



**OWEN BROWN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION, INC**  
**6800 Cradlerock Way, Columbia, Maryland 21045-4809**  
**Phone 410-381-0202 Fax 410-381-0235**  
**www.owenbrowncommunityassociation.org**  
**e-mail: obca@columbiavillages.org**

November 13, 2009

Dear Howard County Council Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to present comments and concerns regarding ZRA-113 (County Council Bills 58-2009 and 59-2009). The Owen Brown Village Board supports both bills with the following comments/concerns and urges the Council to pass them. Changes for Downtown Columbia have been discussed and debated for several years and it is now time to decide what changes should be made and to provide a way forward for the future development of Downtown Columbia.

Redevelopment of Downtown Columbia should be done with respect to Columbia's vision. It should enhance the quality of life of the people who live or work in Columbia, ensure that Columbia remains an open, integrated, and caring community, and enhance the environment. Taken together these two bills move us in that direction. We are pleased to see that many of the changes proposed by the Planning Board and by organizations and residents who testified before the Planning Board have been incorporated into these two bills.

Overall, the Village Board is pleased with both bills. We strongly support the idea of phasing in the development and requiring certain elements to be completed before the next phase can be implemented. The County must closely monitor the development for each phase to ensure that all requirements are met and that development occurs as per the adopted Downtown Columbia plan. We offer the following comments/concerns regarding these two bills.

1. We do not believe that a school should be built in Downtown Columbia. Instead existing schools or school sites near Downtown should be utilized. This makes better use of existing resources. We suggest that the former Faulkner Ridge School could be re-purposed as an elementary school and functions currently located at Faulkner Ridge we relocated to a County multi-purpose building in Downtown Columbia.
2. We support the Columbia Association's plans for the development of Symphony Woods with the following changes:
  - a. The central circular sidewalk needs to be large enough and sturdy enough to host activities and booths.
  - b. Plans need to be developed for how to close Symphony Woods during activities (such as Wine-in-the-Woods and the Jazz festival) and when public safety concerns require closure.
  - c. A surface parking lot is not an efficient use of the land. If parking is required, then it should be either underground or under a building. The proposed parking lot could be used to construct a cultural building with parking incorporated into the building.
  - d. Symphony Woods is a great asset for Columbia and Howard County. In order to achieve its full potential both the County and the owner of Merriweather must join with CA to enhance the park and surrounding area. The County, through its bond authority, could help fund an appropriate parking facility.
3. A proposed cultural district should be located near Merriweather and not at the Lakefront. The premier cultural feature of Downtown Columbia is Merriweather and other cultural centers (such as theaters and museums) should be focused near it. This would allow a critical mass to develop and help make the cultural district a success. It would focus visitors for cultural events in one area which will have the necessary infrastructure to support these large events. We prefer to keep the Lakefront as it currently exists in terms of activities. The Lakefront would continue to be used for free, family-oriented, community-based activities such as CA's current Lakefront activities.
4. There will always be a trade-off between cars and pedestrians in Downtown Columbia. For the foreseeable future, cars will still be the primary way people will get to Downtown Columbia. Plans for development need to allow for both a walkable downtown as well as for intense car usage. This means that compromises will have to be made as redevelopment occurs.
5. We believe that the existing residential units which are already part of Town Center and which border the proposed Warfield neighborhood should be made part of the Warfield neighborhood.
6. Sidewalks, to be installed by developers, should be required along all public frontages in Downtown Columbia.
7. Any land dedicated/deeded to the County should be required (by deed) to adhere to the Downtown Columbia Plan and Section 125 of the Zoning regulations. The County is not currently required to adhere to zoning regulations.
8. All land proposed for residential use must be annexed to Town Center. This gives residents a voice in both Town Center as well as the Columbia Association. Otherwise, the residents will have to pay the CA lien, but will not have the ability to vote. This is not an acceptable situation. The residents living in the new 5,000 dwelling units deserve to have their voice heard at CA and Town Center.

Specific comments related to Bill 59-2009:

9. Page 10: What happens to existing commercial and residential uses already approved in FDPs for Downtown Columbia? These uses are currently calculated as part of the Maximum/Minimum usage table in Section 125. If these existing uses are removed from the table, then doesn't this allow significant enhanced development in the rest of New Town zoned land? Think of the Mall in Columbia. If its acreage is removed from the calculations for the table, won't that allow the equivalent commercial acreage to be used elsewhere? This opens the possibility that redeveloped land outside of Downtown Columbia could be developed at much higher densities and in ways different than currently envisioned.

10. Page 12: How much current land use capability (number of dwelling units and gross square footage for commercial uses) exists before we add the net new numbers? We suggest that the actual figures/numbers be included in Section 125.A.9.C.(5). Clearly these numbers must exist and will not change once the plan for Downtown Columbia is adopted.

11. Page 13 f.2: Won't the ability to use demolition credits anywhere in Downtown Columbia (not just on the parcel where the demolition occurred) allow for enhanced development on land parcels beyond what is proposed under the Downtown Plan or a neighborhood plan? We believe that there needs to be specific requirements placed upon demolition credits to justify using these credits on other parcels of land.

12. Page 28 #4: If the County is not required to track the net new development in Downtown Columbia, then how do we know how much is developed and how much remains? Nowhere in the Bill is there a requirement for the County to track net new usages just as the County tracks usages in the table in Section 125.A.8.

13. Pages 30/31 1A&B: These paragraphs give a property owner the ability to propose developments which are not compatible with the approved Downtown Plan. Is this really a good idea? If a property owner wants to propose a development outside the scope of the Downtown Plan, should not the property owner be required to first propose changes to the Downtown Plan via changes to the Howard County General Plan? And then if the changes are adopted, submit the proposed redevelopment.

14. Page 31 C: Copies of the proposed neighborhood plan should also be sent to the Columbia Association.

15. Page 38 F.2: Should specify that individual lots in residential areas does not include residential areas in Downtown Columbia. Areas in Downtown Columbia including residential areas should be required to follow the process set up for Downtown Columbia.

16. Page 44: Can the County provide one or two examples of how to calculate the required parking spaces in Downtown Columbia? It is difficult to follow the calculations referenced in the text of the Bill. We are concerned that too little parking will be available. For the foreseeable future, cars will continue to be the primary method of accessing Downtown Columbia. Without adequate parking people will be discouraged from visiting and this will defeat the purpose of redeveloping Downtown Columbia.

Finally, in order to make Downtown Columbia succeed, the County and the primary developer and the Columbia Association must work as partners. All must be involved in redeveloping Downtown Columbia and a positive working relationship needs to be created.

Thank you for considering our testimony.

Sincerely,  
Andrew C. Stack  
Chair, Owen Brown Village Board

cc: 9 other villages of Columbia; Columbia Association; DPZ; GGP, County Executive

