

## First voting student member hopes to bring new voice to Howard board

By Megan McIlroy  
Examiner Staff Writer

Getting more students involved is Reservoir High School junior Andrew Gavelek's main objective as the Howard Board of Education's first voting student member.

"I just think that the students aren't taking an active enough role and making their education how they want to be," he said.

Gavelek, an honor roll student and football player, earned the position in a systemwide election last week, beating Reservoir High sophomore Sarah Singer and Atholton High School sophomore Osama Eshera.

"I was surprised to hear [I won] because it was a tough race," Gavelek said.

About 24,000 students in grades six through eight — nearly 80 percent — cast votes.

The results were tabulated by Roger Plunkett, director of business, community and government relations for Howard County Public Schools, and Amy Butler, a Wilde Lake High School student and student elections coordinator.

"It was a major undertaking, but we survived," Plunkett said.

Legislation passed in the 2007 General Assembly gave Howard County's student board member partial voting rights.

Sixteen of the 24 school systems in Maryland have student members, and

**“I just think that the students aren't taking an active enough role and making their education how they want it to be.” — Andrew Gavelek, Howard Board of Education's first voting student member**

five school systems' student board members have partial or full voting rights.

"The student member is very knowledgeable, and we do care what the student has to say," board member Diane Mikulis said. "Having an actual vote is indicative of our position that we care about the students' voice."

The student board member cannot vote on redistricting, property acquisition, school and transportation route consolidation, employee and student discipline, budgetary matters, or personnel and collective bargaining.

"I am excited and nervous being the first [voting student board member], because we are not quite 100 percent sure what to expect from it," Gavelek said.

"This is a great step toward evolving student involvement."

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## ALPHA RIDGE COMMUNITY PARK

# Plans could include home for telescope

By Sara Michael  
Examiner Staff Writer

Beyond the bright lights of a growing Howard County lies a bastion of darkness well-suited for stargazing.

Alpha Ridge Community Park in Marriottsville has "relatively dark skies," sufficient parking for gatherings known as star parties and few trees to obstruct the view, said Joel Goodman, a member of the Howard Astronomical League.

As the county plans to redevelop the park, the 130-member league is advocating for a place to house an antique telescope and lighting that won't interfere with stargazing.

"We were looking to piggyback on that," Goodman said of the county's budget and design plans.

This year's proposed capital budget includes \$95,000, plus \$75,000 from prior appropriations, to design changes at the park, such as bathrooms, a lighted pathway, parking and a pavilion for the rollerhockey rink.

"We thought we would improve the park during this design process," said Gary Arthur, director of the county's Department of Recreation and Parks.

Meanwhile, the astronomical league wants to set up a handmade 1950 telescope.

"It's a beautiful historical piece," Goodman said.

For an astronomy group and hock-

ey players to coexist in the same park, the county must invest in low-intensity and specialty lights, such as full cutoff lighting, which contains the glow, he said.

"Lighting pollution is always a concern," Goodman said.

Lighting has been a contentious issue at Alpha Ridge, opposed by neighbors and amateur astronomers, said Council Member Mary Kay Sigaty, D-District 4, a founding but lapsed member of the league.

She said she would prefer no lights, but she was encouraged to see a partnership between the county and league.

"If we light every park, there is no place for people who engage in stargazing," she said.

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## Experts: Light pollution growing environmental problem

By Sara Michael  
Examiner Staff Writer

One hundred years ago, stargazers in the Baltimore area might have seen some 2,000 stars as they craned their necks toward the night sky.

"Now you are lucky if you can see three," said Tom Burns, director of the Perkins Laboratory at Ohio Wes-

leyan University.

Light from streetlamps, buildings, billboards and flag poles is often directed toward the sky, or the light bounces off surfaces, shattering the darkness.

The result is light pollution, which wastes energy, adversely affects wildlife and robs astronomers of their subjects, experts said.

"Light pollution is an environmental problem that is growing," said Bob Gent, president of the board of directors for the International Dark-Sky Association. "There are some dire consequences that most of us don't even think about."

Among the adverse affects of too-bright lights is that the glare can create unsafe conditions for the aging population, particularly when they drive at night, Gent said.

Wildlife also is feeling the burn. Migrating birds that use the stars to guide them become disoriented, and some sea turtles avoid the brightly lit beaches where they should be nesting, Gent said.

"Lights at night are adversely im-

pacting every species in one way or the other," he said.

The solution seems simple: Use the right amount of light only where it is needed, experts said.

Pointing streetlights down at the street, rather than into the sky, can help, Burns said. Full cutoff lighting fixtures limit the amount of light that escapes above a horizontal plane.

Another option is the use of low-pressure sodium bulbs, which are less offensive than full-spectrum white light, Burns said.

"All of these things will save energy and save money and the save the sky," he said.

However, the cost of replacing existing fixtures is prohibitive, according to a 2002 report from a state task force charged with reviewing lighting efficiency and light pollution in Maryland.

Opportunities exist to use efficient lighting in new construction, the report states, and the state should require properly designed lighting systems.

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## Twelve speed-enforcement cameras now stationed throughout Rockville

By Dena Levitz  
Examiner Staff Writer

Twelve newly installed speed-enforcement cameras now are stationed throughout Rockville in areas selected by a special citizens advisory committee. Drivers traveling 10 miles or more over the speed limit could be subject to \$40 tickets.

Police Chief Terry Treschuk said the idea is to encourage slower driving behaviors in problematic areas. The locations of Rockville's cameras are listed and mapped at [www.rockvillemd.gov/residents/police/speedcameras.htm](http://www.rockvillemd.gov/residents/police/speedcameras.htm).

Like the cameras in the unincor-

porated parts of the county run by Montgomery County Police, these cameras are in vans that move along a designated road.

Both programs also are being handled by the same contractor, Affiliated Computer Services.

However, Montgomery County's speed program is still in the warning phase. Program manager Maurice Nelson said he wants to allow more time for drivers to get comfortable with the enforcement concept before mailing them citations.

With Rockville, Treschuk said he thought he "had all his ducks in a row" and wanted to get to the part of the process that will produce a lasting effect actual enforcement.

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