

FAQs for common community issues

Q: Who is responsible for removing snow from the sidewalks?

A: The simple answer is the adjacent property owner per the Howard County Code. Howard County does not maintain any sidewalks, including snow removal, with exception of the sidewalks adjacent to County buildings (libraries, offices, etc.).

As stated in Section 18.402(h) of the [Howard County Code](#), the owner of the property abutting a sidewalk in a public right-of-way is responsible for removing snow within **48 hours after the snow has fallen**.

In the event of a **multi-unit building with more than one occupant**, it shall be the duty of the lessor to remove the snow unless the lessor has obligated a tenant who is occupying the property to do so. This applies to public streets and is applicable to sidewalks adjacent to public property.

However, it pays to be a good neighbor! If a property owner has not removed the snow within 48 hours, you may want to contact them and advise them of the County Code. Another idea is to reach out and ask the property owner if he or she needs assistance. Although the property owner may wish to comply with the law, many residents are physically unable to shovel snow and ice and are hesitant to request help from neighbors or friends. Your thoughtfulness can make a big difference to someone who might otherwise be unable to cope.

It should be noted that there are many sidewalks and pathways found on property throughout the county, and these pedestrian facilities are typically the responsibility of the land owner (Local HOAs, Schools, CA, County, Private Businesses).

Q There are vehicles parked in my community that do not belong to owners / renters – can the police department tow them?

A: The police department commonly receives complaints from private property owners or HOAs regarding unauthorized vehicles parking on their lots. Police cannot enforce or tow vehicles legally parked from these lots.

Please see [Ops-24: Towing Procedures](#) to see where Howard County police are authorized to tow vehicles. Similarly, the police department cannot disseminate information related to registered owners or information recovered from law enforcement databases for the purposes of towing.

Private property owners/HOAs should refer to the [Trespass Tow Law](#) to address vehicle parking in their neighborhoods.

Q: My neighbor is not abiding by the HOA rules and regulations – can police enforce these rules?

A: The police department cannot enforce violations of HOA rules and regulations. Common complaints the police department receives involve:

- Maintenance of vehicles in the private property parking lot
- Landscape maintenance
- Property owner/renter has too many vehicles

These are issues that police cannot legally address - it may be beneficial to speak with your neighbor regarding the issue or consult your HOA's bylaws.

Q: I want my roommate (or any other cohabitant) kicked out of my property – if I call the Police will they remove the subject?

A: Unfortunately, evictions are a process and involve more than just calling police to remove a tenant. In Howard County, the Sheriff's Office handles all matters related to Landlord/Tenant Disputes. Please refer to the [Howard County Sheriffs Office - Landlord Tenant Section](#) for further information related to these issues.

Request a copy of the Maryland Attorney General's booklet, **Landlords and Tenants: Tips on Avoiding Disputes** by calling (410) 576-6500.

The **Howard County Sheriff's Office Landlord/Tenant Unit** is open Monday thru Friday, 8am-4pm (closed on all Court holidays) and can be reached at 410-313-4222 (fax: 410-313-4236).

Q: My neighbors/common area trees / vegetation are on, cross or near property lines – can police take enforcement action against my neighbor for not landscaping their lawn?

A: The police department does not have any jurisdiction over the care and maintenance of the landscape. Maryland has adopted the so-called Massachusetts Rule that limits a landowner’s remedy against encroaching vegetation to “self-help” in nearly all circumstances. A landowner must assume responsibility for the care and preservation of his or her own property. This means that a neighbor can cut back encroaching limbs or roots of an adjoining neighbor’s tree to the property line, but they:

- May not destroy the tree by the pruning;
- May not cut down the tree itself;
- Must stop at the boundary line, unless they have the neighbor’s permission.

Any person who trespasses and removes trees without the owner's permission, unless they work for a public service company or a public roads agency, is liable for any surveys or appraisals needed, court costs that may incur, and triple the amount of the value of the trees or timber cut.

However, it pays to be a good neighbor! Reach out and ask the property owner if he or she needs assistance. Although the property owner may wish to better maintain their landscape, they may be physically unable to and may be hesitant to ask for help. Your thoughtfulness can make a big difference to someone who might otherwise be unable to cope.

Q: There are several lights out in my community – who is responsible for fixes these?

A: If you live in a private community/apartment complex the onus is on the property manager to fix lights that are no longer working. BGE is a great resource and very responsive to these types of issues. You can report the outage [here](#).