

Columbia Downtown Focus Group

Minutes from Meeting April 5, 2006

Issued: April 18, 2006

Review of Focus Group Meeting Minutes from February 15, 2006

Focus Group members wished to discuss the question posed at the bottom of page 2 of the minutes: Should residential uses be incorporated into the Corporate Boulevard district?

- Could be a conflict for use of parking, Merriweather Post and corporate uses may overlap. Would need parking management.
- Recommendation hasn't been fully resolved yet.
- Look at it, allow it to happen if market justifies it, don't allow developers to over exercise their ability to build residential;
- If it is allowed as a matter of right, need to restrict it and define how much would be allowed.

Review of Focus Group Meeting Minutes from February 22, 2006

Focus Group members had no comment about the minutes.

Public Meeting Minutes and Summary of Themes from February 27, 2006

The Focus Group requested two changes to the minutes and discussed various aspects of the public meeting comments:

- Minutes should identify Delegate (not Representative) Bobo.
- Evan Coren stated that the minutes glossed over his (and other) comments. The minutes did not list his measurements of the dimensions from the stairs to the American Cities Building, demonstrating his case against the proposed Wincopin Street.
- Delegate Bobo presented her memo expressing pleasure at the change in the schedule, her request that the Focus Group seek a new direction by reviewing the panels prepared by the 36 tables of charrette participants and expressing concern that few questions have been posed about the zoning, which should be a major implementation issue.

DPZ Reply: DPZ has all 36 panels and a video of the 36 presentations. Minutes of those presentations (prepared by DCI) and a summary of the exit surveys are also available. All documents can be reviewed by the public at DPZ.

DPZ Reply: Zoning is a major part of implementation and will be dealt with in more detail at the next Focus Group meeting.

Affordable Housing

Steve Lafferty of DPZ told the Focus Group that County Council Bill (CB-22) had been introduced at the County Council meeting on Monday April 3. The legislation is intended to provide more flexibility to developers in meeting their Moderate Income Housing Unit (MIHU) obligations, but requires more from them in return. The legislation uses the Howard County, rather than Baltimore area, median income to define affordability. Steve provided handouts (available on the web page) that detail Howard County income levels.

Neil Gaffney of the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Focus Group about the County's low and moderate income housing programs. He provided a copy of that presentation as a handout (available on the web page). He noted that his definition of terms and incomes are based on Federal standards and referred the audience to the DPZ handout for County standards. He described the County's "tool box" approach, explaining the variety of programs and giving examples for low and moderate projects. Neil also emphasized that units for lower income residents almost always require extensive public sector subsidies to produce.

The audience expressed surprise that the November 2005 average sales price for all SFA/SFD, new and resale, was slightly over \$500,000. He explained that with the current affordability indexes, a \$158,700 three bedroom home is still not affordable in Howard County, so the County has equity interest in moderate income homes. A potential solution dealing with property taxes is not part of the current MIHU legislation but could still be looked at in the future. The new legislation that offers 100 housing unit allocations for affordable units provides incentive for one and two bedroom units.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

- Can affordable housing be resold at market rate?
HCD Reply: Howard County can buy out the affordable housing owner and resell the house as an affordable unit with shared equity. Howard County can also take its equity and reinvest elsewhere.
- Which of Howard County examples are affordable to an entry-level teacher?
DPZ Reply: Patuxent Square, but probably not the others.
- How can you do affordable housing in a development like The Plaza Residences, especially with condo fees?
DPZ Reply: The new zoning for Downtown will have a requirement for affordable, but the Plaza development does not have any requirement because it is under New Town zoning.
- In some projects lower floors of high-rise are designed to be the affordable units.
- It is difficult to provide affordable units in projects that have high amenities. The Columbia lien also makes affordability a challenge when added to mortgage, taxes and condo fees. Another challenge is the Federal Fair Housing Act, which makes it hard to mix seniors and others in the same project.
DPZ Reply: May have certain product in Downtown that lends itself to affordable, others will not be adaptable. Builders may need to adapt product types to get affordable units.
- Can we get cash contributions rather than an affordable unit in a luxury high-rise condo?
DPZ Reply: Fee in lieu is allowed as option in the new legislation.
- The Crescent could be model community. The economics could make it easier because land is already owned by the developer. It could be a mixed market like the Jim Rouse ideal.
- At Patuxent Square, how does the developer fee work?
HCD Reply: The developer is waiving fee and reinvesting it into project. There are developers who look for these opportunities. We need to advertise our tools.
- For CB 22-2006, we need to understand how it relates to presentation. Of concern: how does a developer get out of the requirement by going to the director?
DPZ Reply: Developer has the option to satisfy requirements by alternative methods, offsite or with alternative unit types, they cannot get out of the requirement. The MIHU legislation asks for annual report to track success of new proposals.
- Could you make more money by paying fee?

- HCCA will testify about need for an analysis of housing needs. How much can we produce?
DPZ Reply: Information about this topic is available at a meeting being held on April 6, 3:00 to 5:00 pm, Ellicott Room, Howard Building. The County has an MIHU Workgroup for the issue. We need a greater variety of ways to get affordable housing.
- Government sector and major employers could help by providing affordable housing for their own employees.

Implementation Strategy Work Program

Bill Mackey introduced the Implementation Strategies chart, gave an overview of the proposed work program and led a discussion of the Implementation Strategy issues on the April work program.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Low income isn't included in the strategies.
DPZ Reply: Legislation does not provide for low income housing. Moderate and medium income housing would be provided by developer. Low income housing requires Federal, State and local government assistance. The developer must bring the housing price down to a moderate level, then the housing commission can bring down to a low income level. The County has been successful at providing low income housing through working with developers.
- Other percentages have been suggested. Has DPZ's original proposal (10% moderate, 5% middle) been changed based on discussions?
DPZ Reply: This is the original proposal; it will go into our zoning proposal. Final discussion will occur as part of zoning discussions and Focus Group concerns will be duly noted.
- What is the Focus Group being asked to decide or concur with?
DPZ Reply: Concur that this issue has been discussed sufficiently, that the implementation strategies handle it appropriately, and that a way for making further decisions involving public input is available.
- Are we being asked to concur with 10% moderate and 5% middle?
DPZ Reply: No, just that there is a process in place for making this final decision.
- Will School & Fire Station locations be decided before the Master Plan is approved?
DPZ Reply: This will be done through the processes that have been identified. Potential locations will be discussed further at the next meeting when we will discuss civic, cultural and community facilities.
- Does this mean the end of discussions on affordable housing?
DPZ Reply: The topic has been taken as far as it can within this group, other process are in place to make the final decision. DPZ will include a statement on low income housing in the Columbia Downtown Master Plan (CDMP). The County cannot require that it be provided by the developer in a Master Plan, if it is not part of County regulations and requirements. HCD believes that low income housing is being addressed by County programs.
- Members should make their opinions known to County Executive.
- Can the Administration support low income housing or make testimony to the County Council?
- Three low-income projects were given as examples of the Administration's actions. Low income projects grow out of individual action by developer and county negotiations.

- Do not have closure on this topic, we are moving on to another, but want to talk more at the next meeting.

SCHOOLS

- Location is important; need prime accessible site.
- Isn't the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) the group to decide this?
- We have opportunity to pick site before development happens.
- Will the site be adequate? Need extended conversations with HCPSS. They build suburban schools, this is not a suburban project, are there urban school models that we should consider?
 - DPZ Reply:* There is a public process in place at the School Board level to make this decision. The Focus Group is asked to rely on that process.
- How can we know that the size of the site is right for the need? It is up to the school system. We can not concur unless know the model.
- Size and redistricting will be part of solution.
 - DPZ Reply:* This is the third time that each of these implementation issues has been brought to the Focus Group, each step moving us toward a strategy. First was the Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) sheet. FAQ discussions led to the summary and key recommendations in the Implementation Strategy chapter of the Preliminary Draft Master Plan. In response to audience comments at the February 27 public meeting, the current work program identifies additional strategies and documents the processes that are in place to ensure successful resolution of the issue. The chart shows the way that the issue can be resolved through a process that involves continued public participation. The additional strategies and processes in the chart will be incorporated into the next draft of the Master Plan.
- Each topic on the list of Implementation Strategy issues is a whole system. Some are beyond this group.
- Schools issue is more than just timing. Are there other models for urban schools? Columbia envisioned something different when it was first built.
- We want to see more offices and residences in The Crescent. Do not use it up for a school. If you need to provide schools, what other options are available? Enlarge other schools?
- Are we concurring? Should we be worried that someone will think the group has "signed off" on an issue if we move on?
- Vibrant pedestrian oriented Downtown needs students walking to school, not school buses in Downtown.
- Keep balance in perspective. If you have a large school site, you could lose housing and offices, other need uses. Are we going to an extreme in our discussion? DPZ is not asking us to sign on to everything they propose. Have we gotten it to a point that we feel the strategy can be implemented? Is this proposal understandable enough? Focus Group is not going to decide all of these things.

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

- Most members concurred with move forward on this issue; however, two contrasting opinions were:
 - Not okay with *anything* the government would come up with.
 - Not going to second guess the Fire and Rescue Service over their selection for a station.

LIBRARY

- The group offered comments similar to those above concerning Fire and Rescue Services.
- Focus Group is making suggestions. Make sure you look at the options, the possibilities. Have we thought about how the public uses integrate? Have we thought about how they relate? Are we going to do things the same way or in new and different ways?
- Focus groups generally have a facilitator and let people talk and record their views. What is the role of this Focus Group?
DPZ Reply: The title is meant to imply that the group is a sounding board for the County as the plan evolves.
- Discussions are being cut off. This is a thirty-year plan, we need to take time.
- Columbia was planned in less than a year by a group of professionals, nothing from that group was codified, and no promises were made that their ideas would be implemented. The developer has kept promise over thirty-eight years with plan flexible enough to accommodate change. We need to trust government, especially on technical issues like fire stations and water and sewer. All the proposals will be thoroughly reviewed at public hearings.
- Whose idea was it to conceive a Focus Group and put these issues forth? There is distrust of some government decisions.

WATER AND SEWER

- The group agreed that we move on and do not need to discuss the issue further.

MERRIWEATHER

- Can DPZ confirm that restrictions will be on The Crescent properties, not on Merriweather Post Pavilion?
DPZ Reply: Yes, restrictions would be placed on new properties in The Crescent.
- Developers will want balconies to face the park, how can they be sound proofed? Not sure that this will be enough, it could all end with Merriweather being closed down.
DPZ Reply: Interior space will be sound proofed, not balconies.

ENVIRONMENT

- Can public buildings be required to be LEED-certified green buildings?
DPZ Reply: DPZ will add this recommendation to the Columbia Downtown Master Plan.

Proposed Schedule

Mina Hilsenrath presented a draft schedule that provides two alternative timelines for (I will fill in the rest later)

DISCUSSION

- Lots of construction could happen in Downtown under the old regulations between now and September 2007.
DPZ Reply: The Crescent cannot go forward without a zoning change, but the rest of Downtown could be developed.
- How many units can be built in Downtown under current zoning?
DPZ Reply: Only 400 more residential units are allowed in all of Columbia (without a rezoning).
- Want more deliberate process. Option 2 makes sense; it gives the Council time before they have to decide.

DPZ Reply: We do not have to decide which option to select now. If there is a strong consensus on issues, we won't need extra Focus Group sessions in the fall.

- Don't need to review Design Guidelines over again, just see the changes. We want an opportunity to comment on revisions. This will take trust. Delaying the process could allow more development. The Council should consider a moratorium.

DPZ Reply: The Crescent is probably not at danger of going forward any time soon.

- Any danger of another Plaza building going forward?

DPZ Reply: Nothing is in the pipeline now. Projects take a long time, but some projects could begin to go forward.

- Could GGP commit to doing any further developing in the spirit of the Master Plan?
- Doug Godine of GGP will join at the next meeting. Rouse / GGP has collaborated for thirty-eight years, they have responded to community requests. Extreme steps like a moratorium are not needed.
- Biggest issue is still the road system. That needs to be decided before the Master Plan goes forward. May need to give more time to Planning Board portion of the process, but start it in the fall.
- It would be a mistake to give this to the new Council as their first action.
- County Council needs to be briefed and all the candidates need to be briefed. Ask them what they want and when they want it. What is their level of interest?
- Those that are interested are aware. Governments change every four years. We need to plan for 30 years.
- Want to meet after the traffic analysis is submitted to discuss it.

DPZ Reply: It is on the May 24 agenda. Information will be sent to Focus Group members to read before the meeting.

Next Steps

Bill Mackey asked if the Focus Group wished to continue meeting at the same regular time (3:00 pm Wednesdays), at the new location (Historic Oakland) and with the same membership. He noted that Oakland is not available for one of the proposed meeting dates and thanked Pat Laidig for making Oakland available to the group.

- The Focus Group concurred with the meeting schedule and membership proposal.
- Evan Coren asked if he could be added to the Focus Group. He noted that he will continue to attend and participate, but would like to participate more fully as a member.
- A member of the audience suggested that the meetings need to be controlled more so that consensus could be reached more quickly.

Attendees

Focus Group

Bobo, Liz
Brown, Maggie
DeVerneil, Andre
Edwards, Al (Miller / Godine)
Gray, Karen
Hekimian, Alex (Mary Pivar)
Hollis, Robert
Kirsch, Phil
Laidig, Patricia
Malone, Jud
McCord Nancy
Mugane, Bridget
Parrish, Jane
Richardson, Lee
Saleem, Mohammad
Talkin, Richard
Tennenbaum, Robert
Tousey, Hugh
Tsien, Chris

Council Reps

Feldmark, Jessica
Templin, Scott

Guest Speaker

Gaffney, Neil

Press

Blakely, Andrei

Public

Adams, Carolyn
Broida, Joel
Chambers, Joann
Connolly, Duane
Connolly, Liz
Coren, Evan
England, Brian
Holland, Rosa
Howell, Sherman
Klein, Alan
Knowles, Lloyd
Kondo, Ursula
Lapine, Chuck
Lawson, Marvin A.
McLaughlin, Jo
Rudlin, Barbara
Schnackenberg, Barbara
Scott, Ginger
Scott, Tom
Seidel, Mary Ruth
Sigaty, Mary Kay
Terrasa, Jen
Walter, C. Edward
Wengel, Linda

DPZ

McLaughlin, Marsha
Lafferty, Stephen
Hilsenrath, Mina
Blaumanis, Dace
Clay, Randy
Mackey, Bill