

Date: 23 July 2018

Subject: HCCA testimony on CB54 the Courthouse

Good evening,

I'm Susan Garber, speaking on behalf of the Howard County Citizens' Association, HCCA.

HCCA throughout the years has brought its members vital information in order to garner a greater understanding of the issues facing our county. As a watchdog organization, HCCA is seeking to understand some information which has been circulating recently within the community. It would be inappropriate and a failure of one's fiduciary responsibilities to categorize out of hand the information as "fake news" without pausing to examine the facts. Given the large amount of documentation provided to support the allegations it is imperative that the rumored findings be fully investigated. We are simply requesting that you pause to thoroughly examine information which has been presented before green lighting this bill.

The financial obligation relative to the new courthouse --now and 30 years into our future-- is staggering. Based on County figures of an annual operating budget impact of \$15 to \$16 million, over 30 years that represents \$450 million on top of initial construction costs, with a milestone payment of \$75 million at the time of occupancy. While on one level it is admirable that a creative solution was sought for funding such a large undertaking, perhaps the P3 arrangement is not in our best fiscal interest. Have we basically worked out a complex and costly scheme analogous to leasing a Ferrari when our Ford is still running?

Perhaps based on inaccurate information, activities simply began to snowball. CR27 provided the structure for proceeding full steam ahead but the recent rate of acceleration and perceived conflicts within the choice of location and within the bidding process are deeply troubling.

There is also the elephant in the room, the second devastation of Old Ellicott City in two years. The cost to repair and rebuild --and to mitigate the storm water issues-- may be the more pressing obligation at this time.

If I may present an analogy to family finances. Suppose you had gone through all of the planning to construct a garden room addition on your house. Just as you are about to sign on the dotted line it is discovered that not only is your foundation seriously deteriorating, but significant termite damage has also been detected. One might be forced to abandon the plans for the garden room addition until the more pressing needs to preserve your house are sorted out and paid for.

The most frequently heard reason for needing a new court house has been that the current one is overly crowded. Couldn't the same be said for our schools, for our roads, for our emergency room? The County has many needs. It is owed to the citizens that prioritization be transparent.

Additionally, if at this time when so much effort and money is going into bringing OEC back to life, shouldn't we more closely examine the negative impact to the businesses by removing a significant source of daytime business away from Main Street? Isn't this counterproductive?

While already owning the land on Bendix Road may have seemed advantageous, what does it ultimately cost us to move into new leased space the many departments housed under one roof in the Dorsey Building? Are we really expending \$8500 a month to a PR company? How does promoting the court house benefit us citizens? Did we really award a half million dollars to each unsuccessful bidder? How come? These and many, many more questions make one feel very uncomfortable.

The public, and you, deserve a full fiscal analysis and time to examine documents. Consequently entering into a Project Agreement should be delayed until such an analysis is complete. Tabling CB-54 at this time is in the best interest of the public.

We urge that concerns be fully investigated until such time we can all be completely comfortable with the results. Only then should a course be set. Full transparency is necessary to secure the public trust..... when setting priorities, when conducting needs analyses, when selecting contractors.

In summary, the HCCA would greatly appreciate it if the accusations presented by others would be investigated for accuracy and possible needed action **before** voting on CB54.

Thank you for your consideration.