

Comments in Favor of Resolution No. 224-2025

Amend Scenic Roads Inventory – Add Portions of Old Frederick Road and Main Street in Ellicott City

My Testimony

I'm Bob Dover, resident at 6354 Tamar Drive in Columbia. Thank you for the opportunity to comment in favor of this resolution.

Designation of roads to protect their scenic and historic values is a long-accepted practice that has been done on the Federal, State, and County levels for decades. The Howard County Council began making these designations in 1994, so I hope that the general benefits of these designations to the community and property owners are not going to be questioned.

With respect to the specific roads proposed for designation, I admit that I was surprised to find that these were not already designated by the County. The segment of Frederick Road between Old Town Ellicott City and Route 40 is already designated as a Scenic Byway for its historic values by the State. There is even a sign for this at its western end, and the resolution lists 11 historical landmarks along the way.

As a 30-year Howard County resident and author of some history books, I've had a strong interest in the National Road for years. Although there is some recent development along this segment, this doesn't detract from the fact that the route itself was part of the first federally-funded highway in the United States, starting in 1805. You may have heard of history nerds setting a goal of driving the entire length of Route 66 – well, there is a similar group of history nerds that seek out the National Road, and I'm one of them. I have not driven the entire length, but I have driven the first 400 miles from Ellicott City to central Ohio. I didn't do this because it was faster, or more scenic – I did it because of the historical significance of the road. I even included a subchapter on the National Road in my 2022 book, called *Bridgespotting*. Other than this short segment, the entire length of the National Pike/National Road in Howard County is already designated both by the County and the State. You are the stewards of the first few miles of the road that fueled the early settlement of our country – leaving this short segment out of the overall designation makes no sense.

I was also surprised that Old Frederick Road from Rogers Avenue to the Hollifield Bridge was not already designated. Again, the scenic character of the western part of this stretch has been degraded by recent housing development. However, most of the road is hilly and forested, and the eastern end is in Patapsco Valley State Park. The resolution mentions three historically significant sites, and there is a historic sign discussing a fourth site that was owned by John Ellicott. Although the bridge itself is in Baltimore County, it is scenic and historic, having been constructed in 1934, and it is prominently visible from the road in Howard County.

I hope you'll consider the benefits of protecting these historic and scenic values for future County residents to enjoy.

My Background and Qualifications

I am a geologist with more than 35 years of environmental planning experience, including managing the development of Environmental Impact Statements for federal land and resources management agencies. In addition to evaluating environmental and ecological resources, two of the important components of these analyses are evaluating the impacts of projects on federal, state, and local land and road designations for protection of scenic and historic values.

Through this experience, I have learned how these designations enhance the community as a whole, as well as the property values of the adjacent property owners. While a few developers and property owners will always assert that these designations negatively impact the value of their own properties by limiting the type of development that can occur, this is usually a short-sighted opinion of developers who care more about turning a quick profit than they do about the long-term enhancement of the entire community. It is firmly established that these designations actually enhance land values, especially when the property owners and developers chose to leverage the designation by designing their development to match the context of the designation and to protect the applicable scenic and historic character.

I also have often heard complaints that working within the framework of these designations causes unnecessary delays for property owners and developers. In my decades-long experience, I have found that delays are always caused not by the need to comply with the designation, but by developers and property owners spending time and effort trying to wiggle out of needing to comply. When responsible developers understand that the designation is a positive for them and they choose to work with it, the delays generally do not occur.

Aside from my career as a professional geologist, I have also directly studied and documented the historic and scenic features along both of these road segments near Ellicott City. In 2022, I published *Bridgespotting: A Guide to Bridges that Connect People, Places, and Times*, a book that studies and catalogues the attractions of bridges for tourists, recreational users, and hobbyists. One of the main attractions for tourists and hobbyists is to study historic bridges, which I document in Chapter 2 of the book. Another major attraction is to visit and photograph bridges in scenic areas, which is covered in Chapter 7.

In the book, I included a sub-chapter on the bridges of the National Road. Although the segment of Frederick Road proposed for designation does not include any original bridges and is not specifically discussed in the book, I do discuss the origins and the preservation of the National Road as a whole. The segment of the National Road in Howard County is not just some random segment – it is the very eastern end, the first few miles of the first federally-funded road that was used by settlers from the Atlantic Coast to migrate to the Midwest United States. The state of Maryland chose to protect the scenic and historic character of the entire road from the Baltimore City border to Pennsylvania. In addition, Howard County has already chosen to designate the eastern end of the road from the Patapsco River to Rogers Avenue, and then also from Route 40 near Centennial Lane to the western boundary of the County. The only segment not designated is this 3.4-mile-long stretch which, as mentioned in the proposed resolution, include several historic properties. Allowing this segment to remain undesignated threatens to degrade the historic character of the entire road within Howard County.

Separately, I have also studied the Hollifield Road Bridge at the eastern end of the Old Frederick Road segment proposed for designation. As part of my studies of historic bridges, I captured photo-documentation of dozens of historic bridges in central Maryland for the historicbridges.org website in 2013. There are only 3 remaining bridges wholly or partly in Howard County that qualify for documentation on that website, and the 1934 Hollifield Road Bridge is one of them. The bridge crosses a scenic segment of the Patapsco River within Patapsco Valley State Park and, because the bridge is a superstructure truss bridge (the truss extending above the road deck), the historic structure is prominently visible from the road within Howard County. The western end of the bridge also lands at a property once owned by John Ellicott in the 18th century, which is documented by a historic information sign just off of the road.

Testimony opposing CR-224

17 November 2025

John (Jack) Hild

Good evening members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify tonight in opposition to CR-224. My name is Jack Hild and my wife and I have lived at 8434 Old Frederick Road for the past 44 years. We are intimately familiar with this section of Old Frederick Road. My wife, in fact, has been visiting family on this portion of Old Frederick Road since she was 5 years old. **It is a pleasant road, but in the 45+ years we have driven it, I can't recall ever describing it as "scenic".**

A comprehensive review of county roads in the early 1990s led to the Howard County Scenic Roads Act through County Council Bill 51-1994. About 40 road segments were designated as "scenic" at that time. And in the 30 years since then, only about 3 modifications or additions have been enacted, mostly for rule changes. I have found no evidence that this portion of Old Frederick has ever before been suggested as scenic in any of those prior council actions, which makes sense, **because this portion of Old Frederick Road didn't meet the criteria for scenic road designation in 1994 and certainly not now.** While I found no evidence of this portion of Old Frederick Rd being considered, I believe that it must have been discussed when Daniels Rd (a dead-end side road off of Old Frederick) was designated. Three-fourths of Daniels Rd, in contrast to Old Frederick, is in Patapsco State Park; there are historically significant structures at the end with the Daniels Dam, Gary Memorial Church and the ruins of the Daniels Mill; and in 1994 Daniels Rd was nearly entirely "built out". In 1994 there were only 2 vacant lots on Daniels Rd. Houses were built there in the early 2000s. Given the discussions that occurred about Daniels Rd in the lead-up to the 1994 legislation, I've concluded that Old Frederick Rd must have been discussed, and by its omission, rejected as a candidate for scenic road designation.

Last week I drove many of the county roads designated as scenic and some are truly exceptional, but by any reasonable comparison, this section of Old Frederick Rd falls well short. **Unlike those scenic roads, this section of Old Frederick is largely defined by residential development, not scenic, natural, or historic beauty.**

And there is no doubt that it is less scenic today than it was in 1994 when the scenic road legislation was created. Since purchasing our property in 1980 and building our home, we have watched the residential developments grow along this section of Old Frederick. This includes Hollifield Station, Holly Court, the Rome property, and Hollifield Estates in the late 1990s / early 2000s and Patapsco Crossing in 2020. In addition to those developments, several smaller developments have been built since 2009 and there are 3 more that are in process. In all, more than 300 residences have been constructed in the Old Frederick Rd service area since the 1994 Scenic Roads legislation was passed. Measurements from the Howard County Interactive Map suggest that 17 would fall partially in the 100-foot scenic road buffer. Also of note is that Howard County has sized three pumping stations in the Old Frederick Rd service area to have the capacity to support the additional growth allowed by zoning regulations.

When I look at Old Frederick Road today, I see some “street tree” vegetation around the developments mentioned earlier, **but the defining character of the road is modern “track” housing, older bungalows, electric transmission towers and chain link fences, like so many other residential roads in suburban Howard County.** There are no “scenic” views, other than perhaps the ¼ mile stretch of road near the Baltimore County line that is in Patapsco State Park, **and that area is already protected.**

Further, despite the justification offered by the sponsor, there are no defining historic views or significant views of historic structures. The William Hollifield House, the William Thomas Farm House, and the Kefauver Boarding House are all near existing residential developments.

Because it does not meet the scenic road criteria, I believe that this resolution is being submitted as a backdoor attempt to prevent further development along this portion of Old Frederick Road and nullify conditional use approvals that have already been received for age restricted adult housing developments.

My wife and I, along with our partners, received conditional use approval from the Howard County Hearing Examiner for an age restricted adult housing development on the front portion of our property this past May. **The project was not particularly controversial and the decision was not appealed. As part of the conditional use process, we presented our project to both the Design Advisory Panel and the Historic Preservation Commission, neither of which took any issue with the proposed developments’ impact on the character of Old Frederick Road.**

We’ve followed the law and the Howard County processes and invested significant time and resources so far. Stable and predictable laws and processes are at the heart of good governance. We have relied on those laws and processes and made decisions accordingly. The approval of this resolution would effectively nullify our conditional use approval requiring unworkable setbacks from Old Frederick Road. It would pull the rug out from under us at the 11th hour. Such a result would be fundamentally unfair and signals to anyone looking to invest in Howard County that there is no predictability in the process, especially since the road itself does not meet the scenic road designation criteria. For all these reasons I respectfully request you vote against CR-224.

Edited Testimony for 3 minute timeline

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A comprehensive review of county roads in the early 1990s led to the Howard County Scenic Roads Act in 1994. About 40 road segments were designated as “scenic” at that time. And, in the 30 years since, only about 3 modifications have been enacted, mostly for rule changes. I have found no evidence that this portion of Old Frederick has ever before been considered. Which makes sense, **because this portion of Old Frederick Road didn’t meet the criteria for scenic road designation in 1994 and certainly not now.**

Last week I drove many of the county roads designated as scenic and some are truly exceptional, but by any reasonable comparison, this section of Old Frederick Rd falls well short. **Unlike those scenic roads, this section of Old Frederick is largely defined by residential development, not scenic, natural, or historic beauty.**

And there is no doubt that it is less scenic today than it was in 1994. Since purchasing our property in 1980 and building our home, we have watched the residential developments grow. In all, more than 300 residences have been constructed in the Old Frederick Rd service area since the 1994 Scenic Roads legislation was passed. About 17 would fall partially in the 100 foot scenic road buffer.

When I look at Old Frederick Road today, I see some “street tree” vegetation that has matured a little, **but the defining character of the road is modern “track” housing, older bungalows, electric transmission towers and chain link fences, like so many other residential roads in suburban Howard County.** There are no “scenic” views, other than perhaps the ¼ mile stretch of road near the Baltimore County line that is in Patapsco State Park, **and that area is already protected.**

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