



Town Center Community Association

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March 3, 2021

FY 22 Howard County Budget Comments On Symphony Woods Testimony by the Town Center Community Association Board, March 9, 2021

Mr. Calvin Ball
County Executive
Howard County
George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

Howard County Council
All Council Members
Howard County
George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

RE: FY 22 County Budget Comments

Dear County Executive Ball and Howard County Council,

The Board of **Town Center Community Association (TCCA)** is asking for budgetary support of the Inner Arbor Trust's Concept Plan for **Symphony Woods** from Howard County government. It is our belief that the new concept plan would significantly contribute to the quality of life in the Downtown, Town Center as a whole, Columbia in general and, more broadly, Howard County. It will provide an enjoyable experience for all ages while remaining sensitive to the existing landscape in a space which is largely unused in its current form. It will provide better connectivity between the Merriweather District to the rest of Town Center, Downtown Columbia, and surrounding Columbia villages.

As one of many stakeholders invited into the development of the concept plan, I applaud the efforts of the Inner Arbor Trust (IAT) in the manner community members were engaged to offer comment and ideas. This collaboration across diverse backgrounds (business, development, local government, the arts, residents, etc.) across our county was inspiring and should continue as a model for projects to come.

The impact of the planned improvements at Symphony Woods should be a priority for the County. Jim Rouse's vision of an inclusive community, including lots of open space for all ages to enjoy continues to embody IAT's current concept plan. Central Park in New York City is typically cited as an iconic model for city parks. While Symphony Woods is a far cry in land mass, its geographic components echo the same elements, including the



serenity of walking paths, a venue for the arts in many formats, picnic areas for families to enjoy, creative playgrounds, and providing meaningful connectivity between Columbia neighborhoods. To those ends, please consider:

1. In 2020, with the advent of the COVID pandemic, residents searched for activities that were safe, fun, and healthy and have returned to National, State and County Parks in record numbers. This trend is expected to continue in 2021 and beyond.
2. In 2020, the State of Maryland saw a 45% increase in State Park attendance. Fifteen national parks set attendance records in 2020 **even though** some were closed for 3-7 months due to COVID-19 restrictions.
3. Investments in Parks like Symphony Woods are wise in any year but especially during times when people need safe open spaces in which to congregate and enjoy nature. TCCA encourages a private and public partnership to fund the concept of "Columbia's Central Park" as quickly as possible to take advantage of the general public's renewed interest in parks and outdoor recreation options.
4. Besides the more than 6,000 people who live in Town Center that can **walk, scooter, bike, and skateboard** to the Park, it is equally accessible to Oakland Mills, a short walk across the Route 29 Bridge and Hickory Ridge. Symphony Woods is located less than two minutes off Route 29 which is a major transportation route utilized by more than 150,000 cars passing by daily (north and south bound) with exits at Broken Land Parkway, South Entrance Road and Exit 20B Southbound off Route 29 (based on State of Maryland 2019 State Highway Statistics). Adding more amenities to Symphony Woods and making it a destination will attract more people of all ages and demographic spectrums in the greater Howard County area and beyond.
5. Within the Park, IAT already provides quality community events, many free and open to the public, such as Columbia Orchestra concerts, the popular Chrysalis Kids events, multicultural shows like Culture Plenera and Mystic India. Regular arts and cultural programming in the Park will attract interest and visitors that will tie into the vibrant "Merriweather scene" and make Symphony Woods the central gathering point within Town Center.
6. A "world class" park would help the marketability of the new housing and office space that downtown is looking to fill. We need people and business to make the downtown vision achievable: a walkable place to take your lunch break or an afternoon coffee would be a selling point for people/businesses looking to relocate to Downtown Columbia.



7. Symphony Woods already features one of the best, and iconic, concert venues in the United States: **Merriweather Post Pavilion (MPP)**. Joint programming during or around MPP concerts/events can only enhance the experience of residents and visitors in Downtown Columbia.

James Rouse viewed Columbia as a "garden for growing people." Why not enhance Columbia's largest downtown garden/park to grow people through inspiring sculpture, beautiful walking paths, spacious gathering points and picnic areas, fun interactive "hands on" art for young children and adults, and an inspiring tree canopy.

Thank you for considering our thoughts and suggestions.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions at **lfoehrkolb@yahoo.com**.

Sincerely,

Lynn Foehrkolb

**Lynn Foehrkolb
Village Board Chair
Town Center Community Association**

**CC: Board of Directors of the Columbia Village Community Associations
Columbia Association Board of Directors**