



Town Center Community Association

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kevin Fitzgerald
Lynn Foehrkolb
Joel Broida
Dean Dworkin
Jamison Hibbard
Clara Pino

COLUMBIA COUNCIL

Lin Eagan

September 10, 2021

To: Howard County Department of Planning & Zoning
William Erskine, Offit Kurman for Brookfield Properties

From: The Board of Directors of Town Center Community Association

Subject: Pedestrian Bridge Located at 10314 Little Patuxent Parkway

On September 2, 2021, our Board representatives attended the pre-submission meeting for the removal of the pedestrian bridge located at **10314 Little Patuxent Parkway**. We listened to the presentation by William Erskine and his engineering colleague regarding the demolition of the pedestrian bridge and the completion of an at-grade crosswalk and pathway.

We appreciate all the input during that meeting from Barb Nicklas, Columbia Mall General Manager, as well as from companies (Merrill Lynch) and residents that were in attendance.

We do not agree that it is a good decision to demolish the bridge and in fact, feel that it should be refurbished or rebuilt to meet ADA standards including putting in an elevator on the "Whole Foods Side" if necessary and/or an ADA-approved ramp **WITHOUT STEPS**. In addition, ADA accessibility needs to be significantly improved on the side of the bridge that immediately adjoins the Merrill Lynch building. We would strongly encourage Brookfield Properties to include this project in their new capital plan as well as a new pedestrian bridge.

The Downtown Columbia Plan outlines ways to improve the walkability for pedestrians in the downtown area and does suggest "at grade" crosswalks as a solution to slowing traffic and improving walkability. However, in this case, we heard during the meeting that the 3,000+ Merrill Lynch employees and/or tenants working in the building at 10320 Little Patuxent Building, use the bridge daily (pre-COVID) to access Whole Foods and the Lakefront Area as it is the most direct pedestrian route. Once new buildings are built along the Lakefront Area, and in and around Wincopin Circle, the bridge would be used



Town Center Community Association

more extensively than it is today and would continue to be an asset to the community.

The proposed new “at grade cross walk” at Whole Foods ends at a dead-end hill to nowhere as there is a parking deck immediately above the hill. Without ADA-approved steps there is no way to get up the hill to access the Mall. The very long proposed path, quoted as being a 5% grade, leads from the Whole Foods intersection back to where the current bridge ends (see attached photos) and will require the unnecessary removal of street trees.

The proposed path that replaces the current bridge access will not be ADA-compliant, so we see no advantage to changing the current bridge status. Brookfield states that there is not enough money in their capital budget at this point to connect the proposed path with the current stepped Mall access. However, to avoid repairs to the current bridge, they would simply want to remove the current bridge access still leaving a non-ADA compliant Mall access at the stairs adjacent to the Merrill Lynch Building.

If safety is an issue as mentioned in the September 2 meeting, there are even attractive modular steel options that could replace the concrete bridge in the interim, before a larger deck promenade is built connecting the Mall area to the Lakefront.

We ask, why not either wait until funding is sufficient to complete the proposed path, making access to the Mall complete for those unable to negotiate steps (i.e., ADA compliant access from the Lakefront to the Mall). Or, think about an affordable redesigned/updated bridge that accomplishes that same goal. There must be more than a few ways to accomplish that, possibly through partnership funding. We do not see the urgency to remove a currently safe and easy access that connects the Lakefront and the Mall and again ask that another solution be found.