

APFO FAQs

1. What is APFO?

The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) is a growth management ordinance that enables the County to provide adequate public schools, roads, and other public infrastructure in a timely manner in accordance with the county's general plan growth objectives. The APFO process is designed to direct growth to areas in the county where adequate infrastructure exists or will exist.

2. What are the APFO tests?

There are three APFO tests: 1) Allocations; 2) Schools; and, 3) Roads. These are explained in more detail below.

3. What is the allocations test?

The general plan for Howard County, *PlanHoward 2030*, stipulates how many housing units can be built annually in the county. Each housing unit equals one allocation. Once housing unit allocations are used up for the year, all plans for future homes are placed on hold until more allocations become available the following year. These annual allocations are designed to help pace residential development so the county can plan, fund, and build new capital facilities such as schools, fire and police stations, libraries, senior centers, and parks necessary to accommodate the new growth.

4. How are allocations distributed?

Housing unit allocations are currently distributed among five geographic categories: Growth & Revitalization; Established Communities; Rural West; Downtown Columbia; and, Green Neighborhoods.

5. What is the Schools Test?

Once allocations are granted for a project, the project must then take the Schools Test. In order to pass this test, the elementary and middle school districts and the elementary school region serving the proposed development must all be below 115% of capacity utilization. If the project does not pass this test, then plans for the development will be placed on hold. Projects are re-tested each July after a new capacity utilization chart is adopted by the County Council. Projects can be placed on hold due to failing the Schools Test for up to four years.

6. What is an elementary school region?

An elementary school region is a geographic grouping of elementary schools. There are five regions: Columbia East; Columbia West; Northeast; North; Southeast; and West.

7. What does capacity utilization mean and how is it determined?

Capacity utilization is the comparison of a facility's program capacity and its enrollment. If the enrollment equals the capacity, then the capacity utilization is 100%. The Howard County Public School System calculates program capacity differently for elementary, middle, and high schools. Methodologies by school type are as follows:

- Elementary School: 22 students for each Kindergarten classroom; 19 students for each classroom in Grades 1 and 2; and, 25 students for each classroom in Grades 3–5;
- Middle School: 95 percent of the total number of teaching stations multiplied by 20.5 students, exclusive of special education classrooms;
- High School: either 80 or 85 percent of the total number of teaching stations multiplied by 25 students, exclusive of special education and special use classrooms.

It is important to note that the State of Maryland and local jurisdictions can determine capacity differently. The State's formula, referred to as state-rated capacity, is the number of students that an individual school has the physical capacity to enroll, per the Interagency Committee on School Construction (IAC). The IAC determines this number using a formula for the number of students per classroom, typically on a per grade, or grade range, basis.

8. How often is capacity utilization updated?

Each year, the Howard County Public School System prepares and approves new capacity utilization levels by school (referred to as the 'Open/Closed Chart'), which is approved by the Howard County Council.

9. What is the Roads Test?

Traffic studies are required for all major subdivisions. These studies determine any traffic impacts from the proposed project, and the developer must mitigate the impact. For example, developers may be required to add a turn lane to a road leading up to the subdivision or may be required to signalize an intersection in a different way. These traffic improvements are paid for by the developer, and the project will not be approved until there is an agreement and surety bonds in place requiring the specified traffic improvements.