

Date: 14 April 2016

Subject: Testimony to Planning Board Regarding Affordable Housing in Downtown Columbia

The Howard County Citizens Association (HCCA) asks the simple question that after seven years of various entities not taking a firm stance we should all be ashamed in not coming up with a solution that by this time should have residents occupying Affordable Housing units in Downtown Columbia. Does the County and Howard Hughes really care about the lives of our most valuable commodity? Yes – I am speaking about our teachers, policeman, fireman, EMS and hospital personnel, etc. After seven years why don't we see one unit designated as Affordable Housing in Downtown? Why are there as I understand presently 817 residential units built in Downtown but not one Affordable Housing unit? Why is the County supporting Howard Hughes 10 percent Affordable Housing allocation when the going rate throughout the County is 15 percent? This is undoubtedly a travesty!

Now we have two plans before us and from what I count at least 33 documents on the County website applicable to this case for the Planning Board to make a decision. We have ZRA-170, the County's plan and ZRA-162, Councilwomen Jen Terrasa's plan. After looking at these ZRA's it is inexplicable to us why ZRA-170 should in anyway be adopted as it calls for more units than the designated 5500 as stated in Plan Howard 2030. The County unfortunately has bought into this idea from Howard Hughes. We, HCCA are very disappointed with this decision. Plan Howard 2030 is the vision of Howard County and when it was written there was a reason for the 5500 units allocated in Downtown Columbia. It should not be amended to allow an increase in density. Our infrastructure can simply not handle it. By the way infrastructure is not just roads and schools. It is police, fire and EMS personnel. In 2014 we had over 183,000 911 calls as stated in the Annual Police Report found on the web. Can we afford such an increase in population especially regarding health care when we have one hospital in the County; can the hospital handle the increasing emergencies and need for more inpatient beds due to this proposed increase of units?

We find it interesting when Howard Hughes conducted their pre-submission meeting. They used in one of their slides the designated 5500 units, titled "Affordable Housing by the Numbers." You have to ask yourself why? They did this to slant the numbers to show the percentage of Very Low Income Units, Middle Income Units, Low Income Units within Downtown and Low Income Units adjacent to Downtown which would be a lower percentage had they used the additional 1010. I called them out on this and they stated it was a mistake.

Yes – the approval of ZRA-170 would be a major mistake for all of us. Please use your insight and think what is best for the county. How much more can we build without having a real strategic plan to ensure sanity. Please pass ZRA-162 as this is the one that makes the most sense.

Thank You,

Stu Kohn  
HCCA, President