

Harper's Choice Village Center Community Profile

Existing Conditions and Issues

INTRODUCTION

Village Center Community Planning and Process - Zoning Regulations Set the Frame

In 2009, Howard County amended its development regulations and established a village redevelopment process. As part of that process, the zoning regulations allow for the development of Village Center Community Plans. A Village Center Community Plan is defined in the zoning regulations as "an advisory plan which has been developed by the community and endorsed by the Village Board." The Village Center Community Plan provides a community vision that is to be used to help evaluate the appropriateness of Village Center development/redevelopment petitions. In the future, at the time a developer submits a redevelopment petition to the county, the Village Board is permitted to submit a written Community Response Document to comment on the proposal. The regulations state that the Village may include a statement of whether the petition is in harmony with a Village Center Community Plan.

Setting the Stage for Planning: the Role of This Community Profile

This Community Profile provides an overview of existing conditions, trends and issues that relate to the Harper's Choice Village Center. This Community Profile provides the context for the Harper's Choice Village Center Community Plan by providing an overview of existing conditions and identifying key issues that impact development and vitality of the Village Center. The document seeks to provide a common knowledge base for participants and stakeholders in the planning process. The Community Profile is an important precursor to the Village Center Community Plan; it is not the plan.

Many issues and opportunities face Harper's Choice Village Center today and tomorrow, such as incorporating green and sustainable principles, maintaining vibrant and attractive village shopping, community facilities, and community gathering areas; addressing safety and transportation issues; and continuing to make Harper's Choice a desirable place to live with its own distinct character and appeal.

The Community Profile is an important precursor to the Village Center Community Plan; it is not the plan. . . . The purpose of this Community Profile is to provide a factual basis for the Village Center Community Plan and to focus on the issues the center is facing today and will face in the future.

The purpose of this Community Profile is to provide a factual basis for the Village Center Community Plan and to focus on the issues the center is facing today and will face in the future. The topics included in this document include a brief history of Harper's Choice, a description of the Village Center study area, and sections on exiting land use, zoning, community character, transportation, and the environment. These are followed by a summary that identifies key issues and opportunities that should be addressed in the plan. It is anticipated that these issues will be expanded through the public engagement process that the Village Board is undertaking to involve residents, merchants, and other stakeholders in the Village Center Community Planning process.

Why Harper's Choice Needs to Plan for its Future

The new zoning provisions and the current redevelopment process on-going in Wilde Lake are the main reasons Harper's Choice and other villages have decided to proactively develop Village Center Community Plans. In 2010, the Harper's Choice Village Board called for volunteers and appointed a Harper's Choice Village Center Plan Committee to develop a plan for the Village Center and environs. The Board also established a charter for the committee.

The Board directed the plan committee to develop a plan. The intended outcome is the development of a community driven Village Center Community Plan that addresses issues such as economic viability, development and design concepts, circulation to and around the Village Center, community engagement, and sustainability. It is intended to communicate the desired outcomes of the community as it changes and evolves over time. In order to plan for the community's needs in the future, it is critical to understand the history, demographics and existing conditions of the Village Center. To do this it is helpful to answer the questions: **Where have you been? Where are you now? Where do you want to go? And how will you get there?** This Community Profile document serves to answer the first two questions, which creates a foundation from which the second two questions can be answered by the Harper's Choice community and documented in the Village Center Community Plan.

What is a Village Center Community Plan?

The zoning regulations outline what the Village Center Community Plan "may include but is not limited to:"

- The boundaries of the Village Center;
- Planning and design concepts;
- Specific recommendations related to Village Center Amenity Areas, building heights, bulk requirements, parking, density, and permitted uses;
- Whether the Village Board has architectural review as designated in the village covenants; and
- Identification of any historical or signature aspects of the Village Center.

The zoning regulations state that when the Village Center Community Plan is completed, it may be submitted to the County's Department of Planning and Zoning.

VISION AND GOALS

Vision – Ensure We Thrive in a Time of Change

The Harper's Choice Village Center, an enduring facet of Columbia history, is an inviting and attractive community hub. The Village Center maintains a balanced, sustainable environment for current and future generations, hosts a strong core of merchants who are part of the community, satisfies the day-to-day needs of the residents, and attracts residents and non-residents through specialty offerings. The Village Center adapts to the needs of the residents, thrives with the residents, and celebrates community accomplishments.

Goals

1. Social Enable visitors to the Harper's Choice Village Center to function safely and with civility
2. Environmental Integrate sustainability into the Harper's Choice Village Center functions and development, to minimize loss of environmental resources
3. Economic Provide for the Harper's Choice Village Center visitors' material needs and promotes development that enhances visitors' well being

HISTORY OF HARPER'S CHOICE

In 1963 Howard County, Maryland was almost entirely rural. That fall, The Rouse Company announced to the citizens of the county that, for the purposes of building a new city, over the past year it had purchased over 140 separate properties for a total of acquisition of more than 14,000 acres, one-tenth of the County's total land area. James W. Rouse, Chairman of the Board of Directors of The Rouse Company, described his vision of Columbia as being a planned city that would avoid the ills of urban sprawl and actually enhance its residents' quality of life by providing jobs and recreation, shopping and health care, and the many other facilities and services people want and need in a city, along with a broad range of housing choices.

Designed to have nine villages and a Town Center, construction started on city's first village, the Village of Wilde Lake, in 1966. Columbia opened to the public one year later, drawing international publicity and more than 100,000 visitors to its Exhibit Center during the first summer. In July 1967, Columbia's first residents moved into the Village of Wilde Lake. Construction began on the city's second village, Harper's Choice, which lies in the northwest part of Columbia, that same year.

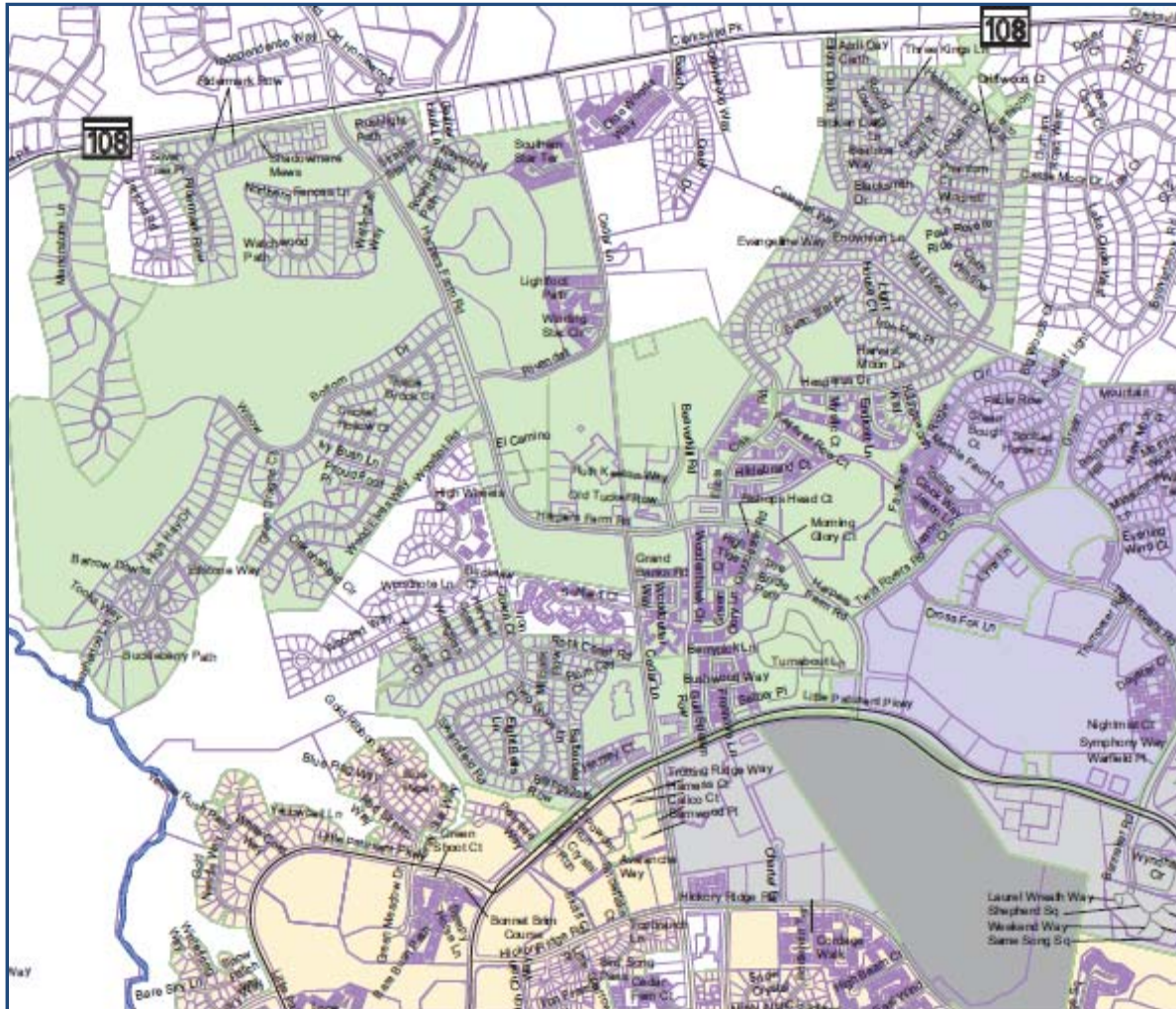
Harper's Choice is named for the late Robert Goodloe Harper Carroll from whom much of the land that comprises the village was purchased. The Carroll family estate, Doughoregan Manor, dates back to 1702 when the grandfather of Charles Carroll, who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, secured a grant of more than 7,000 acres along the Middle Patuxent River. The village is also comprised of land that was added to Columbia with the acquisition of one of the largest working farms in the area, William Kahler's 700-acre farm.

The Village of Harper's Choice consists of the neighborhoods of Longfellow, Swansfield, and Hobbit's Glen. Longfellow, the first neighborhood in the village, was named for the American poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The name, Hobbit's Glen was taken from the works of J. R. Tolkien. Swansfield's name was inspired by the paintings of James MacNeil Whistler. The three neighborhoods and the Village Center are connected to each other through the Village Center, through interconnected natural resources and through streets and many miles of pathways.

Harper's Choice Historical Landmarks:

- Just off Rushlight Path is a small wrought iron fence surrounding a land marker that predates the Revolutionary War. It designates three original land grants. Carved in the stone, it says: "There stand the beginning trees of Doughoregan (sic), Pushpin and The Girls Portion, 1773".
- Remnants of the past remain in Harper's Choice. A small cemetery is tucked away in a small grove of trees near the intersection of Harper's Farm Road and Eliots Oak Road (just outside the Village Center Community Plan study area). The earliest tombstone is that of Amos Dorsey, born Feb 20, 1789 and died Jan 13, 1851.

The lands comprising the Village of Harper's Choice is depicted in green in the map below.



Harper's Choice Village Boundaries

The Harper's Choice Village Center opened in 1971 and was originally named Joseph's Square in honor of the first Chairman of the Harper's Choice Village Board, John Joseph. At the time, the shopping center was a unique mixture of retail, offices and residential. Joseph's Square was renovated in 1987 and renamed Harper's Choice Village Center. The plaza of the shopping center was designated Joseph's Square. In the mid 1990's the Village Center underwent an extensive renovation and refurbishment. A building that backed up to Harper's Farm Road was demolished as well as an existing supermarket building. Safeway built the present site for its store and McDonald's became a free standing building. There are offices and apartments above the Harper's Choice Village Center.

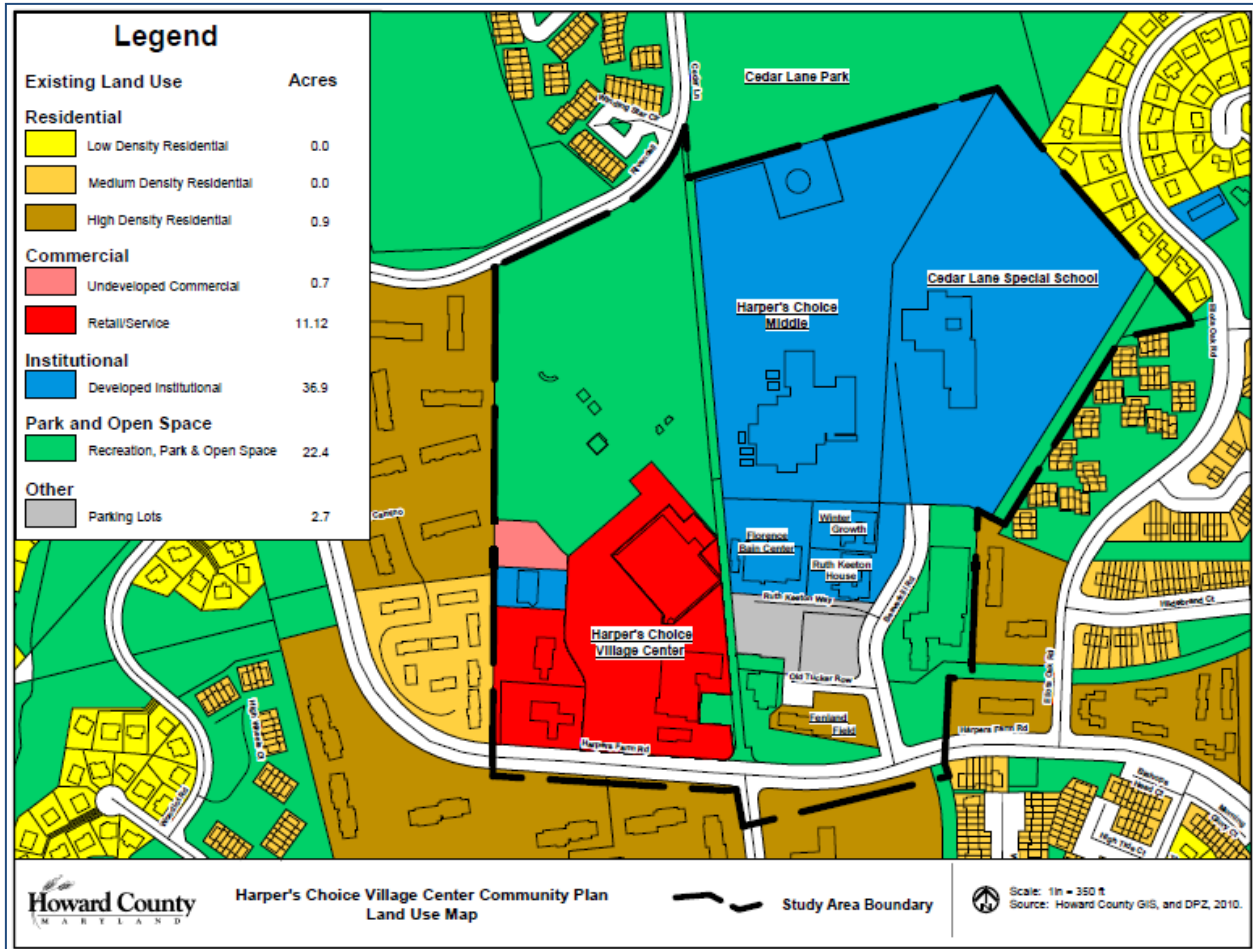
VILLAGE CENTER LAND USE AND ZONING

The Harper's Choice Village Center is comprised of a mix of retail and service uses and is complemented by residential uses. It is the only Village Center in Columbia that includes residential uses as part of a mixed use development. The Village Center is anchored by a 55,000-square-foot Safeway Food store. In addition, there are 17 other retail/service businesses including restaurants, shops, and personal service establishments in three building owned and operated by Kimco Realty Corporation. Two buildings back onto a courtyard that serves as a community gathering place. There are nine residential loft apartments above the retail spaces and a number of businesses. One of these business spaces is a ballet studio, which attracts many families with children to the shopping center. There is a free standing fast-food restaurant and across the parking lot to the west there is a small strip center which includes a bank, cleaners and restaurant. That western side of the shopping center also houses a service station, which has been in continual operation and owned by the same family for over 40 years. Also on this western edge is a currently vacant building that had most recently house a day care center¹.

The Existing Land Use Map on the next page shows that the lands within the Village Center Study Area comprise a mix of uses. Forty-seven percent is developed as "institutional uses" such as the Harper's Choice Middle School and Winter Grown senior care facility, 28 percent of the land is devoted to recreational purposes or is parkland or open space, 14 percent is comprised of retail uses, and parking lots comprise three percent of the lands and high density residential (Fenland Fields) comprises one percent of the land use.

Council Bill 29-2009 (ZRA-102) Effective 11/5/09]

¹ In 2008, the Village Board hired a Title Company to confirm which land parcels within the Community Planning Area are subject to the Village Covenants. There is only one land parcel in the subject area that is not subject to the covenants; the former day care center building near the Safeway. This building is an out parcel and not subject to the CA annual assessment. However, it still falls under New Town zoning.



Existing Land Use

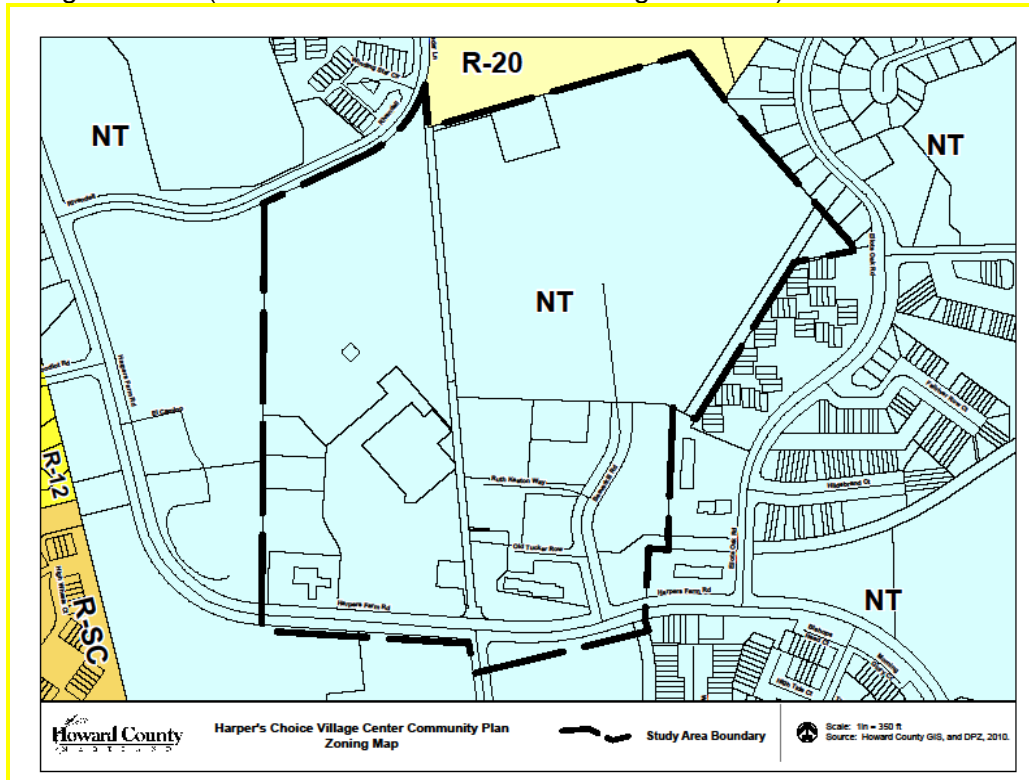
In addition to the shopping center, the Village Center Study Area includes destination uses and services for a wide range of activities. Kahler Hall, a Columbia Association² (CA) facility, is the community center for Harper's Choice but also services residents from across Columbia. Kahler Hall hosts meetings, classes and is a rental venue for celebrating many of life's events. The Columbia Association has three other facilities surrounding the shopping center. There is the SportsPark with batting cages and mini-golf; the SkatePark for skate boarding; and the Athletic Club, one of Columbia's three indoor gyms, which includes a full range of athletic facilities and a hot water therapy pool.

Howard County facilities add to the mix of uses in the study area. County facilities include Harper's Choice Middle School, the Florence Bain Senior Activity Center; as well as the Ruth Keeton House Wintergrowth, a senior day care program and a 16-bed assisted living facility. The former Cedar Lane School, on the campus with the middle school, has been converted into

²Homeowners pay assessment fees to CA and they operate under the Maryland Home Owner's Association Act. CA provides many amenities to the residents of Columbia, including 96 miles of pathways, open space maintenance, outdoor and indoor swimming pools, athletic clubs, golf courses, tennis courts and much more. Columbia has no city council and no mayor. Columbia does not have control over zoning regulations, road improvements, public utilities, police, fire, emergency services or any other public resources that are funded by tax dollars. Columbia resident's pay taxes to Howard County for these services.

an activity center. A portion of Cedar Lane Park is also included in the study area and provides playing fields where organized soccer and little league games take place.

As shown on the existing zoning map below, all lands within the study area are zoned New Town (NT) zoning. The shopping center and adjacent lands are also designed as a New Town Village Center. (See text box below for the zoning definition).



Existing Zoning

New Town Village Center is defined as follows in the zoning regulations:

A mixed-use development in the New Town District which is in a location designated on the New Town Preliminary Development Plan as a "Village Center", which is designed to be a community focal point and gathering place for the surrounding village neighborhoods by including the following items:

- a. An outdoor, public, village green, plaza or square, which has both hardscape and softscape elements. This public space shall be designed to function as an accessible, primarily pedestrian-oriented promenade connecting the various Village Center buildings and shall include public seating features;
- b. Stores, shops, offices or other commercial uses which provide opportunities to fulfill the day-to-day needs of the village residents, such as food stores, specialty stores, service agencies, financial institutions, personal services, medical services, and restaurants;
- c. Space for community uses and/or institutional uses; and
- d. Residential uses, to the extent appropriate to support and enhance, but not overwhelm, other uses in the Village Center.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND DESIGN

Community character and design have to do with the physical form of a place and how the community interacts with and experiences it. Features such as streets and their design, plazas, area of vegetation, plantings and open space; architectural design, building placement,

height, scale, and lighting all play a part in urban design and how we interact with the built environment.

The Village Center proper consists of two large buildings, a strip center, a free standing supermarket, fast food restaurant and service station. Adjacent to the service station there is an empty building that was previously a day care center. In addition there is a breezeway/arcade that is in between two of the buildings.

Signage, both externally and internally, is problematic within the Village Center study area. There is limited visibility from Harper's Farm Road, and there is no easy way for motorists or pedestrians to ascertain what stores are in the Village Center. For instance, two of the restaurants do not face Harper's Farm Road or the front of the center. Once in the Village Center, shopper may have a difficult time finding the different stores. It is important to have cohesive signage in order to identify the different aspects of the Village Center.

Lighting in the Village Center and gathering places is important for safety and it can also add to or detract from the area's attractiveness. Existing lighting in the breezeway area and the stairwells is currently poor. While lighting in the parking shopping center lot areas is adequate, additional pedestrian oriented lighting would be a welcomed enhancement.

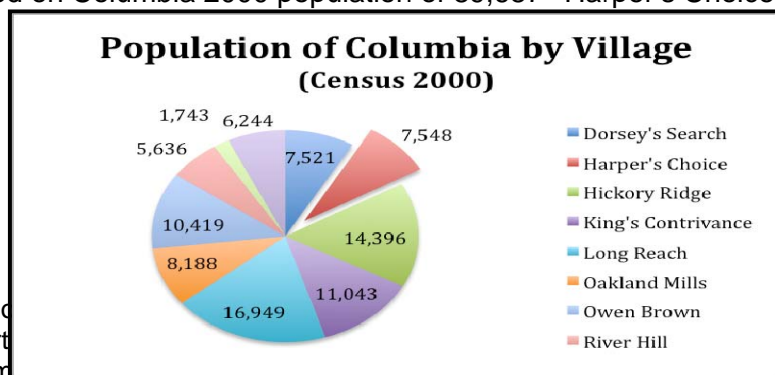
Gathering Places, Plazas and Public Realm Improvements including Outdoor Seating are important to the vitality of any activity center including the Village Center environment. Joseph's Square is used for outdoor seating and as an informal gathering place as well as the site of some organized events. It was re-designed in 1997 to improve its attractiveness as well as its safety. The original fountain was kept as part of that plan is a signature feature of the Village Center. Special paving stones were installed in the Village Center in 1987.

Other outdoor spaces and plazas include the patio at Kahler Hall, the benches in front of the shopping center and the outdoor seating and tables across the parking lot in front of Maiwand Kabab. There may be an opportunity to add outdoor seating areas near the SportsPark.

Harper's Choice Covenants: The Harper's Choice Architectural Committee (HCAC) maintains architectural control over commercial buildings owned by Kimco and CA. The HCAC does not maintain architectural control over the County-owned buildings. All future development will need to adhere to the Harper's Choice Covenants and plans will need to be reviewed by the Harper's Choice Architectural Committee.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF HARPER'S CHOICE

As of the 2000 census and analysis completed by Howard County, more than 7,500 people called Harper's Choice home. Based on Columbia 2000 population of 89,687³ Harper's Choice comprises approximately eight percent of the total Columbia population, making it the sixth largest Columbia village with regards to population size.



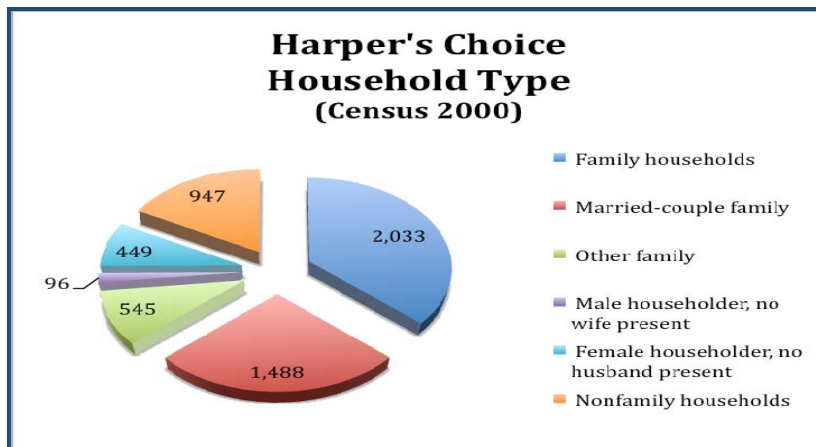
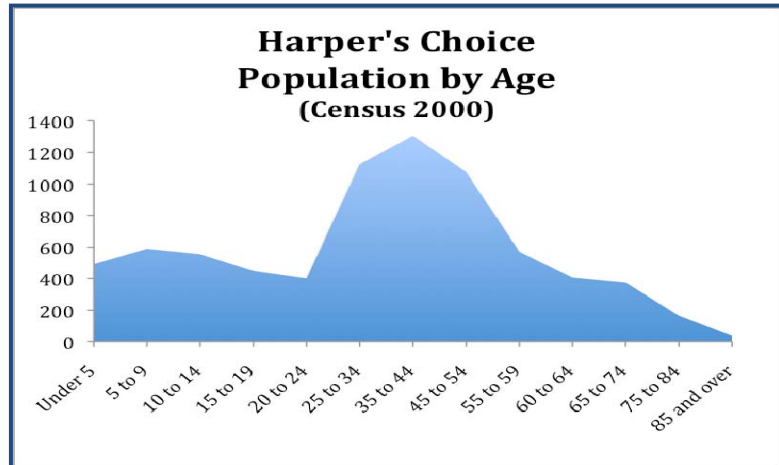
³ Source: The demographics information is from the Howard County Planning and Zoning, Research Report "Columbia". Columbia is the largest community of the entire county's overall population. As of 2010 the estimated total Columbia population has grown to approximately 100,000 residents.

Harper's Choice is a diverse community with regards to age, race, and household type. Housing units in Harper's Choice vary widely across the village from single-family homes to condominiums, townhomes and apartments. Harper's Choice has both the most expensive housing and the most affordable housing in Columbia, with approximately 37 percent of all housing units being renter occupied.

The Columbia villages that were developed first, such as Harper's Choice, tend to have the highest concentration of residents older than 65 years of age. As of the 2000 census, approximately eight percent of Harper's Choice residents were 65 years or older.

While in 2000, Howard County's population was approximately 74 percent white and Columbia's approximately 66 percent white, the Village of Harper's Choice is more diverse with approximately

57 percent of its residents describing themselves as white in the 2000 census, 30 percent describing themselves as black and the remaining 13 percent comprised of a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds.



Approximately 68 percent of the households in Harper's Choice are family households, which according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is defined as two or more people living in the same household related by birth, marriage, and/or adoption. This reflects similar ratios as can be seen across the whole of Columbia, which has a higher ratio of high density housing than Howard County at large.

As of the 2000 census, of the 2,033 family households in Harper's Choice, slightly more than half are occupied by children under the age of 18. Of the non-family households in Harper's Choice, 79 percent of these households are individuals who reside alone and 25 percent of the total households are comprised of single occupants, which is the same percent as Columbia as a whole.

Harper's Choice is a diverse community comprised of many families and individual residents living in a wide variety of different housing accommodations. The Village Center Community

Plan will seek to ensure that opportunities at the Village Center are provided that support diversity and community activities and that engage all social and economic levels in the Village.

CONNECTIVITY AND CIRCULATION

The Village Center is centrally located within Harper's Choice and has good accessibility to nearby community destinations and institutions. Within a one-half mile radius of the Cedar Lane and Harper's Farm Road intersection, destinations include Howard General Hospital, the entrance to Howard Community College, Swansfield and Longfellow Elementary schools; Harper's Choice Middle School; Longfellow Pool and Neighborhood Center; and Swansfield Pool and Neighborhood Center.

The Harper's Choice Village Center is located at the intersection of Cedar Lane and Harpers Farm Road, both of which are classified as minor arterials

What's Close By?

WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE: Howard General Hospital, Howard Community College, Swansfield and Longfellow Elementary Schools; Harper's Choice Middle School; Longfellow Pool and Neighborhood Center; and Swansfield Pool and Neighborhood Center.

WITHIN 10-15 MINUTES BY CAR: Wilde Lake Village Center, Riverhill Village Center, Hickory Ridge Village Center, Central Library, The Columbia Mall, Harper's Choice Golf Club, several community pools, Wilde Lake, Lake Kittamaqundi, and Centennial Park.

by Howard County. Minor arterials⁴ provide interconnection between intermediate arterials such as Rt. 108 and Little Patuxent Parkway. Based on the county's classification system, minor arterials are designed to provide a balance between travel mobility and access to land uses and provide the primary access to or through communities with access to residential concentrations and commercial, retail or industrial land uses. The retail uses at the Village Center benefit from this location adjacent to two minor arterials.

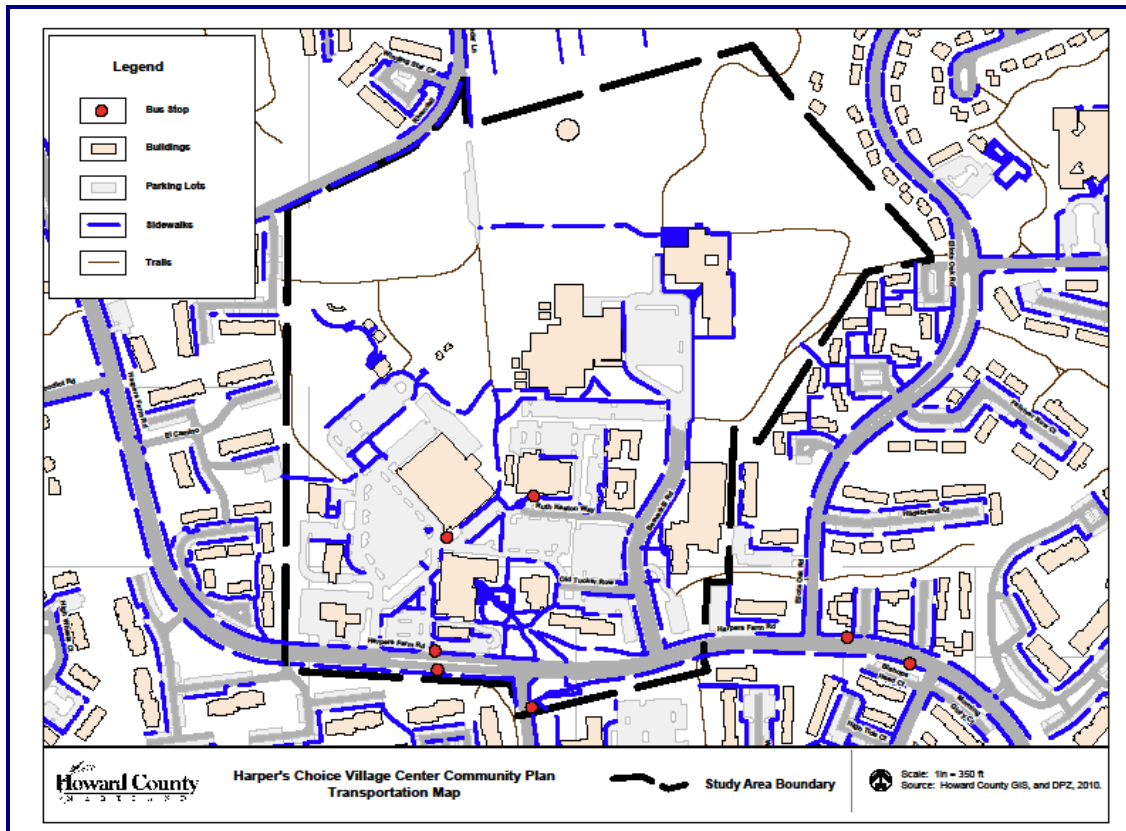
In suburban locations, the viability and health of retail business locations is based on a mix of elements including the strength of the trade area, automobile traffic counts, visibility and signage, physical attractiveness of the area, parking and pedestrian facilities, and mix of uses. Other factors include nearby competition, which also ties into the strength of the trade area. Nearly all sectors of retail businesses in suburban areas require a location with enough drive-by traffic to make the location attractive and successful. Harper's Choice Village Center is well-located in this respect.

Traffic counts for Cedar Lane and Harper's Farm Road near the Village Center are available but are more than ten years old. However, there are a few more recent counts for the nearby intersections and these show a general upward trend in traffic volumes. Based on this it is safe to say that the current traffic volumes at Harper's Farm Road and Cedar Lane are higher than they were 10 years ago. In any case, there is a significant level of drive-by traffic in this area.

⁴ The county's roadway classifications system uses six classifications: Principal Arterial – freeways, Intermediate Arterials - multi-lane divided or undivided roadways, Minor Arterials Roadways, Major Collectors, Minor Collector, Local Streets, and Scenic Roads. Each of these classifications relates to two factors: the role the roadway plays in the movement of vehicular traffic and how the roadway provides access to adjacent land. For instance, a freeway is designed for the highest capacity for movement of vehicles and the lowest level of adjacent land access since there are limited interchanges. At the other end of the classification are local streets whose primary purpose is to provide local land use access and low levels of minimal through traffic.

This base level of traffic flow on Harper's Farm Road and Cedar Lane contributes to the success of the shopping center now and in the future.

The Village Center is served by a number of surface parking lots, many of which are used as shared parking resources. The parking lots are grouped in six distinct areas: the lot in front of the Safeway, the lot in front of the village shops with direct right in/right out access from Harper's Farm Road; the lot that serves the Columbia Skate Park/Sports Park facility; the shared lots between the back of Safeway and the Columbia Athletic Club that serve Kahler Hall, the Bain Center, the Columbia Association Athletic Club and retail customers; and the Harper's Choice Middle School Parking lot. Not including the middle school parking lots, there are an estimated total of 685 spaces that serve Village Center uses. The table on the next page includes the approximate number of parking lot vehicle spaces by parking lot area. There are also approximately 55 on-street parking spaces along Beaverkill Road.



Transportation Map

Harper's Choice Village Public Auto Parking Lot Spaces

Parking Lot Area	Current Vehicle Spaces (Approx.)
In front of and west of Safeway	260
SportsPark / SkatePark	100
Village Shops – lot with access to Harper's Farm Rd	65
Joint Use – between Safeway and Athletic Club	185
Parking Behind the Bain Center	75
Subtotal without Harper's Choice MS	685
Harper's Choice Middle School	185
Total	870

Source: Estimate of parking spaces via visual examination of aerial map

In addition to vehicle parking, the Harper's Choice Village Center is served by facilities for pedestrians and cyclists including sidewalks, crosswalks, trails, bicycle parking, pedestrian signals and signage, and pedestrian lighting.

The Transportation Map above shows the location of sidewalks and trails in the Village Center study area. Sidewalks are located on both sides of Harper's Farm Road. These sidewalks shift away from the street right of way as they meet the elevated pedestrian bridge landings at the northeastern and southeastern quadrants of the intersection of Harper's Farm Road and Cedar Lane. There is a market crosswalk and pedestrian signal at the Cedar Lane intersection.

Sidewalks are also present along both sides of Beaverkill Road and there are two marked crosswalks and pedestrian signals at the intersection with Harper's Farm Road. There is also a pedestrian-activated signal located at the main entrance to the Village Center on Harper's Farm Road. This intersection is also marked with two cross walks – one across Harpers Farm Road and one across the entrance road to the Village Center. At this crossing, the northwest quadrant of this intersection does not have a sidewalk along the Village Center entrance road.

Internal to the Village Center, there are several marked crosswalks that connect the parking areas to the sidewalks/entrance plazas that line the storefronts. There is no direct sidewalk connection between the Village Center entrance road to the SportsPark.

There are no bicycle racks within the retail portion of the Village Center. However, there are bicycle racks at the east-facing entrance to Kahler Hall and at the entrance to the Athletic Club.

Columbia Association and other trails connect the Village Center retail uses to Harper's Choice Middle School, Cedar Lane Park, the Athletic Club, and to surrounding residential neighborhoods.

For those who are not able to drive, walk or bike to the Village Center, there are a variety of bus transit options. Howard County Transit provides local circulator service to the Harper's Choice Village Center via the Green Route. The Green Route connects the Village Center to Wilde Lake Village Center, the Columbia Mall, Howard Community College, and Howard County General Hospital and Clary's Forest. The service runs seven days a week with weekday headways of 30 or 60 minutes and weekend headways of 60 minutes. Riders of the Green Route may transfer to other Howard County bus routes at the Columbia Mall as well as to Central Maryland Regional Transit's Connect-A-Ride service.

Regional Commuter Bus Service is provided by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA). The MTA operates commuter buses that serve the Harper's Choice Village Center with routes to Washington, and Baltimore.

Bus route 310/311 serves the Harper's Choice Village Center, Town Center, Columbia Gateway, and downtown Baltimore via MD 175 and I-95. Bus route 915 provides regular and express service between Columbia, Silver Spring, and Washington, DC. Bus route 929 provides regular and express service between the Harper's Farm Village Center, The Mall at Columbia, the Oakland Mills Village Center, the Broken Land park-and-ride lot, and Washington, DC. These routes run during weekday morning and evening rush hour periods.

Bus stops that serve the Village Center are located on both sides of Harper's Farm Road west of the intersection with Cedar Lane. The location of these stops is shown on the Transportation Map.

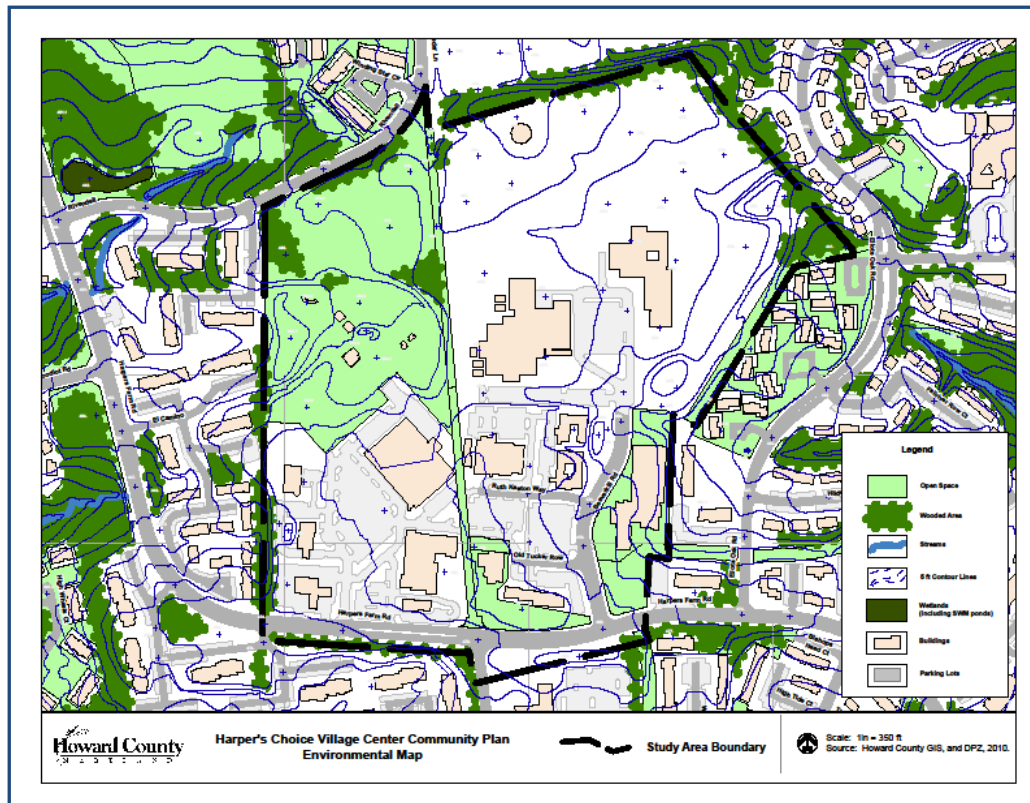
Currently the upper story of the Village Center building is not ADA compliant. Future plans should include strategies for bringing the building into ADA compliance.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES⁵

The Harper's Choice Village Center falls within the Wilde Lake sub-watershed of the larger Upper Middle Patuxent watershed and the even larger Chesapeake Bay watershed. Wilde Lake watershed is 1.9 square miles and is almost fully built-out with most of the development occurring in the 1970s without consideration for storm water management. The existing impervious cover levels within the watershed have a considerable effect on the conditions in the streams in the watershed, which were determined to be in poor condition in recent studies. This is strongly related to the altered hydrology that occurs in watersheds with relatively high levels of impervious cover. Prior research has shown that stream and wetland quality begins to decline when the amount of impervious cover in a watershed approaches 10 percent. Based on the estimates, the Wilde Lake watershed has moved far beyond this threshold. The Wilde Lake watershed is approximately 32 percent impervious cover and based on zoning is fully built out while the Harper's Choice Village Center is approximately 72 percent impervious cover.

The final report of the 2005 [Centennial and Wilde Lake Watershed Restoration Plan](#) priority recommendations includes two specific projects in the Harper's Choice Village Center. The Harper's Forest apartment complex and some neighboring townhomes currently discharge untreated stormwater runoff to a drainage channel that was likely a historic headwater stream. At Harper's Choice Middle School an existing dry pond provides limited stormwater management from the parking lot, road and some rooftops at this school site. However, the existing practice suffers from eroding conditions. The report provides details on how these two problem areas can be resolved in a manner beneficial for both the environment and the community.

⁵ The information contained in this section comes from the final report of the 2005 [Centennial and Wilde Lake Watershed Restoration Plan](#) and the 2009 [Watershed Management Plan](#).



Environmental Features Map

In a more recent study – the 2009 [Watershed Management Plan](#), completed for the Columbia Association – additional watershed enhancement opportunities were identified for the Harper’s Choice Village Center area. These include a stormwater retrofit of the Columbia Athletic Club and tree planting at the Columbia SportsPark site. The Athletic Club site stormwater retrofit was recommended to “demonstrate stormwater controls taking advantage of the high volume of CA customers who would see the demonstration. A large educational sign could be constructed in the open area to the south of the entrance walkway. The information could include a diagram of the site with the percentage of runoff contributed by all impervious surfaces. Ideally, it would show the controls for all surfaces adding up to 100 percent. The diversity of practices would be highlighted, including underground storage, rain tanks, bioretention (rain gardens), sand filters, and discharge to flower boxes. The utility of the demonstration would increase if gray water use and/or installation of solar panels (especially on the south-facing roof) were implemented.”

The [Watershed Management Plan](#) also found that the SportsPark has several small, bowl-shaped potential tree planting sites and rain gardens. The [Watershed Management Plan](#) recommends that the tree planting could be good planting project for Harper’s Choice Middle School.

Key Issues, Opportunities, and Potential Strategies

Some issues and opportunities within the study area that should be addressed in the Village Center community Plan include the following items:

- The Harper's Choice Architectural Committee maintains architectural control over commercial buildings owned by Kimco and CA, but not the County owned buildings. All future development will need to adhere to the Harper's Choice Covenants and plans will need to be reviewed by the Harper's Choice Architectural Committee.
- Signage at the Village Center could be improved both along the frontage of Harper's Farm Road and within the Village Center. It is important to have cohesive signage to identify the different aspects of the Village Center including what shops and services are at the Village Center.
- The lighting in the breezeway area and the stairwells of the Village Center should be enhanced for a greater safety and to improve the attractiveness of these spaces. Lighting should also be improved around the Bain Center.
- There is a need for coordination with nearby village centers (Wilde Lake and Hickory Ridge) to make sure uses are complementary and don't compete with one-and-other.
- Enhanced outdoor seating and dining would further enliven the Village Center as a gathering and activity center. Opportunities to add outdoor seating and dining including sidewalk cafés should be explored and identified in the Village Center Community Plan. One area for additional outdoor seating areas might be near the SportsPark on Columbia Association open space, an ideal spot for picnicking.
- The upper story of the Village Center building is not ADA compliant. The Village Center Community Plan should identify strategies to bring the building into ADA compliance.
- Residential units provide a unique characteristic of the Village Center. The Village Center Community Plan should explore the potential of adding more housing units.
- During the planning process, assess the feasibility of adding a segment of sidewalk at the crosswalk that traverses Cedar Lane across from the Village Center (at the southeast corner of Cedar Lane and Harper's Farm Road). The sidewalk is actually further south and not at the corner.
- On the southwest corner of the intersection of Cedar Lane and Harper's Farm Road, there is a sidewalk at the crosswalk, which is good. However, there is also a "natural path" made by people who have made a diagonal, shortcut dirt pathway through the trees at that corner. The plan should consider options for a pathway through this area.
- There is a need for a sidewalk along the entrance to the shopping center next to BP station and for it to extend approximately 0.1 mile north to the SportsPark.
- The bus shelter on the south side of Harper's Choice Road needs better maintenance including sanitation and trimming of the shrubbery.
- There is a need for bike racks at the bus shelter on the south side of Harper's Choice Road or nearby for use by commuters who now drive their cars and park in the shopping center parking lot. Some could ride their bikes if there were convenient, visible and secure bike racks/parking here at the Village Center near the bus stops.
- There is also a need for additional bike racks within the Village Center.

- As changes in technology making electric cars more prevalent and with the continued increase in gasoline prices, there may need to be convenient electric vehicle charging stations. The Village Center Community Plan should consider the possibility of location one at the Harper's Farm Village Center in the future.
- The Village Center Community Plan should include strategies for including green building techniques into future development/redevelopment/rehabilitation projects.
- The Village Center Community Plan should include the two priority projects identified by the [Centennial and Wilde Lake Watershed Restoration Plan](#) and the additional two projects that are identified in the [Watershed Management Plan](#) (CA) that are located in the Harper's Choice Village Center. The first two involve constructing a shallow marsh wetland facility at Harper's Forest apartments and modifying the bottom of the Harper's Choice Middle School pond to provide both recharge and enhanced water quality treatment using a bioinfiltration approach. The second two involve a stormwater retrofit of the Columbia Athletic Club and tree planting at the Columbia SportsPark site. Both documents include numerous other recommendations that should be considered in planning for the Village Center.
- One of the areas to address in the plan is how to continue to make the Village Center attractive to all types of users including older community members who may have more leisure time to shop and have lunch at the center. The plan should examine how to improve and promote the Village Center and environs as a "naturally occurring retirement community" where long-time residents can age in place.
- During the planning process, it would be desirable to identify ways to attract more sit-down restaurants at the Village Center.
- The building next to the BP service station that used to house a daycare center is now vacant. This building is not well-integrated into the center. The plan should identify potential desirable uses for that location. The Village Association could also consider annexation to be able to bring this parcel under the village covenants.
- The Village Center Community Plan should address how to capitalize on the SportsPark and SkatePark and include ideas to bring more users in to these facilities. Paving Stones were installed in the Village Center in 1987. While they have proved to be durable, they have also proved to be very hard to keep clean and they stain easily. The Village Center Community Plan should include recommendations for the use of alternative materials when the next remodel of the Center occurs.