



## **Testimony**

### **Howard County Planning Board Thursday, February 5, 2009**

Thank you for giving the Columbia Association an opportunity to comment on ZRA-113. It is our belief that Columbia was founded on a masterful creative vision for its time. CA would like to see any development for downtown Columbia build on the values of Jim Rouse's vision and carry those values forward in a visionary design for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. This new vision must go beyond today's standards and set the standards for others to follow in every community across the nation, as Rouse's plan did when he created a community that is studied in urban planning classes all over the world.

In reviewing the proposals, CA commends the DPZ staff and GGP for their efforts in preparing a general concept and vision for the future growth and sustainability of Columbia's downtown. However, we are concerned that some important requirements are not clearly defined in the DPZ Key Recommendations, or are omitted in the proposed ZRA, and recommend several amendments.

CA recommendations tonight will be presented in two sections. The first section will detail those requirements CA would like to have included in the ZRA so they become enforceable. The second section will highlight DPZ Key Recommendations CA either does not agree with, or would like to have language modified or added. And finally, we will be submitting at the end of my testimony a matrix containing DPZ Key Recommendations, the GGP Response and CA's recommendations.

We will start with the three (3) requirements CA would like to have included in the ZRA.

The County should ensure that a Public Infrastructure and Amenity Plan is in the ZRA.

The ZRA should state that development rights will be allotted incrementally, on a phase-by-phase basis rather than up front rights to the full amount of development that GGP proposes. A Phasing Program, which specifies the projects and services that are necessary to support the proposed land development in each of 6 phases, should be adopted in Phase 1 by the Zoning Board after the County completes the Public Infrastructure and Amenities Plan.

CA agrees with the DPZ Key Recommendation that each phase shall include a list of infrastructure, restoration and amenity projects to be completed before the next phase can commence and we would like this language placed in the ZRA because we believe this phasing should be enforceable.

CA supports the need to identify a suitable location for a new fire station. In keeping with current practice, we believe the developer should provide land for the fire station.

Our next comments pertain to most of Theme 2 – Moving and Connecting People

DPZ provides comments on bicycle accommodations, feasibility studies on transit, adequate public facilities, the Route 29 overpass, transit hubs and corridors and parking systems.

CA's position is the ZRA should state that in Phase 1, the County will prepare a Public Infrastructure and Amenities Plan. It would identify the public infrastructure projects and amenities, such as transportation facilities, environmental projects, schools, playgrounds, expanded library, new fire station, satellite police station, and other enhancements, that should be included in the Phasing Program, a document that would be adopted by the Zoning Board.

The Public Infrastructure and Amenities Plan should confirm that new transit and road projects are feasible and can support the amount of development proposed for each phase. This Plan should include the results of a new County-sponsored transportation study that utilizes an advanced regional travel demand model, such as the one already developed by the Baltimore Metropolitan Council of Governments. Any projects involving US 29, MD 175, or their interchanges must also be analyzed and confirmed as feasible by the State Highway Administration.

The ZRA should state that the current Adequate Public Facilities standard for roads in Downtown Columbia will not deteriorate to a worse standard. Level of Service D (1450 Critical Lane Volume) should be maintained and the current concept of "constrained intersections" should expire. Traffic will need to be monitored and found acceptable in each phase before proceeding to the next phase.

The proposed pedestrian/cyclist/bus shuttle bridge over US 29 connecting Downtown with Oakland Mills should be studied as part of the Public Infrastructure and Amenities Plan.

The Transit Center, new transit system and parking systems should also be identified as part of the Public Infrastructure and Amenities Plan.

Let me move on to Theme 3 - #3.

CA's position is acre-for-acre replacement of parkland would only be acceptable if it is consistent with CA's vision and plan for Symphony Woods. Of primary importance to CA is the future of Symphony Woods. CA wants to protect the woodlands and create a park setting that is more user-friendly. CA is concerned that the two large buildings,

underground parking, and several roads proposed for Symphony Woods are in direct contradiction to CA's vision. Because CA is very concerned about the removal of many trees in Symphony Woods and wants to preserve the integrity of the parkland, CA does not agree with exchanging existing land in the heart of Symphony Woods for other land. CA agrees with the proposal for an attractive connection between The Mall and Merriweather Post Pavilion. However, a proposed cultural arts center should be included in the Lakefront neighborhood. In addition, we would like to advise you CA is working with consultants on creating proposals for a revitalized park in Symphony Woods, which will be available for public review in April.

Theme 4 - #3 - The ZRA should indicate that each phase should be approved through the County's existing 4-step process: Preliminary Development Plan, Comprehensive Sketch Plan, Final Development Plan, and Site Development Plan. The proposal to skip parts of the normal process by having only a Final Development Plan and Site Development Plan for Downtown development would significantly reduce the public's opportunity to review and comment on these high profile neighborhood plans as they evolve. Before a subsequent phase can begin, the County will determine that all of the public infrastructures and amenities are in place, traffic levels are shown to meet the existing level of service standard of D, and at least 3/4 of the development has been built for the current phase.

Finally, we would like to discuss the subject of annexation. CA strongly believes the developer must enter into a declaration of annexation with the Columbia Association and the appropriate Village. We ask the County to support this request and ensure compliance in the ZRA.

Once again we would like to thank the County and GGP for their efforts in preparing a general concept and vision for the future growth and sustainability of Columbia's downtown. Like many here tonight, CA has had a large number of meetings and spent countless hours taking into account the comments from our key stakeholders. We believe together we can build a lasting legacy and create a destination and home that will be the envy of many.

We look forward to being a partner in the planning and developing Columbia's Downtown, and we hope our comments and suggested revisions will be helpful. Thank you again for giving us this opportunity to testify.

I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.