



Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961...

The Voice Of The People of Howard County

March 12, 2013

To the Columbia Association Board of Directors:

The Howard County Citizens Association has been following the Columbia Association's progress toward the redevelopment of Symphony Woods with great interest. We support CA's efforts to enliven the Woods, to make it more of an attraction and resource for area residents and to increase its connectivity with the rest of Downtown Columbia.

While taking no position on the type of development being considered by you, we do have serious concerns with one piece you approved at your last meeting. At that meeting you approved the creation of a nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation to handle the day-to-day operations of, as well as the fundraising for, major new uses of Symphony Woods. This non-profit corporation is proposed to be funded, in part, from monies raised by CA from residents through the mandatory lien on Columbia property owners.

As a Maryland Home Owners Association, CA is subject to the sunshine provisions of law, such as providing residents the opportunity to speak at all meetings of the Board of Directors, advance notification of such meetings and public access to meetings unless otherwise specifically closed for cause. In addition, residents elect the members of the CA Board of Directors.

Non-profit corporations, however, are only required to make annual disclosures of certain expenditures and salaries. They are not subject to the same sunshine provisions as is CA and the members of their Board of Directors are not subject to the public's approval.

Part of our mission at HCCA is to speak for "sound fiscal policies and responsible administration of public funds". While we understand that you are a private corporation, you collect money from citizens of Howard County that is by all other measures similar to a tax. We question the advisability, the appropriateness, and even the legality of CA transferring the public's funds to a corporation for the operation of CA facilities when that corporation is not subject to the same sunshine requirements under which CA itself operates.

We are sympathetic to your need to raise additional outside funds for improvements to Symphony Woods. We agree that a nonprofit vehicle would be useful in this regard to encourage others to contribute. Many entities have formed "friend of" groups for just that purpose-the Friends of the Robinson Nature Center being a recent, local example. However, such a nonprofit should be limited to fundraising and not to operating any CA property or facility.

We request that you reconsider taking the day-to-day operation of CA property away from CA's control. For decades you have built and managed many properties around Columbia . There does not seem to us to be any difference between CA being able to effectively operate an athletic complex, such as the Supreme Sports Club, and your ability to operate the theater complex you are proposing to build in Symphony Woods. It is completely consistent with CA past practice, as well as open and transparent government to keep such control within CA's hands.

Thank you for your consideration. We would appreciate your feedback on this request.

Cathy Hudson, President
Howard County Citizen's Association