



Howard County Citizens Association

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The Voice Of The People of Howard County

January 20, 2015

HCCA is testifying against Resolution No. 2-2015.

HCCA began over a half century ago as an organization due to the proposed New Town of Columbia. Citizens were concerned about this 14,000 acre project and now we are concerned about the Urban Renewal Project for Long Reach Village Center (Project). HCCA has come full circle. Howard County designated this blighted area. We have major concerns regarding what has and has not occurred since this Project was announced last year.

1. It appears that several requirements for the Project as set forth in the Howard County Code, Subtitle 11, Urban Renewal have not been followed:

- Section 13.1105(d) with respect to "plans" has not occurred - there is no "Phase 1" of an Urban Renewal Plan that has been previously defined. Council Resolution 22-2014 was only the INITIAL approval of the Project and should have required that a Plan be prepared.
- Section 13.1106 Public hearings; approval of project has not been followed subsequent to County Council Resolution No. 22-2014. No plan is available other than the Project boundary map, no review has been done by DPZ, and there has been no opportunity for the public to review a plan.

2. It appears that the County is only interested in making Celebration Church the major tenant/owner in the Project. There is no "Plan" to revitalize this blighted area. In fact, Celebration Church is currently already part of this blighted area so this approach does not help. This is in direct opposition to the goals stated in the Long Reach Village Master Plan adopted in 2012 by the Long Reach Village Board as advisory to Howard County DPZ. None of their Master Plan anticipates a church.

"We are poised to accommodate businesses that wish to take advantage of this location but do not fit the big box store model. Any redevelopment needs to leverage the surrounding retail to benefit the village center. We support unique destination retailers as well as the usual village center mix of retail stores. For example, due to the surfeit of nearby grocery stores, we encourage a targeted market type of store that would not compete with but compliment a high-end market like Wegmans and traditional markets like Giant and Safeway in place of a conventional grocery store.

Long Reach is not adverse to a mixed-use approach to any redevelopment of the village center noting that the commercial, residential and recreational use must be proportionately divided with the main emphasis on the commercial and recreational components.

We want to see our village center set the standard for what a village center should and can be in the 21st century."

The description of the Master Plan further states:

"The plan provides guidance from the Village of Long Reach to the County and developers on the vision and planning concepts that are desired by the Long Reach Community Association as the village area changes over time. It is anticipated that this plan will be referred to as property improvements and development proposals are considered and to help guide decision-making about appropriate uses and design issues in the village area."

3. The joint Columbia Association and Howard County Market Study (Study) recently completed states that the following should be done for Long Reach based on the market:

- "As the last renovation was completed more than 15 years ago (1998), the physical condition of Long Reach Village Center is deteriorating. Buildings and common areas are outdated, poorly configured and sited, and in need of physical upgrades and improvements". None of the existing buildings are proposed to be changed, etc. Instead a condominium set up is proposed that perpetuates the outdated buildings and common areas. It will be impossible in the future to do anything else with this condominium set up for any future renovations. Since all condominium owners would have to agree and be bought out.
- "The retail demand analysis estimates that Long Reach Village Center could potentially support approximately 13,500 sq. ft. of restaurants/food service space. Currently, there is approximately 9,000 to 10,000 sq. ft. of existing food service tenants, suggesting demand for an additional 4,000 sq. ft. of restaurants/food service space at the village center. Given existing options at the village center, careful tenant selection will be needed to tap this potential demand for restaurants/food service space."

HCCA suggests that the County take into account the Study and develop a Request for Developer Proposals to redevelop the Long Reach Village in a comprehensive Plan vetted with the village residents instead of what appears to be a piece meal approach with no coherent strategy. The goal should be to ultimately return this village to a vibrant center.

4. Celebration Church received approval from Howard County in July for an Environmental Concept Plan for 301 parking spaces on 3.9 acres in the BGE right of way adjacent to their existing property. . The Village Center is turning into a huge parking lot.

5. It now appears that Celebration Church could not secure funding for the former Safeway location. We understand that now Howard County is required to buy this space for \$2.5 million. If correct, this Urban Renewal Project is now costing the County \$7.5 million. It may even be increasing the County's deficit from \$14 million to \$16.5 million.

6. Finally, we are very concerned with not only Long Reach, but all the Village Centers in regard to the redevelopment/revitalization process that is now needed after a half century. Master Plans are being laboriously adopted by Columbia's Village Boards and sent to the County. They need to be considered and integrated in the redevelopment/rehabilitation process.

Stu Kohn
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