policy conversations in our state.



Speaker Peña-Melnyk, is a thoughtful, intelligent, qualified leader who has now made history as our first Afro-Latina, our first immigrant to lead the House, and only the second woman to ever serve as Maryland's Speaker. Her colleagues' overwhelming support speaks volumes about her collaborative ability to build consensus, her integrity, her steady leadership, and the trust she has earned by many across our state.

Congratulations once again to my friend, Speaker Peña-Melnyk. I look forward to the continued leadership and vision she brings to our General Assembly.



Building Maryland's Future

We joined county leaders from across the state at the 2025 Winter MACo Conference for meaningful conversations about Maryland's future. As a former MACo president, during my final Winter Conference on the Executive Board, it was especially meaningful to reconnect with our colleagues and partners committed to strong, effective local government.

We attended sessions on housing, public health, AI in government, and more, and engaged in thoughtful discussions on equity and fiscal stability. MACo once again delivered timely, high-impact programming. I was honored to once again chair the Diversity Caucus with speaker Melony Griffith, President of the Maryland Hospital Association. We explored access to affordable and efficient care. We also met with Exelon President and CEO Calvin Butler to discuss energy independence, infrastructure, and regional collaboration addressing issues for our rate payers around Maryland.

Thank you to MACo Past President Jack Wilson, current President MC Keegan-Ayer, as well as the entire MACo team for hosting an outstanding conference. The strength of Maryland's counties is rooted in collaboration, and MACo keeps that alive.

Congratulations Judge Frazier!

We gathered for the investiture of Judge Maurice C. Frazier as Associate Judge for the Fifth Judicial Circuit of Maryland.

It was an honor to celebrate this milestone with our legal community and Judge Frazier's family. His decades of service as a prosecutor, his impactful work as a family law magistrate, and his visionary creation of Project Elevate have changed lives in our community.



As a fellow Brother of Alpha Phi Alpha, his elevation to the bench is a moment of profound pride for many across our nation and world. Judge Frazier brings wisdom, compassion, and a deep belief in the potential of every person he serves.

Congratulations, Judge Frazier. We look forward to the extraordinary impact you will continue to make!



Got a Flag?

If you are interested in buying Howard County's new flag to have on display at your home or business, we have great news! You can now buy a flag online at <https://tinyurl.com/NewHoCoFlag> to have shipped straight to your door or purchase one in person by stopping by the Department of Finance's Cashiers Office, located on the first floor of the George Howard Building at 3430 Court House Drive in Ellicott City, during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Join us in showing off your Howard County pride, by purchasing a flag today.

For questions and/or more information, email flag@howardcountymd.gov.

Government Updates

Boards and Commissions

Applicants Sought for Public Works Board

Our Department of Public Works is responsible for reliable and accessible infrastructure for our community. To help ensure that we are providing needed services in the most effective way possible, our Public Works Board supports our Director of Public Works, Howard County Council, and myself to make sure the department's plans and policies are effective, as well as evaluates developer built public improvements to ensure a benefit to county residents and adherence to the County's high standards for infrastructure. If you are interested in supporting our Department of Public Works, I encourage you to consider [applying today for our Public Works Board](#). Applications are now being accepted through tomorrow, December 23rd.

Applicants Sought for Animal Matters Hearing Board

Our beloved pets and animals should be treated with care and respect. As members of our family, we should meet their basic needs and shower them with love and enrichment; however, this is sadly not the case for all pets and animals. To handle the unfortunate cases where Howard County pets and animals are found to be neglected or suffering, the members of our Animal Matters Hearing Board step in. Serving three-year terms, Board members are responsible for ruling on appeals for animal control law violations and issuing orders and declarations related to the enforcement of animal control laws. Members also make recommendations to our Howard County Police Department's Animal Control Division's Adoption Center and review the Center's proposed budget.

If you live in Districts 1 (Ellicott City to Elkridge) or 4 (Columbia to North Laurel) or are a licensed veterinarian living in the county and want to step up and provide a voice for those animals who cannot protect themselves, I encourage you to apply today for our Animal Matters Hearing Board. To learn how, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/News121025b. The deadline to apply is Friday, January 16th.

Department of Community Resources and Services

Parenting in the New Year

Through family workshops, local resources, events, educational programs, and more, our Department of Community Resources and Services' (DCRS) Office of Children and Families (OCF) supports Howard County families with opportunities to learn, grow and thrive. For instance, in the coming new year if you anticipate needing child care or want to learn more about recreational options available to your young child, be sure to check out OCF's "[Howard County Child Care Fair](#)" on Saturday, January 24th. This annual fair provides parents, guardians, and grandparents with a "one stop shop" for their child care and preschool, school-age, and summer program needs, as well as the opportunity to connect with teachers and program directors. While admission to the Child Care Fair is FREE, [pre-registration](#) is requested, especially in the event of inclement weather. To learn more about the fair, check out the flier in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) or contact OCF at 410-313-2273 or email children@howardcountymd.gov.



To learn more about the latest happenings, workshops, activities, and programs for children and families being offered by OCF each month, [subscribe](#) to its latest [Parent Pages](#) newsletter. In each monthly issue, readers will find a full schedule of upcoming virtual workshops and in-person programs offered by OCF's Family Support Center. OCF's "[Parent's Guide to Howard County](#)" for 2025 is also a great resource for parents, caregivers, and others looking to learn more about and find services in our community to help children grow and thrive.

If you need individual assistance, such as finding childcare, guidance with parenting issues, mental and emotional health support, special needs resources, food access, housing, and more, contact OCF's free CARE line at 410-313-CARE (2273) to learn more about what's available.



The Howard County MultiService Center
9900 Washington Blvd., Suite I, Laurel 20723

OPEN TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY*

Special Food Pantry Service Hours
November and December
Monday - Friday • 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Food, diapers and toiletries available.
To protect both clients and staff, food items are
pre-packaged in "grab and go" bags. Let us know
if you have any food allergies, and we will do our
best to accommodate your needs.



* If you are in need of food and cannot get to the center during operational hours, call 410-313-0220 (voice/relay) to schedule an appointment. The MSC Food Pantry service is only available to Howard County residents.

If you need this information in an alternate format, contact the MSC at 410-313-0220 (voice/relay) or

mscinfo@howardcountymd.gov

www.howardcountymd.gov/msc

please call 410-313-0220 (voice/relay) to schedule an appointment. Additionally, if you and/or a family member have food allergies, please let our MSC Food Pantry staff know, as they will do their best to accommodate your needs. Please keep in mind, the MSC Food Pantry service is only available to Howard County residents, once a month.

New Food Pantry Extended Hours

As we continue to implement initiatives and programs to help our community traverse this difficult time, I am pleased to share that DCRS has extended the hours of its Howard County MultiService Center (MSC) Food Pantry this December. Located at 9900 Washington Boulevard, Suite I in Laurel, the MSC Food Pantry will now be open weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. through this month. From pre-packaged "grab and go" food bags to diapers and toiletries, I encourage Howard County residents in need to stop by the MSC Food Pantry for assistance. Please note, one distribution per month per family.

If you are in need of food but are unable to get to the MSC Food Pantry during its operational hours,

Staying Active at a 50+ Center Near You

Stay active with DCRS's Office on Aging and Independence (OAI) as it wraps up the holiday season at its 50+ centers, including:

- Close out the year with Ellicott City 50+ Center's Fitness Center staff next Monday, December 29th, 11:00 a.m. to noon, with its Pop Up Group Fitness Class: Mindful Reflection. The class will feature Hatha Yoga, which combines gentle postures, mindful movement, and calming meditation. Participants should be comfortable getting up and down from the floor.
- Glenwood 50+ Center's Pickleball Social for residents 50 and older who enjoy the game of pickleball and the company of good friends, on Tuesday, December 30th from noon to 3:00 p.m.,

Visit www.howardcountymd.gov/50Center to view each Center's newsletters for details, or check out the December issue of OAI's 50+ Connection newsletter to learn more.

Request for Proposals Now Being Accepting

DCRS's Office of the Local Children's Board (OLCB) is now accepting proposals for its Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) Request for Proposals (RFP). For its FY27 funding, OLCB will prioritize initiatives that support Howard County children, youth, and families in the following areas:

- School-Based Mental Health
- Community-Based Mental Health
- Afterschool Programs
- Mentoring
- Summer Learning
- Mentoring

For organizations interested in learning more about the RFP process, you must first create a [Neighborly Account](#). Additionally, all applicants must submit their proposal through DCRS's new [Grants Management System through Neighborly](#). **While summer learning proposals are due by Friday, January 16th, all other proposals are due two weeks prior on Friday, January 2nd.**

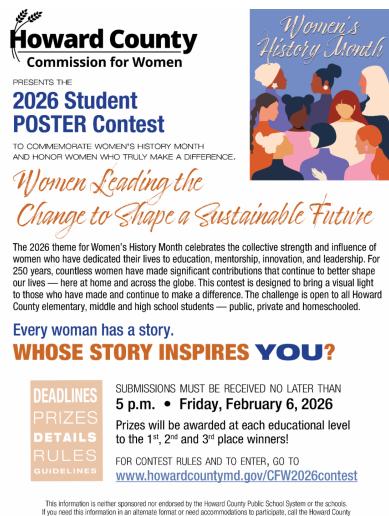
For assistance or more information, email LCB@howardcountymd.gov. Questions about the RFP should also be sent to LCB@howardcountymd.gov by no later than tomorrow, December 23rd.

Become a Purple Star School

Calling all Howard County schools, show your support for our veteran and military-connected students and their families by earning [Maryland State Department of Education's Purple Star School](#) designation. This prestigious recognition program honors schools that go above and beyond to support military-connected students and their families. If your school is dedicated to creating a welcoming and supportive environment for these students, DCRS's Office of Veterans and Military Families (OVMF) encourages your school to apply today. To learn how, visit the Department of Education's ["Purple Star Schools Program" website](#); the deadline to apply is March 3, 2026.



To keep up with all the latest news for Howard County veterans, check out [OVMF's latest eBulletin](#).



Women's History Month Student Poster Contest

Calling all Howard County elementary, middle, and high school students, our Howard County Commission for Women is now accepting entries for its 2026 Women's History Month Student Poster Contest. Open to public, private, and homeschooled students, submissions must depict this year's theme, "Women Leading the Change to Shape a Sustainable Future," which celebrates the collective strength and influence of women who have dedicated their lives to education, mentorship, innovation, and leadership. This contest is designed to bring a visual light to women who have made and/or continue to make a difference.

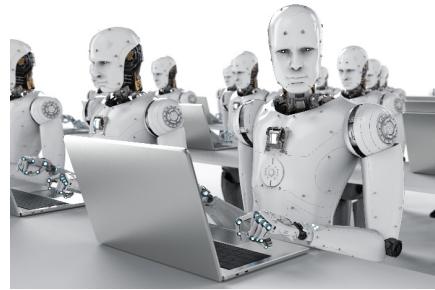
Posters are due by 5:00 p.m., Friday, February 6th and in addition to incorporating this year's theme, posters may be done in any medium and must be the student's original work. First, second, and third place prizes will be awarded at each educational level.

For more information about the contest, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/CFW2026contest or email women@howardcountymd.gov.

Office of Consumer Protection

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of AI

While Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing many aspects of daily life, it is also turbocharging the scam industry, making scams more personalized and harder to detect. With traditional red flags disappearing because of AI's evolution, it's even more important that residents remain vigilant. To help you navigate AI and protect yourself in our AI world, our Office of Consumer Protection (OCP) is offering tips to keep you safe and reviewing the good, the bad, and the ugly of AI in its latest [monthly online newsletter](#).



In OCP's [December newsletter](#), readers will also find details on why "Buy Now, Pay Later" (BNPL) services can sometimes be too good to be true, as BNPL services:

1. Can make it easier for shoppers to overspend;
2. Come with hidden fees and high interest charges for missed payments; and
3. May harm a consumer's credit score if a consumer falls behind on payments, especially since BNPL services lack the protections and transparency required of traditional credit products.

To stay up-to-date on the latest OCP news, [sign up online](#) for its mailing list to receive its informative newsletters about consumer topics, events, and alerts.

Department of County Administration

Energy Saving Days

HEADS UP: December 22nd to December 24th, December 26th, December 28th to December 31st, and January 2nd are designated Howard County Government "Energy Saving Days." On these days, various County employees are teleworking as several County buildings and offices are physically closed. When teleworking, County employees remain reachable by phone and email.

To learn more about the County's Energy Saving Days, including a list of what buildings/offices are physically closed, what departments and offices are effected, and contact information for those departments and offices, visit

www.howardcountymd.gov/energysavingdays.



Christmas Day Holiday Closings

Howard County Government offices, [50+ centers](#), animal shelter, Alpha Ridge Landfill, Cedar Lane and Schooley Mill Activity Rooms, Gary J. Arthur, North Laurel and Roger Carter Community Centers, Meadowbrook Athletic Complex, Robinson Nature Center, Harriet Tubman Cultural Center, Kiwanis-Wallas Hall, Baltimore & Ohio Ellicott City Station Museum, and county historic sites, as well as [local Maryland courts](#), will be closed on Thursday, December 25th in observance of the [Christmas](#)

holiday.

As there will be no curbside trash, recycling, yard trim or food scrap collection on Christmas Day, the County's [holiday "slide" schedule](#). Additionally, [County park gates](#) will be open on the 25th; however, there will be no staff on duty.

On Christmas Eve, Wednesday, December 24th, the Gary J. Arthur, North Laurel, and Roger Carter Community Centers and Harriet Tubman Cultural Center will close at 5:00 p.m. Additionally, the Alpha Ridge Landfill will be closing at 2:00 p.m. and the Baltimore & Ohio Ellicott City Station Museum will be closed.

The Regional Transportation Agency (RTA) buses will operate on a limited schedule on December 24th and will not operate on December 25th. For more information on RTA, call 1-800-270-9553 or visit www.transitrtta.com. Howard County parking fees will not be enforced on December 25th.

The 9-1-1 Center, Police and Fire departments remain staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For emergencies, call 9-1-1; for non-emergencies, please call 410-313-2200.

County operations will resume on Friday, December 26th at regular business hours.

[New Year's Day Holiday Closings](#)

Howard County Government offices, [50+ centers](#), animal shelter, Alpha Ridge Landfill, Cedar Lane and Schooley Mill Activity Rooms, Gary J. Arthur, North Laurel and Roger Carter Community Centers, Meadowbrook Athletic Complex, Robinson Nature Center, Harriet Tubman Cultural Center, Kiwanis-Wallas Hall, Baltimore & Ohio Ellicott City Station Museum, and county historic sites, as well as [local Maryland courts](#), will be closed on Thursday, January 1st in observance of the [New Year's holiday](#).



As there will be no curbside trash, recycling, yard trim or food scrap collection on New Year's Day, the County's [holiday "slide" schedule](#) will be in effect the remainder of the week. Additionally, [County park gates](#) will be open on the 1st; however, there will be no staff on duty.

On New Year's Eve, Wednesday, December 31st, the Gary J. Arthur, North Laurel and Roger Carter Community Centers and the Robinson Nature Center will close early at 5:00 p.m. Additionally, the Baltimore & Ohio Ellicott City Station Museum will close at 3:00 pm.

The Regional Transportation Agency (RTA) buses will not operate on January 1st. For more information on RTA, call 1-800-270-9553 or visit www.transitrtta.com. Additionally, Howard County parking fees will not be enforced on January 1st.

The 9-1-1 Center, Police and Fire departments remain staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For emergencies, call 9-1-1; for non-emergencies, please call 410-313-2200.

County operations will resume on Friday, January 2nd at regular business hours.

Office of Emergency Management



Got One in Your Car?

With winter officially here, our Office of Emergency Management is reminding residents of the importance of making sure your vehicles are each equipped with an emergency kit in case you ever get stranded. Each kit should include, at the least: jumper cables, flares or reflective triangle, ice scraper, car cell phone charger, blanket and warm clothes, a map, cat litter or sand, first aid kit, water, and snacks.

To learn more about building an emergency kit for your car, visit www.ready.gov/car.

Department of Finance

Second Installment of Property Tax Bill Due Date Extended

For Howard County property owners who pay their [Real Property tax](#) bills biannually, second installment bills have been mailed out. While originally due at the end of the month, the County's Department of Finance has extended the due date for the second installment of Real Property taxes to January 9, 2026, due to the County's upcoming Energy Saving Days the weeks of Christmas and New Year's.

Taxpayers who do not pay their bill through their mortgage company from an escrow account, can instead:

- Mail a check or money order made payable to Director of Finance, along with their payment coupon, if available, to: Howard County Maryland, PO Box 37237, Baltimore, MD 21297-3237;
- Taxpayers without a payment coupon, can mail their check or money order made payable to Director of Finance, to: Howard County Maryland, PO Box 3370, Ellicott City MD 21041-3370;
- Pay by credit card (VISA, Master Card, American Express, or Discover) or e-check [online](#); keep in mind, Municipay charges a convenience fee of \$1.00 for e-check transactions and 2.35 percent (\$2.00 minimum) for all other debit and credit card transactions;
- Drop off their check or money order in Finance's locked drop box located to the left of the George Howard Building's main front doors at 3430 Court House Drive in Ellicott City; or
- Pay in person at Finance's Cashier's Office, located on the first floor of the George Howard Building and open Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except for County holidays and Energy Saving Days. Payments in person can be made by cash, check, or money order.

To learn more about County holidays, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/county-holidays and for Energy Saving Days, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/energysavingdays.

Additionally, Finance mailed out recertification letters for property owners who were first granted its [Aging-in-Place \(AIP\) Tax Credit](#) in 2017 in November. The due date to submit the annual AIP attestation is also January 9th. Additionally, applications will be made available for active duty, retired, or honorably discharged

individuals with a service-connected disability rating of 75 to 99 percent or a surviving spouse of an individual who had a service-connected disability rating of 75 to 99 percent who has not remarried, on December 9th and will be due on January 9th. Finally, **Senior Tax Credit** applications will also be made available for individuals who combined net worth is between \$500,000 to \$800,000 on December 9th and due on January 9th.

Department of Fire and Rescue Services

The Second Leading Cause of House Fire

According to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), two in five deaths in space heater fires involve portable electric heaters. With space heaters contributing the most to home heating equipment fires and colder temperatures here, our Department of Fire and Rescue Services (DFRS) is reminding residents to NEVER use an extension cord to power a space heater, instead ALWAYS plug it directly into a socket. Also, be sure to keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from the heating source.

For more information about space heater safety, visit the NFPA's **Electric Portable Space Heater Safety** **website** or contact DFRS at 410-313-6000.



Adopt a Hydrant

In an emergency, every second counts. Fire hydrants that are blocked, concealed or difficult to access due to snow, ice or other obstructions can impede emergency fire response. If you are and/or your business is interested in helping ensure DFRS has quick and easy access to the fire hydrant(s) in your neighborhood, consider **adopting a hydrant** today.

To adopt a hydrant or to learn more about this program, visit DFRS's **Adopt a Hydrant** **website** or email DFRS to outreach@hcdfrs.org.

Help Train a Firefighter by Donating Your Unwanted Car

Help DFRS personnel train and prepare for incidents involving motor vehicles by **donating your unwanted car** today. In addition to providing an invaluable training opportunity for our firefighters, your vehicle donation is tax deductible and even better, if you live in county (or within a reasonable distance), DFRS will tow your vehicle away for free. Simply email cardonations@howardcountymd.gov and include the location



of the vehicle you'd like to donate and your contact information.



Applications Now Being Accepted for Trainee Class 40

Want to become a firefighter or know someone who does? DFRS is now accepting applications for its Trainee Class 40. The job application can be found on the County's [**"Careers Pages" website**](#) and will be accepted through 11:59 p.m., Thursday, January 15, 2026.

To learn more about DFRS's recruitment/application process and employment qualifications, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/fire-and-rescue-services/recruitment.

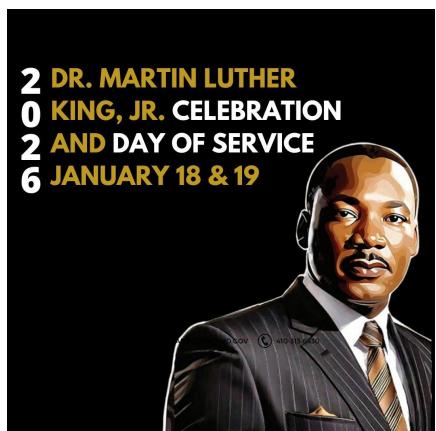
Office of Human Rights and Equity

A Celebration of Kwanzaa

Join us on Saturday, December 27th from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. our [**Harriet Tubman Cultural Center**](#) for our Office of Human Rights and Equity's (OHRE) annual Kwanzaa Celebration. Come experience the richness of Kwanzaa's traditions through family-friendly activities, inspirational speakers, live performances, cultural performances, refreshments, and engaging community discussions in a joyful atmosphere. Together, we will honor the seven principles of Kwanzaa: Unity, Self-Determination, Collective Work and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity and Faith.



As space is limited, registration is required. To reserve your spot, visit OHRE's [**"Howard County 2025 Kwanzaa Celebration" Eventbrite website**](#) today.



A Celebration and Day of Service to Honor Dr. King

Help us honor the life and contributions of one of America's greatest civil rights leaders, by joining OHRE and Howard County's [**Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission**](#) on Sunday, January 18th at 6:00 p.m. for our annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration. This celebratory event pays homage to Dr. King's legacy of service and human rights with uplifting speeches, captivating presentations, and recognition of the 2026 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Living the Dream" award recipients and student essay, oratory, and poster contest winners. Set to take place at Howard Community College's [**Peter & Elizabeth Horowitz Visual and Performing Arts Center's Smith Theatre**](#).

the event reception will commence at 6:00 p.m. and will feature light fare served and live entertainment, followed by a celebration at 7:00 p.m. To reserve your spot for this year's event, visit OHRE's [**"Annual Howard County Martin Luther King, Jr.**](#)

[Celebration" Eventbrite website](#) today.

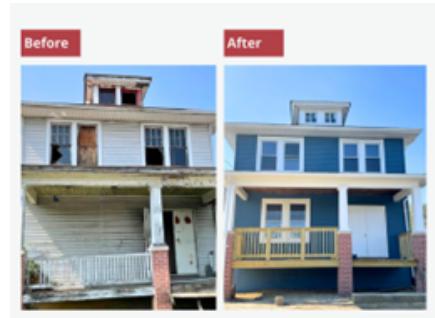
Then on Monday, January 19th at the County's [Harriet Tubman Cultural Center](#), OHRE and the Commission will gather to host the County's annual MLK Day of Service event. Starting at 1:00 p.m., residents are invited to stop by to participate in a variety of service opportunities and activities that align with Dr. King's ideals of equality, community service, and social justice. To attend this FREE event, visit ["Howard County Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service 2026" Eventbrite webpage](#).

For more details or to get involved, contact the Commission by calling 410-313-6430 or emailing MLK@howardcountymd.gov.

Department of Planning and Zoning

[Route 1 Tax Credit Program](#)

In case you missed it, our Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) continues to accept applications for its [Route 1 Tax Credit Program](#). If you own a commercial, industrial, or mixed-use property along the Route 1 Corridor or Elkridge's Main Street area, you may be eligible to receive tax credits for qualified façade and landscape improvements visible from the roadway. Eligible improvements include building façade upgrades, new signage, exterior painting and lighting, screening and landscaping, and other options.



For more information about this program, to apply and/or to hear what others have to say who have benefited from the tax credit, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/planning-zoning/route-1-tax-credit-program.



[A Webinar on Accessory Dwelling Units](#)

Calling all community members who are interested in learning more about Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU), I invite you to join our DPZ staff on Monday, January 12th from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m., for an informational session webinar to learn more about current ADU regulations, recent or proposed changes to the law, and what these proposed changes may mean for homeowners and neighborhoods. Following the informational session, DPZ staff will host a question-and-answer session; attendees are asked to submit their

questions in advance to DPZ to planning@howardcountymd.gov by no later than Thursday, January 8th.

To secure your spot to participate in this ADU Webinar event, visit <https://bit.ly/3MHPGp> today to register.

Police Department

[Staying Safe on the Roads and Shopping this Holiday Season](#)

From now through New Year's Day, Howard County Police Department (HCPD) will be working to ensure your safety on the roads, at shopping centers and malls, and in your neighborhoods. While our officers will be doing all that they can to keep you safe, here are some [tips and best practices](#) on how you too can stay vigilant and safe on the roads and when shopping (whether in-person or online) this holiday season from HCPD.

Also, as a reminder, starting this Wednesday, November 27th night through the Thanksgiving weekend, HCPD will have extra patrols out on our roadways and at shopping centers throughout the county.

Too Cold For You, it's Too Cold for Them

HCPD and its Animal Control Division are reminding residents that Howard County law requires animals housed outside must have access to appropriate shelter, bedding and an unfrozen water source at all times. Dogs may not be tethered outside when not under direct supervision; this means you must be out there with them. Please keep in mind, these requirements are the bare minimum and if it's too cold for you outside, it's probably too cold for your dog or cat.



To report a violation, please contact HCPD's Animal Control Division at 410-313-2780. Violations can lead to civil citations, criminal charges and/or impoundment of one's pet.

For safety tips on how to keep your pet safe during the cold winter months, such as cleaning snow and salt from their paws, legs and stomach, check out the ASPCA's website at <https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/general-pet-care/cold-weather-safety-tips>.

Department of Public Works

Bureau of Environmental Services

Holiday Slide Schedule in Effect for Christmas Day and New Year's Day

REMINDER: The upcoming Christmas Day and New Year's Day holidays are two of the six holidays that do affect the County's curbside trash, recycling, food scrap, and yard trim collection programs. As there will be no curbside collection on Thursday, December 25th and Thursday, January 1st, the County's [holiday "slide" schedule](#) will be in effect the end of the week of December 25th and January 1st, with Thursday's collection sliding to Friday and Friday to Saturday.

For questions, concerns, or more information about the County's holiday "slide" schedule, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/holidayschedule or contact the Bureau of Environmental Services at 410-313-6444 or email help@howardcountyclerries.org.

Household Hazardous Waste



Saturdays ONLY (April-November) 8am-4pm
2350 Marriottsville Road, Marriottsville, MD 21104
Proof of Howard County residency required

YES we accept:
• Batteries (rechargeable)
• Motor oil/ transmission fluids
• CFL bulbs and tubes
• Chemicals
• Cleaners
• Degreasers
• Fungicides, Pesticides, Herbicides
• Gasoline
• Kerosene
• Paint & Paint thinners
• Removers & Solvents

NO we do not accept:
• Ammunition
• Asbestos
• Commercial waste
• Dioxin
• Explosives
• Mercury
• Industrial waste
• Insecticides (an insecticide)
• Lead-based waste
• PCB's
• Radioactive Material

KNOWBeforeYouTHROW.org • help@howardcountymd.gov • 410-313-6444

dispose of their HHW waste.

To learn more about our HHW program and those special winter HHW Saturday's, stay tuned to www.howardcountymd.gov/HHW.

How to Recycle Holiday Lights

Not sure what to do with those broken or working holiday lights that just you don't want anymore? Check out these quick tips from our Department of Public Works' Bureau of Environmental Services about how to donate your working holiday lights and how to [recycle your broken strands through these drop-off and mail-in programs](#).

Please keep in mind, **holiday lights should NOT be placed in your curbside recycling** as these "tanglers" get wrapped around recycling equipment and jam the screens at the processor.

How to Recycle Holiday Lights

Drop-off: The [Residential Environmental Center](#) at Alpha Ridge Landfill accepts working holiday lights and other electronics year-round.
Alpha Ridge Landfill
2350 Marriottsville Rd
Marriottsville, MD 21104
10:00am-4:00pm, Saturday holiday Lights Recycling Drive in the winter. They accept both working and non-working lights. Visit [this page](#) for more details.

Mail-in: [Household Lamps](#) offers a mail-in recycling program and offers a coupon for mail-in holiday lights and send them to [Holiday LEDs Recycling](#) 10000 N. 100th Street, Suite 112, Sussex, WI 53089



Merry Mulch Your Holiday Tree

To help keep holiday trees out of the landfill, our Bureau of Environmental Services is once again offering residents a variety of FREE holiday tree recycling options through its festive "[Merry Mulch](#)" program. Beginning this Friday, December 26th and continuing through Saturday, January 17th, holiday trees may be [dropped off at sites throughout the county](#), or set out for yard trim collection through

Friday, January 16th, to be recycled into compost and mulch.

To learn more, check out our "["Merry Mulch" Your Holiday Trees from December 26th Through January 17th](#)" news release.

Construction Report

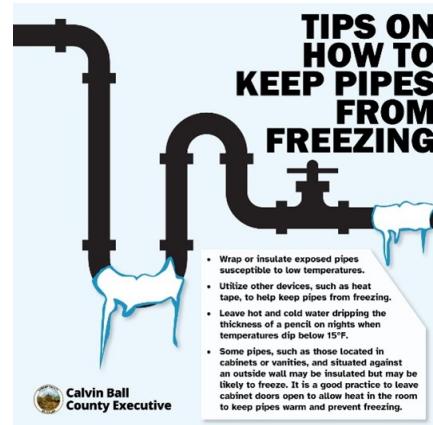
To learn about our DPW projects currently underway, check out [DPW's website](#). Searchable by project category and street name, from this site you'll find additional project details, including news releases about the project. You can also contact DPW's Customer Service Office at 410-313-3440 or email publicworks@howardcountymd.gov for further assistance.

If you have questions or are interested in finding out about a State road (numbered roadway) project in your area, visit the Maryland State Highway Administration's (SHA) ["Project Portal" website](#).

Bureau of Utilities

Tips on How to Keep Pipes from Freezing as Temperatures Dip

With winter underway and below freezing temperatures already making themselves known, DPW's Bureau of Utilities is offering residents [tips](#) on how to keep pipes from freezing and potentially bursting. These [tips](#) are especially important for water pipes located in a crawlspace or on an outside wall, or garage, attic or any other unheated building, which are subject to sub-freezing temperatures.



If your pipes do freeze, the Bureau recommends opening the cold-water faucet nearest the frozen pipe to relieve pressure. Then, use a gentle heat source, such as a light bulb or hair dryer, to thaw the pipe. **DO NOT** use an open flame.

To learn more, check out Utilities' ["Water Pipes – Cold Weather Best Practices" website](#).



Keep Your Pipes Clear of FOG this Holiday Season

In addition to reminding residents how to prevent their pipes from freezing this winter, our Bureau of Utilities is also reminding residents of the steps to take to prevent your pipes from clogging, especially with the additional cooking around the holidays. FOG, short for fats, oils, and grease, are byproducts of cooking and meat cutting preparation that when disposed of incorrectly, can wreak havoc on yours and the County's sewer lines. In fact, nearly 50 percent

of all sewage overflows nationwide are caused by homeowners who improperly dispose of everyday FOG down drains or in garbage disposals. Found in foods and food ingredients we use in our homes every day, including meat, cooking oil, butter, shortening, margarine, baked goods, sauces, and dairy products, FOG can build up in sewer systems, harden in your pipes, and cause backups in your sinks, toilets, and possibly into your own or somebody else's basement.

To properly dispose of FOG at home, Utilities recommends letting it cool completely, then scraping the solidified grease or pouring the liquid oil into a sealable container, like a plastic bottle or freezer bag, to dispose of in your regular household trash. For greasy dishes and pans, wipe out the excess FOG with a paper towel before washing the dish or pan to prevent the FOG from going down your drain. You can also recycle used vegetable-based cooking oils, such as peanut, corn, canola, and olive oils, at DPW's Alpha Ridge Landfill in its Used Cooking Oil Tank.

To learn more about this recycling program or FOG in general, check out the "Frequently Asked Questions" section of the Bureau of Utilities [**"Pretreatment Program" website**](#) or call 410-313-4900.

Department of Recreation and Parks

What to Do When Schools are Closed

Our Department of Recreation & Parks is here to help when schools close early or are closed all day with its School's Out programming. From science, sports, art, music, drama, chess and more, there are plenty of activities and programs to choose from to keep your kids active when school is not in session.



To learn more about what fun activities Recreation & Parks has planned now through January 2, 2026, click on the following dates: [**Wednesday, December 24th**](#); [**Friday, December 26th**](#); [**Monday, December 29th**](#); [**Tuesday, December 30th**](#); [**Wednesday, December 31st**](#); and [**Friday, January 2nd**](#). During the weeks of Winter Break, [**full-week**](#) options are also available.



Stay Active this Winter

[**Registration**](#) is now open for all residents, both Howard County and out-of-county, for Recreation & Parks' [**Winter 2026 Activity Guide**](#). With hundreds of great programs, activities, and events to choose from, there is something for everyone to help chase those winter blues away.

All Aboard!

Ring in the spirit of the season with Recreation & Park's annual free holiday train garden at its [**Baltimore and Ohio Ellicott City Station Museum**](#) in historic Ellicott City. Come take in the wonder of this year's meticulously crafted winter display, where scale-model trains glide through handcrafted scenery, creating a living diorama of holiday charm, during the museum's [**normal operating hours**](#), now through Sunday, January 4th. And don't forget to check out the museum's year-round exhibit in its Freight House while you are there!



Come Work for Us

If you are interested in being a part of our great Recreation & Parks team, I encourage you to stop by its [**Job Fair**](#) event on Saturday, January 10th, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at our [**Roger Carter Community Center**](#). Specifically for part-time and contingent positions within the department, this

Job Fair will feature information about summer jobs for students and camp counselor, licensed childcare, front desk staff, and more positions for adults and seniors. This Job Fair is a great opportunity for anyone interested in flexible hours and schedules to discover, connect, and apply on the spot.

For more information about this event, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/HCRPjobfair or call Recreation & Parks' main line at 410-313-4700. Please note, if you are interested in a full-time position with the department, you'll need to go through the County's traditional hiring process.

50+ Health & Wellness Open House

If you are 50 and older and looking to start 2026 off on the right foot, I encourage you to check out Recreation & Parks' "50+ Health & Wellness Open House" on Wednesday, January 14th from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at its Roger Carter Community Center (RCCC). During this FREE event, attendees will learn how staying active enhances both the body and mind, while also diving into wellness with interactive demonstrations in RCCC's pool, gym, and dance studio. All attendees will receive a complimentary one-day pool pass, chair massage, healthy snack, and giveaway.



While online preregistration is not required, it is recommended to stay in the know about event updates and more. For questions about the Open House, contact Julija Sajauskas with RCCC at 410-313-2722 or email jsajauskas@howardcountymd.gov.

If you are interested in learning more about other great recreational opportunities offered by Recreation & Parks that are geared toward residents age 50 and older, be sure to check out the department's "Recreation & Parks Active Adult Programs" website.



National Girls and Women in Sports Day

Mark your calendars and join our Recreation & Parks team on Sunday, February 1st as we gather to celebrate the power and passion of girls and women in sports at the County's third annual National Girls and Women in Sports Day event! This award-winning event is part of a national movement celebrating the achievements and contributions of girls and women in sports.

Set to take place from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at our North Laurel Community Center, this FREE event features a multi-sport clinic led by expert coaches and offers participants of all ages and skill levels the opportunity to try their hand at a variety of sports and possibly discover a hidden talent. To register to participate and/or for more information, visit www.hcrpsports.org/ngwsd.



Howard County Government | 3430 Court House Drive | Ellicott City, Maryland, MD 21043 US



Try email marketing for free today!