



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961...

The Voice Of The People of Howard County

Date: 18 May 2021

Subject: HCCA's Summary of Attention to Columbia – New Town District

The Howard County Citizens Association, HCCA has been asking for years that there be a comprehensive strategic plan regarding the Columbia New Town (NT) District and such strategies are completely enforced. We are pleased the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) is evaluating this in the HoCo by Design General Plan exercise.

During the years we have seen reports, evaluations and surveys related to Columbia NT. Several of our Board Members are residents of Columbia and are extremely passionate about where they live. You might want to refer to our website -- <http://howardcountyhcca.org/> on our home page to the left the fourth bullet and click on “Help Preserve the Vision.” Although old it is very relevant. Quite frankly we are dismayed that for all these years we seem to have no traction only mud thrown in our faces. If we don't act now and stick with a real strategic plan the results will only add to the numerous NT reports which have been propagated during the last decade. The following is a brief summation of what we would like to see DPZ to focus on relating to the NT District.

1. Establishment of rules, regulations, and policies to guide the redevelopment process in those in the Columbia business and industrial parks. Note: A process similar to the Village Center redevelopment process has been suggested.
2. Update the existing “design regulations” for the business and industrial parks. Currently, the County states that they have no control over enforcement since it is the responsibility of the Covenant Associations and Howard Hughes. This is only partially true because it's the role of DILP to only sign off on the development after it the has received relevant forms from the associations that show the development conforms to the Design Guidelines.
3. Enforcement of the non-residential covenants for the rest of Columbia New Town in the same way the “residential covenants” are currently enforced by the Columbia Association/

Village Associations. Note: The late John DeWolf agreed to transfer Howard Hughes's (HH) authority to the Columbia Association who is the co-enforcer of covenants. The county should facilitate this process. The county should also confirm that HH is the "original petitioner" there is evidence that General Growth is really the entity that has this role.

4. Expand the Columbia redevelopment process to include "out parcels" since these parcels are in the Columbia Planning Area.

5. Define the affordable housing redevelopment process to include new ideas and allow the increase in density only if it is compatible with the existing neighborhood PATTERN of development and do not burden future generations with extra maintenance costs. Increase the permitted density for Apartment Use in the FDP from 15 units per acre to 30 units per acre. Stipulate that the site coverage of buildings and surface parking shall NOT exceed that of the existing development that it replaces, OR 20% for buildings and 16% for surface parking. Fix the parking index at 1.5 parking spaces per apartment unit. Also require full basement parking under each building: the residual may be surface parking. Limit the maximum building lengths to 190 feet so they will be in scale with apartments and townhouses in the neighborhood. (See drawings below). Consistent enforcement by the Department of Planning and Zoning, Department of Licenses Inspections and Permits, the Columbia Association and the "Original Petitioner" is critical to ensure that what makes Columbia special is not lost.

Below are HCCA's suggestions for NT improvement as it relates to the HoCo by Design theme of PETS – Preserve, Enhance, Transform, and Strength.

Preserve

Preserve ALL the open space in Columbia to include the current park land, bike paths, trail and Symphony Woods. Areas that storm water run-off are directly to flood-prone areas.

The FDP's regardless of other changes to NT zoning. The concept and character of the Parkways to ensure a balanced and functional transportation system. The purpose of Parkways was to provide coherent restricted access to facilitate mobility and natural vistas.

Enhance

1. (Business) - more variety of types of businesses is needed on Route 1 and Route 40, especially the Eastern portion of 40.

2. (Residential) - We have heard that some projects have fallen into disrepair or have a lot of vacancies such as the River Walk. All properties which have fallen into the disrepair need to be revitalized.

3. Columbia (Commercial)

Develop regulations for redevelopment for the Business and Industrial Centers to expand employment opportunities.

4. Columbia (Residential)

Write zoning regulations to address the absence of provisions for the increase of density, outside Village Centers, for multifamily redevelopment. Allow them strategically, where parking is available and where it's not or there are narrow streets already causing emergency use problems that we age-restrict them. We are against any further increase in density in the NT district until at a minimum at such time the infrastructure is in place or funded.

Transform

1. The County should buy parcels in areas that are blighted, or there is not enough affordable housing. Then put those parcels into land trusts, and create permanent updated affordable housing across a larger % of median income ranges. Open Spaces should also be put in permanent land trusts.

2. Return Employment and Industrial to former uses (now gyms, religious store fronts, etc.) see planning idea for these areas that's based on Village Center revitalization (CB29)

3. Plan Seiling Industrial Park, East Guilford, GEAPE and Gateway They should be re-planned together to upgrade all to Grade A. Extend McGraw into GEAPE connect to Commerce Drive, cross Oakland Mills Road and connect to (Gerwig Lane) and (the other) interchange (on) Rt. 32. This might solve traffic congestion on Snowden River (Parkway). Curtail encroachment of retail outlets, worship facilities and warehousing in the Employment Centers.

Strengthen

1. Strengthen the Enforcement of all the regulations (GP, Covenants, Design Regulations, FDP's and CSP) related to Columbia NT by ALL parties, DPZ, DLIP, Howard Hughes and the Columbia Association.

2. DPZ review for compliance but consideration of plans is delegated to the Planning Board. It

would be better by a NT Advisory Panel and the adoption of evaluation Criteria

Your feedback regarding the aforementioned would be appreciated. HCCA stands ready to communicate with any and all interested parties.

Stu Kohn
HCCA President

