

Downtown Columbia is it following Design Guidelines?

Dear County Council Members

Last week's Opinion page commentary in the Columbia Flier titled "Another Turning Point in the History of Columbia" represents, perhaps, the expectations of most residents and businesses. However, I believe two important aspects are being overlooked in advocating approval of the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and the plans for the next phase of Downtown development.

The benefits of the TIF primarily apply to the Crescent located on the far side of Merriweather Symphony Woods which is not what most people think of as Downtown, namely The Mall, surrounding neighborhoods and the Lakefront. Therefore the TIF will not enable completion of the whole of Downtown as is intimated.

The next phase of development will be The Crescent, but if the soon to be completed buildings on Broken Land and Little Patuxent Parkways are indicative of what to expect, it will not meet the Downtown Columbia Design Guidelines. The new buildings are too close to the street to allow for the green space, sidewalks, street trees, street furniture and amenities required and beautifully illustrated for various streets, avenues, boulevards and parkways. Unlike the original New Town Zoning, drafted by The Rouse Company now superseded by the 2010 Downtown Columbia Plan, the Design Guidelines do not specify how far each building has to be back from the street. This is now left up to the judgement of the developer, subject to review by the Department of Planning & Zoning.

So far neither have seen fit to follow the Design Guidelines, consequently the Columbia recognized nationally for innovative planning and design, will not become the better, greener urban environment originally envisioned and that this community, I believe, still expects.

Respectfully

Jervis Dorton