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Issue #453

GPCA Newsletter

January 2026



Happy New Year!



GPCA General Meeting
Monday January 12, 2026 7:00 pm



Social Hall, Granite Presbyterian Church
10637 Old Court Road

GPCA ELECTIONS - 2026
Setting the 2026 Agenda and Priorities

This is one of the most important meetings of the year so be sure to join us. (See the Election Committee report below)

Following the elections **Guest Speaker Phil Herndon** will be presenting.

Topic: Flying Drones - Drones are not toys. What to think about before flying them.

Upcoming Meetings:

February 9 – Speaker: TBD

Topic: Baltimore County Solar Project at Hernwood Landfill

March 9 – Speaker: Dave Schuerer, Small Watershed Committee

Topic: GPCA's Streams--A health assessment report after 6 years

Please come join us

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President's Note



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

President's Note – January 2026

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Happy New Year and welcome to 2026! I hope you all enjoyed a joyful holiday season and are feeling renewed for another year of community connection and progress. As we step into a fresh chapter, I'm filled with gratitude for what we've accomplished together — and excitement for what's ahead.

Looking back, 2025 was a year filled with inspiring guest speakers, thoughtful conversations, and meaningful community engagement. From Granite to Woodstock and across the Greater Patapsco area, your continued involvement — whether through meetings, cleanups, advocacy, or support — helped keep our neighborhoods connected and strong.

As we look ahead, GPCA remains committed to fostering that same spirit of collaboration and inclusivity. We're already preparing another great lineup of speakers, discussions, and events for 2026 — and we always welcome your ideas. If there's a topic you're passionate about or a project you'd like to see us take on, don't hesitate to reach out.

There's so much to appreciate about the communities we serve, and so much more we can build together. Thank you for being a part of it. Let's make 2026 another year of shared progress, neighborly support, and lasting impact.

We may be small, but we are mighty.

Thank you!

~ Chris Brock, President, Greater Patapsco Community Association

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Last Month's Meeting December 8, 2025



A Great Holiday Party!

The Holiday Party on December 8th was great. Members, neighbors and friends came together with wonderful food, company, and live music.



We are grateful to Dominique Johnson for his joyful music and our State Senator Ben Brooks for bringing the turkey.



Lot's more photos on the [GPCA Facebook Page!](#)

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New Data Center Proposed

Data Center Proposal in West Baltimore County

On December 3, State Senator Charles Sydnor, along with Delegates McCaskill and Ruth, hosted a community meeting to present and discuss a proposal for a new data center. The proposed center would have a capacity of 42 megawatts and be situated on approximately 45 acres along Woodlawn Drive, northwest of I-70.

Data centers are critical facilities that house servers and IT infrastructure, enabling everyday internet access and the storage of cloud-based files. If this project is approved, construction could begin as soon as July 2026.

There are several important considerations for the GPCA and the local community. Data centers require massive amounts of electricity, which raises concerns about potential local blackouts or brownouts. They also demand significant quantities of water for cooling purposes. Additionally, questions remain about how this intensive industrial use aligns with the state's mandate to redevelop the area bordered by Liberty Road, Baltimore National Pike, Rolling Road, and the city line.

Key points include whether the data center will spur economic development and provide amenities for local residents. The West Baltimore County Redevelopment Authority has been tasked with making recommendations regarding the acquisition, development, redevelopment, or disposal of land in west Baltimore County. Because this project falls within the heart of their jurisdiction, it is important for the Authority to be actively involved in evaluating whether the proposed use will support their mission to revitalize the area for both residents and neighboring communities.

For more information about the proposal and to access the slides from the community meeting, scan the provided QR code to register.



Update: Ben's Run Bridge at Dogwood and Hollifield Roads

This bridge has been scheduled for replacement for 21 years. Scheduled, rescheduled and rescheduled again, the construction is now expected to begin in 2027. Hopefully it will last that long!

Thank you!

~ Cathy Wolfson, Public Affairs and Zoning
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ELECTION

JANUARY 12, 2026 ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

GPCA By-Laws direct us to hold annual elections at our January general meeting. To be eligible to serve on the Executive Board candidates must be members of GPCA for a minimum of 6 months immediately preceding the election.

Officers are elected for a one-year term. The president may serve for 2 consecutive one-year terms and may again become eligible after a one-year lapse.

Directors serve for a 3-year term and can again become eligible after a one-year lapse.

2026 Nominations for Officers and Directors

President – Chris Brock

Vice President – Butch Oakman

Secretary – Brenda Strohmer

Treasurer – Cathy Wolfson

Director – 1 year (rest of Patrik Bavoil's term who is stepping back)

Director – 3 years (Ralph Wright's term is ending)

Currently, we have three candidates for the two director positions.

Steve Goodmuth (either term)

Pamela Germain (either term)

Sandy Fallin (1 year term only)

Note: Gabriela Summerer-Herndon's 3-year term expires in January 2028 and is not subject to nomination

Nominations of candidates are being taken at this time and will continue until the election when nominations will be taken from the floor.

All Officers and Directors shall contribute impartially to decisions of the board and support the objectives of GPCA which per our By-Laws are:

“To preserve and enhance the tranquility and beauty of our rural environment and to encourage orderly and positive growth of the community within the framework of prescribed regulations and laws. The Association shall provide a forum for all residents to express their concerns and interests and shall attempt to provide informative and interesting programs that will keep members informed and better able to address any of their concerns or problems. The Association's objective is also to foster a spirit of community among the residents.”

What's the commitment? In addition to attending GPCA's General Meetings on the 2nd Monday of September to June the Board meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at 7:00 pm via Zoom. If you're interested in serving on the Board, would like to nominate a candidate or have any questions about the process please contact Gabriela Summerer-Herndon, Nominating Committee Chair, at gpcagsh@gmail.com.

Thank you!

~ Gabriela Summerer-Herndon, Director of the Board and Election
Committee

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.....A Message from the GPCA Clean Up Committee

Community Cleanup Event Report

Overview

On December 20, members of the GPCA and the Small Watershed Committee participated in a community cleanup at the intersection of Old Court Road and Granite Road. The event was timed perfectly, with mild temperatures, no rain, and melted snow that made it easy to spot and collect trash.



Participants The GPCA members who contributed to the cleanup were Laurie Donnelly, Susan Simpson, Andy Grosko, Pam Germain, Judy Plaskowitz, Austin Cohen, and Jim Raistrick. Their collective efforts made a significant impact on the area.



Cleanup Efforts

The team worked diligently to pick up six bags of trash, a large section of plastic fencing, and a sizable container of recyclables.

Both sides of the roads were thoroughly cleaned, including the areas along the railings and beyond.



The majority of the trash consisted of alcohol bottles, cans, fast food drink cups, and food containers. One of the most challenging items to remove was a broken windshield. The team took great care to gather all the pieces to prevent them from ending up on the roadway.

Coordination with Local Authorities

Baltimore County has been contacted regarding the collection of the filled bags and other debris. County officials will schedule a pickup at the designated location.

Future Plans and a Request for Volunteers

Another cleanup event is planned for early this year, with the specific date to be determined based on weather conditions.

The Committee is seeking volunteers to help with this initiative. *If you are interested in participating and contributing to the preservation of our community's environment, please contact the GPCA Cleanup Committee Chair at: communitycleanupgpca@gmail.com*



Thank you!

~ Jim Raistrick, Clean Up Committee Chair
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....A Message from the GPCA Small Watershed Committee

Recently, Joy Tsao, a news reporter, spent a couple of days with the Small Watershed Committee team and wrote a story about the team's activities and their ongoing work to improve the water quality of the tributaries within the GPCA boundaries. The author is a local writer who shares stories from the Patapsco and the surrounding communities of Catonsville and Ellicott City.

With the author's permission the story is reprinted here.

~ Laurie Donnelly, Small Watershed Conservation Committee, Chair

When Freshwater Turns Brackish by Joy Tsao



In the Patapsco watershed, local residents came together to form the Small Watershed Conservation Committee (SWCC). What began as trash pickups along the banks has, over the past six years, evolved into a dedicated program for sampling and monitoring water quality in streams. As the committee noted in their newsletter:

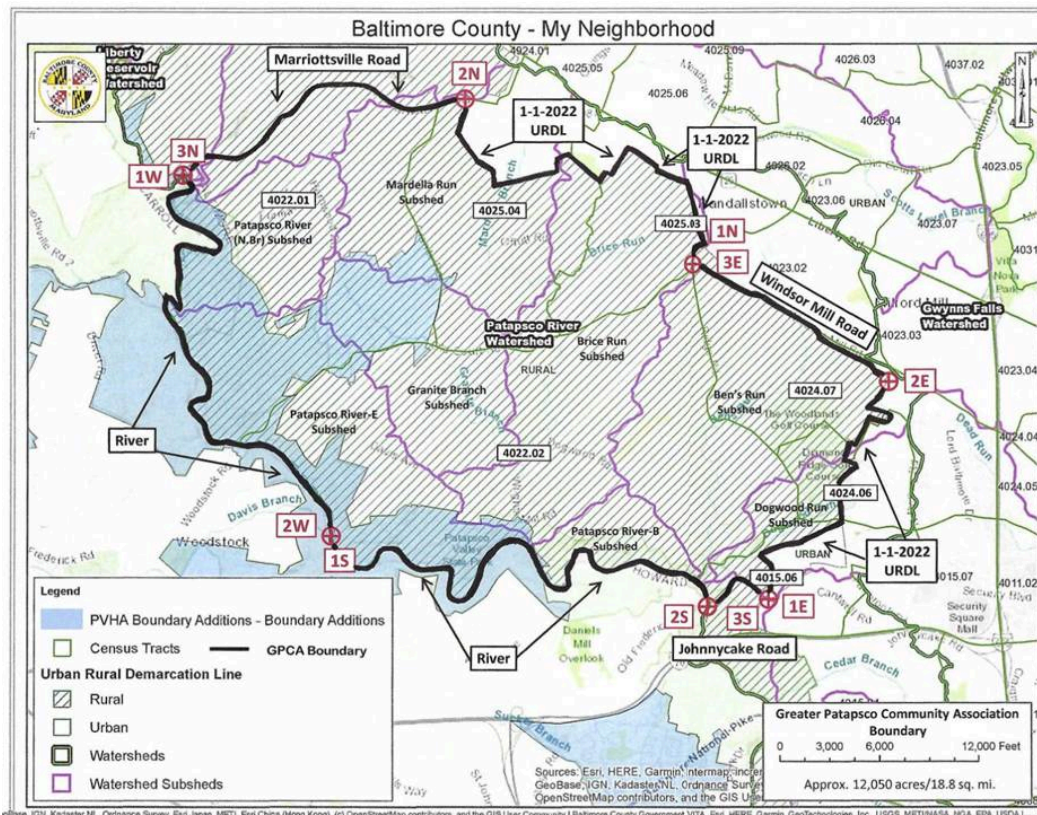
“Since the streams within our area feed into the larger Patapsco River and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay, what happens within each small stream, even on your property, affects the health and vitality of our water resources, and this, in turn, affects our quality of life.”

For two days, I watched the SWCC crew work with steady determination, unfazed by cold water, whipping winds, or whatever else the days threw at them. They waded straight into the streams, plunged their bare hands into the cold water to collect samples, cast bobbers again and again to measure flow, filled long tubes to gauge clarity, and patiently sorted through muck to uncover the tiny streambed critters caught in their nets.

They’ve noticed that Dogwood Run, one of the streams they monitor, consistently shows elevated salinity—about twice that of the other streams. The SWCC is trying to figure out why.

SWCC volunteer Dave Scheurer explained that they live just outside Baltimore County’s Urban–Rural Demarcation Line (URDL), a boundary

designed to concentrate growth within it while preserving farmland and natural resources outside. “So, outside the URDL is fairly undeveloped compared to what’s happening inside,” he said, adding that the association and local community outside the URDL have been vigilant about keeping zoning restrictive. Their association, the Greater Patapsco Community Association (GPCA), encompasses 12,050 acres — about 18.8 square miles.



Map of the Greater Patapsco Community Association area (GPCA website)

Views on the URDL differ sharply: some praise it for conserving rural land and natural resources, while others criticize it for limiting growth and development.

He said the program’s primary value comes from six years of data collected before hundreds of townhouses were built along Johnnycake. The development was intended to help meet Baltimore County’s housing goals.

“That used to be fields and woods, part of the Dogwood watershed. The land was upzoned for the Red Line, which never happened. It stayed undeveloped—until recently. Over time, we should see if it affects the stream.”

The Red Line was a proposed east-west transit line intended to connect that area of Baltimore County and the city.

The conversation turned to the high salinity levels in the Dogwood Run stream.

“You’d expect high salt in winter from road treatments,” Dave said. “But we’re seeing it year-round.”

He explained that in one area the stream is brackish and that it is one of the streams with the highest salinity levels in the region. “We’re starting to wonder if it’s getting into people’s wells,” he said. “So we’re going to ask if we can test them.”

He pointed out that the homes outside the URDL use private wells and septic systems. Salt is corrosive. Excess salt can eat away at pipes, potentially releasing toxic metals into drinking water.

In freshwater ecosystems, excess chloride and other salts can be deadly, disrupting animals’ ability to maintain cellular ion balance.

I asked if I could tag along to see how they work.

They emailed me the address of the church they work out of and told me to be ready to get my hands dirty. I was to meet them on the side porch.

I drove around, circling the church until I finally spotted the side porch. The SWCC crew sat on white plastic chairs, three of them bent over mud and leafy debris spread across a brown mesh on the table, picking through it with tweezers. A few feet away, two others hunched over white buckets, eyes down, absorbed in their work.

It was a cold morning, and sitting under the shaded porch awning made it feel even colder. They paused to introduce themselves.

Earlier, volunteers had been out in the stream with nets, collecting samples and bringing them back to the church to sort through and identify the critters that had been caught.

The crew used to do all their work along the creeks, a process that took about four hours. On rainy days, they would set up tents, but the dim light made the tiny critters nearly impossible to see.

When a Catholic priest learned about their volunteer work, he offered them the church, where they could warm up, make tea in the kitchen, use the

restrooms, and work on the porch, which has better lighting.

Andy Grosko, one of the volunteers, walked me through the process. They follow the Virginia “Rocky Bottom” protocol, aiming to collect at least 200 total organisms. They look for riffles and use a kick net. The health score is based on the number of pollution-tolerant versus pollution-intolerant species. He noted that the most they’ve ever collected in one sample was roughly 800.

Andy talked about the tiny critters living at the bottom of a stream with the ease of someone who’d spent a lifetime with them. He knew rivers and streams the way people know the streets they grew up on. It didn’t surprise me to learn he was a fisherman.

He showed me how they sort through the streambed muck, carefully getting the macroinvertebrates out from under the clumps of debris that clung to the mesh. Some are so tiny you need a magnifying glass to see any detail.

He handed me a field guide and explained that each specimen goes into an ice tray filled with stream water, sorted into the different compartments. He asked whether I wanted tweezers or a spoon. The way he asked, you could tell they all hoped I’d choose the spoon. They explained that the critters are delicate, and using tweezers without harming them takes a certain technique. Some are so soft they can be easily squished. They aim to release as many as possible alive after identifying and counting them. As the lone newbie, I got the spoon. I was fine with that considering the only tweezer technique I knew was pluck.

It was like stepping into an alien world—many of these critters were completely new to me. I scanned for anything that moved, but most were masters at blending in. And, of course, the moment you got one into its ice-tray compartment, it would start wriggling free while you were busy looking for more critters. The volunteers don’t tally them up until the very end.

I was busy scanning the mesh when someone spotted something on a wet leaf. Andy said, ‘Joy, you’ve got to see this! It looks like something straight out of the Black Lagoon.’ He grinned and jokingly warned that they grow up to eight feet long and attack people.

Nice try—it was a hellgrammite. They reach a few inches. Harmless to people, but they look menacing with those scythe-like pincers. This work

isn't for the squeamish.



Hellgrammite, ready to go back to living under a rock. From the Granite Branch—always a good sign, since I was told they only survive in relatively clean, well-oxygenated water.

Volunteer Bob Reisdorf found a caddisfly case-maker. These larvae build portable homes from sand, pebbles, leaves, and twigs—like tiny, customized RVs.

Andy noted the size differences. “That one is extremely small—I don’t think I’ve ever seen one this tiny. It built its case from sand,” he said. Soon after, another appeared, this one using leaves and sticks.



This caddisfly larva built itself an RV out of twigs and stream debris.

We took a break about 70 minutes in to warm up inside with hot tea and snacks. The conversation turned again to Dogwood Run, the problem stream.

All the critters we were sorting today came from Granite Branch, not Dogwood, but the memory of the Dogwood sample two days earlier was still fresh. Bob recalled that they had found a lot of Net-Spinning Caddisflies there. They can survive in a wide range of water conditions. “They bring your score down a bit,” he said. Stream health is rated acceptable, unacceptable, or somewhere in between—the grey zone. Dogwood currently falls in that grey zone. Last spring, it had been rated unacceptable.

The group kicked around theories, weighing them as they debated what to investigate and how best to proceed.

They worked their way up the Dogwood Stream, sampling as they went, until they reached a stretch with the highest salinity just downstream of a highly developed area. That told them roughly where the problem begins,

but they still don't know what's causing it—the source.

They're limited in what they can test as a volunteer group with roughly three thousand dollars a year in funding. Dave hopes a university will take up the case and conduct a full study with more advanced testing.

After tallying the critters from Granite branch, we reached a total of 446.

We saw many mayflies, which is always encouraging since most species are sensitive to water quality.

Mayflies play a key role in the ecosystem, feeding fish and birds. The data was entered into the Clean Water Hub, a collaborative platform that allows people to track the health of local creeks and streams.

The next time I joined the SWCC volunteers, I crossed the demarcation line. On one side, the land was manicured and built up; on the other, houses sat on big lots that barely cut into the forest. Most of the land outside the demarcation line appeared to be untouched.

I was told to meet the group at Laurie's house. From there, we would carpool to the four different stream monitoring sites.

Four SWCC volunteers were waiting: Laurie Donnelly, Dave Scheurer, Pam Germaine, and Judy Plaskowitz. Laurie climbed into the driver's seat, and I settled into the back.

Dave sat next to me and explained how carefully they chose the monitoring and sampling sites. They selected four locations that were close to each other and easy to access, and, in some cases, required landowner permission. Each choice involved careful consideration, since it was a long-term commitment. Together, the four sites capture runoff from much of the land and represent a range of land uses and watershed characteristics. Dave estimates that it covers about 80% of the GPCA area.

They explained that when a stream shows persistent issues linked to a property, they collaborate with the landowners to find solutions.

They visit each site once a month, armed with equipment, documenting their findings and collecting samples for testing.

After a short car ride and a brief hike, we reached the first testing site.

Using her son's fishing rod, Laurie cast the bobber into the current while Pam timed its drift to calculate streamflow, repeating the process several times.

As they worked, Dave noted that with more resources, they could use a probe to measure the flow—but for their purposes, the current method worked. He added that all they really needed was something that floats;

even a rubber ducky would do.

They also measured water clarity, depth, and temperature, and collected a large container full of stream water. The same process was repeated at the other three stream locations.

When we started, it was a comfortable 65 degrees. By the time we reached the second-to-last sample site, the wind had picked up, and the temperature had rapidly dropped. The trees were creaking and groaning. Dave planted himself beneath one of those creaking giants, bending over to take the water's temperature. Somewhere in the distance, a branch crashed to the ground.

After he took the temperature, Dave lowered his voice. "I didn't like being under that tree," he said. "All that creaking..."

They venture out in all sorts of weather.



Laurie Donnelly preparing for the water-clarity test

Water temperature is one of their more important variables, he explained, because it is crucial for trout health—they are cold-water fish.

In winter, when he checks the temperatures of all four streams, most hover around freezing. Dogwood, however, has so much salt in it that the water's freezing point is lower, allowing the stream to remain liquid at below freezing without turning to ice. It is measurably colder than the other streams.

The last stream they sampled is their healthiest, Granite. Dave said, "This one has a lot of agriculture in it, and marshes and things like that, so it's interesting. It has really low salinity and is the least developed."

With the fieldwork wrapped up, we headed back to Laurie's house to process the day's samples. One of the SWCC's founding members, Bob Teller, had handled all the processing for four years in the basement of his home. But after recent health issues, he had to step back. Now the heart of the operation has shifted to Laurie's kitchen, where large water containers, test kits, detergent powder, beakers and notebooks covered the kitchen counter, their DIY laboratory.

Dave said, "The biggest challenge for many water-quality groups is sustainability. You run out of money or you run out of people—people don't want to give up the time."

Still, this group has logged thousands of volunteer hours monitoring their streams for six years.

"We have a dedicated group here," Laurie said.

Pam, a recent retiree and SWCC volunteer, added that their community is unique: many residents rely on wells. "It affects us and our lives," she said. They hope that if something is wrong with the groundwater, they'll catch it early and be able to address it before it becomes a serious problem.

Because private wells aren't regulated by the EPA, communities like this one must monitor their own water.

The Baltimore County Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability has provided comparison water-quality samples and equipment, and the Patapsco Heritage Greenway (PHG) has contributed funding for four years to help sustain the program. Most recently, the SWCC received a \$3,300 PHG grant for 2026, which will further support their efforts.

From their water samples, the volunteers can track a variety of indicators—salinity, pH, conductivity, dissolved solids, and nutrient levels—which together reveal the overall health of a stream.

Looking ahead, the group hopes to acquire more advanced instruments, which would allow them to monitor additional stream locations more

efficiently and perform all analysis on-site instead of transporting samples back for processing. These instruments can run thousands of dollars and would require extra funding, but the volunteers remain hopeful they can secure grants or donations to make it happen.

After processing the samples, Dogwood Stream continues to show unusually high salinity. Dave previously reported that the upstream salinity value was about 0.70 parts per thousand (ppt), which is near the lower end of the brackish range. Although dilution lowers it downstream (the current sample is 0.38 ppt), this is still higher than other local streams. Without mitigating the source of the salt, there is potential for long-term environmental impacts.

Dave still hopes a university will take up the case with a high-resolution professional lab capable of work that goes far beyond what they can do in Laurie's kitchen.

If you're interested in volunteering with the group, contact Laurie Donnelly at Imdonnelly1@yahoo.com.

I'm a local writer sharing stories from Patapsco and the surrounding communities of Catonsville and Ellicott City.

Please consider joining as a free or paid subscriber. Your support keeps this going—and shows potential sponsors it's worth backing.

Joy Tsao, Nov 28, 2025 <https://thejoyofptap.substack.com/p/when-freshwater-turns-brackish>

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Baltimore County and Beyond

A Message From Yolanda Gregory Our District 4 Planner

It's that time again! Join **Yolanda Gregory, the Community Planner for Baltimore County Council District 4**, for our 2026 1st quarter Community Connect Pop-Up of the year!



Community Connect Pop-Up

BALTIMORE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
YOLANDA GREGORY
COUNCIL DISTRICT 4 COMMUNITY PLANNER

Join me for an exciting opportunity during my office hours to pop in and connect, discuss, and share your ideas about the future of our district. Whether you're curious about urban planning, want to learn more about upcoming projects, or have feedback to share, this is your chance to get involved and shape the development of your community. Come with questions, leave with insights, and be part of a collaborative effort to build a brighter future for District 4

THURSDAY JANUARY 29, 2026
9:30AM-4:00PM

REISTERSTOWN WELCOME CENTER
234 MAIN STREET
REISTERSTOWN, MD 21136

Scan the QR Code to sign up for our newsletters and see where I will pop up next.

*Venue selection does not imply endorsement by the Baltimore County Department of Planning.

DNR Note – The Maryland DNR 2025-2026 deer season concludes with a winter firearm season from January 9–10, 2026, in Region B (most of MD except far west), with Sunday hunting on Jan. 11, 2026, in specific counties. Bag limits for the season are up to 10 for firearms and 15 for archery in Region B.

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Know Someone New to the Community?

Please share this newsletter and let them know they can sign up for their own free subscription at gpca.net No membership required! Thanks to all of you who have joined GPCA this year. Membership is open year-round and you can join anytime at gpca.net or just use this QR code



Not sure if you joined, or if your membership is up to date? Just contact me, Cathy Wolfson Treasurer / Membership Chair at gpcatreasurer@gmail.com and I'll be glad to let you know!

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Around the Neighborhood

There's always lots of information, news and photos of happenings in our area on the [GPCA Facebook Page--](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100066644855331>

And for the **Woodlawn Precinct** latest news and information visit: www.baltimorecountymd.gov/departments/police/community/precincts/2-woodlawn

Bingo Night Saturday January 31st--sponsored by St Alphonsus Knights of Columbus held at the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Lodge. See Flyer for details

What's going on around the neighborhood, along the roads or near you?

Let your community know!

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Goodbye January

One day closer to **SPRING!!**

Hello
February

CHARITY BINGO NIGHT

Sponsored by

St Alphonsus Knights of Columbus

All Cash Prizes!

Saturday, January 31, 2026

Snow Date: February 7, 2026

Doors open at 6 pm

First game starts at 7pm

* 20 regular games * Specials * Food and drinks to purchase *
\$5.00 extra game packets * Raffles, * Door Prizes * 50/50

Join us at:

10613 Old Court Rd, Granite, Maryland

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows' Lodge

Admission: \$25 if purchased by Jan 15, 26; \$30 at the door (includes one 20-game pack).

Purchase tickets online at <http://kofc13294.org/>

or contact Luke Browning: 410.707.1564; Luke@colconinc.com

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