



Advocacy Alert

May 19, 2015

Downtown Columbia Affordable Housing

ACTION REQUESTED

1. Send emails as soon as possible to County Executive Allan Kittleman (akittleman@howardcountymd.gov) and County Council Chair Mary Kay Sigaty (mksigaty@howardcountymd.gov) in support of affordable housing as Downtown Columbia is redeveloped.
2. Participate in the May 27, 5:00 p.m.—6:30 p.m. “Stand In” for affordable housing in Downtown Columbia. (Additional information will follow.)

Background

Jim Rouse had a vision of a “New Town” (Downtown Columbia) in which every neighborhood offered an opportunity for all to live, work and play together regardless of income. In 2005 when the plan to re-develop Downtown Columbia was put in place the new vision included a “Full Spectrum” of housing. That meant that a portion of 5500 housing units that were to be built would be affordable for households earning between \$30,000 and \$60,000 a year.

Fifteen percent of these housing units—800-plus—were to be for the types households that in large measure ACS members serve. We know them as hospital technicians, hotel employees, retail sales persons, restaurant managers and waiters, teachers, school support personnel, librarians, nurses, deliveryman, bus drivers, policeman, young families, first time professionals, government employees and even our own social service and nonprofit employees.

The Administration, Council and Community 2005 full spectrum housing vision thus far has failed to materialize and is at risk of never coming to fruition. Thus far, over 800 units of housing have been built with no low-income affordable housing units. The anticipated new Crescent retail/housing development of 2300 housing units appears to be moving forward without inclusion of another 350 low income affordable units.

Attempts to negotiate an agreement that will result in affordable housing at the levels originally envisioned appear to be stalled. It is likely therefore that legislation will be introduced requiring housing affordability. Now is a critical time for the community to let County leadership know that there is strong and broad public support for low-income affordable housing in Downtown Columbia. Please reach out to your Board, staff and volunteers—encourage them to email County leadership now and join May 26 “Stand In.”

Key points to consider as you communicate with County leadership. Please share your personal and/or organizational viewpoint.

- Affordable housing advocates do not wish to see 5,500 units of housing situated in the core of Columbia making it an exclusive enclave for only high-income families.
- The Rouse vision of inclusion and diversity continues to have the highest potential of ensuring the economically viable, vibrant new Downtown Columbia envisioned by County leadership and residents.
- In a County that has a shortfall of over 6600 affordable housing units for households making less than \$50,000, it is unacceptable to lose the opportunity to create over 800 affordable units.
- The diverse set of low-to-mid income (\$30,000-\$60,000) families and individuals who work in Columbia, should have the opportunity to live near where they work—HCGH, HCC, the mall, our nonprofits, the library, etc. Conversely, the employers who need these workers should be able to attract employees because there is affordable housing in the community in which they will work.
- Moderate income housing is a requirement in every other County residential zone. Why should Downtown Columbia be exempted from the same requirement?
- Whether through negotiations with the Columbia Downtown developer Howard Hughes or through new legislation, County leadership has a responsibility to ensure that the full complement of 800-plus affordable housing units is achieved in Downtown Columbia.

For additional information, contact Executive Director Joan Driessen (joan.driessen@acshoco.org) or Public Policy Committee Chair Jackie Eng (Jacqueline.eng@verizon.net).

###