

Date: 17 Sept 2018

Regarding CB 67-23:

The Howard County Citizen Association once again asks whether there is a master list of properties available to the County Council and to the public which identifies all properties owned or leased by our County government. While most bills to lease additional government space sail through this legislative body without comment, the sheer volume of leases warrants a closer look.

In a Columbia Flier article from August 8 of this year entitled *Howard county hires first energy manager* the County Executive indicated that the Howard County government has nearly 200 buildings with 2.5 million square feet of space.” Nearly **200 buildings** and yet we need more?

During your last legislative session back in July you were asked to approve three additional leases in order to accommodate county departments which would be leaving the Bendix building in order to make room for the new Courthouse campus. The bill before you now asks you to approve yet another lease as a result of the razing of the Bendix building. In this case, the Bureau of Environmental Services, which currently resides in the Gateway Building, apparently needs to vacate Gateway in order to provide more space for the Economic Development Authority.

Without any data to prove otherwise, county departments appear to be being shifted around willy nilly. Spreading the many services which were formerly housed at Bendix or Gateway appears to make these services less convenient to us, the customer. While we applaud the effort to place Citizen Services and non-profit agencies in a centralized location we are confused by witnessing the exact opposite approach for these Departments, Agencies, Divisions, and Offices.

The 3 bills passed for additional office space in July totaled over 18 million dollars for leases of from 5 to 10 years. CB-51 authorized moving Land Records, the Office of the Sheriff, and the Police Department’s Automated Enforcement to Elkridge for 5 years. Wasn’t part of the justification of the new Courthouse its ability to reunite land records and the Sheriff’s Office back under the same roof for citizen convenience?

CB-52 authorized moving the Dept. of Inspections, Licenses, and Permits; the Bureau of Engineering; the Bureau of Highways; and the Loan Closet to the Rivers Corporate Park in Columbia. Is the Loan Closet that’s referred to the one in Long Reach or a part of Citizen Services by the Non-profit Center?

CB -53 authorized moving the Bureau of Facilities to Owen Brown. Those 3 bills added almost 135,000 sq. ft. of leased space to an inventory of almost 2.5 million sq. ft. More importantly they obligated over \$18 million in rent as a result of demolishing a county-owned facility. This figure doesn’t include the financial and service interruption cost of relocation of files, furnishings, and equipment. One can only ponder whether county employees feel just like school children being redistricted to new locations further from their homes.

The agency being relocated in today's CB-67 for a much smaller space for over \$2 million for an 11 year term with abatements may on the surface appear well negotiated. But the point remains: How can the Council or the Public decide whether such Bills are in the best interest—both budgetary and for service provision efficiency—if they continue to be presented in isolation without a full accounting. A comprehensive list of all leased facilities should include the address, the firm engaged in the lease, the terms of the lease, and which County services are housed there. A map, not unlike the one Recreation and Parks publishes to indicate the location of their facilities and programs would be a most helpful accompaniment.

HCCA hopes this Council or the next will make such a full accounting of facilities priority legislation.

Susan Garber
HCCA Board of Directors