

Columbia Downtown Focus Group

Minutes from Meeting May 3, 2006

Issued: May 18, 2006

Welcome and Introductions

Marsha McLaughlin introduced Doug Godine, GGP Vice President and General Manager of Columbia, who is replacing Dennis Miller on the Focus Group. Mr. Godine, in turn, introduced Tom Seiler, GGP's Director of Planning and Design, who was in attendance at the meeting. Among other duties, Mr. Seiler is responsible for architectural review in Columbia.

Review of Focus Group Meeting Minutes from April 5, 2006

Evan Coren asked that revisions to February 27 minutes, as described in the April 5 minutes, include the dimensions that he cited for the Wincopin Street area near the American City Building and the stairway and grass amphitheater. Mr. Coren agreed to email those dimensions to DPZ so they could be reported fully and accurately. The following was subsequently provided by Mr. Coren:

- From the bottom of the steps on the northeast corner of the American Cities Building to the point where if the top edge of the grass amphitheater is extended north is 22 feet.
- The Design Guidelines say that DPW has said that in order to get a 15 mile an hour street (the special street in the diagrams) that is designated to run on the top edge of the grass amphitheater as southern extension of Wincopin 10 foot wide lanes are required.
- To have a northbound and southbound lane will thus require a 20 foot wide street leaving only one foot on either side for a sidewalk and thus not very walkable.
- If you got rid of the steps you would have an over 5 foot drop from the sidewalk that on the American Cities side of the street to the street. Again this is not very walkable.

Update on Low-, Moderate- and Middle-Income Housing

Steve Lafferty of DPZ updated the Focus Group on the status of proposals for moderately priced dwelling units in Downtown and in the County:

- DPZ's recommendation for affordable housing in Downtown remains 10% moderate, 5% middle.
- CB 22-2006 seeks to amend housing code to change range of incomes, add a middle income category and provide options to meet requirements. <http://www.co.ho.md.us/CountyCouncil/CCdocs/CB22-2006.pdf>
- CB 23-2006 proposes designating housing unit allocations for affordable housing. <http://www.co.ho.md.us/countyCouncil/ccdocs/cb23%2D2006.pdf>
- Public testimony and the Council expressed concerns about several aspects of the legislation; amendments may attempt to resolve issues of concern.
- The legislation was tabled by the Council for further study.

FAQ # 17: Cultural, Civic and Community Facilities

Mina Hilsenrath introduced the Frequently Asked Question sheet and asked Focus Group members to respond to the many questions posed in the FAQ.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

- Wouldn't it be nice if each office building had space for art, we wouldn't have to go to commercial venues. We should encourage sculpture too. Does art need an incentive?

- Building owners will be interested, but a concern is security and access. Retail spaces may more easily accommodate than office or apartment buildings.
- Time Warner building in New York is an example of how this can work. Locations need to be selected, won't occur throughout downtown buildings.
- One percent for art could be required of public sector and could be encouraged for private sector. Many things could count: sculpture, lighting, a gallery space, etc.
- Village Centers might be a more reasonable/affordable venue for community art.
- The Merriweather Post Pavilion (MPP) report lists what art venues are needed, this list is on page two of the FAQ.
- Can we create live-work units to allow for an arts environment?
DPZ Reply: The zoning won't be an impediment. Cost is usually a constraint; market rates can make it challenging.
- Glad that grass amphitheater by the Lake is included, it needs to be addressed.
- What about neighborhood pools? This was one of Rouse's values. Concerned that pools would be exclusive if they are provided as an amenity for residential developments.
- Watermark, Gramercy and Evergreen have their own pools.
DPZ Reply: Typically Columbia has provided pools in most villages.
- Originally Rouse wanted a pool in each neighborhood, but soon the Columbia Association realized it couldn't keep up with this goal.
- Density bonus will be given by the rezoning, so could someone donate land (maybe 50% of the downtown land) for facilities? Downtown developers should not expect the Columbia Association to do it all. The County also has some responsibilities.
- Zoning is not a gift, it is land planning that says what the government wants to have happen in a particular location.
- Profit will be reaped, it is not reasonable to expect a downtown partnership to provide the facilities.
- What do you want the Downtown "story" to be? What do we want it to be? An exciting place with galleries, plays, etc. Do we want it to happen in a multi-use space?
- These things (cultural facilities) happen when people come to a place. Different models can get to the end result. We have a community college. Some facilities should be public; some Columbia Association. We can not write it all into the plan now.
- The plan can encourage civic, cultural and community uses. How is the exhibit building used? It is rented as a sales center, but it could be used for community activities. Add it to the list.
- Rouse gave land to Columbia to build facilities. Now the approach is build, build, build. New builders should provide land for facilities like Rouse did in the beginning.
DPZ Reply: Developers will be required to provide urban amenity areas.
- We need an endowment to make this happen.
- Many endowments already exist, may not be able to support even more
- Two issues: what is needed; how do you get there? Zoning can help establish amenity requirements, guidelines will define more about sites and how facilities are incorporated into mixed use facilities. How do we define how much, where?
- Where is a community center? Should Downtown be thought of as a neighborhood or part of the Town Center Village? Does Downtown need its own community spaces in plan?
- Need for community space depends on why people are coming to the Crescent and to Downtown. Parking becomes an issue if people are attracted to the area for facilities.
- Parking is important; especially if the new development goes where Merriweather parking was.
- The plan shows a community or civic building on Little Patuxent parkway (LPP), but we wouldn't want a pool on LLP. This community use has to have its own parking; underground in other buildings isn't the answer.
- Annapolis has solved the parking problem with fringe parking and shuttle, be careful of shared parking.
DPZ Reply: MPP parking must be replaced before anyone can build on the Crescent. No one can build without providing parking.

- Mass the cultural facilities together – it helps trips, works best with festivals and creates a “park once” environment.
- We need to know where we want facilities to go. What sites should be reserved and where should they be? Civic and cultural uses say the most about who we are. They should have the finest architecture that reflects our values. They should not look like or be in suburban office towers. The sites should be in prominent, focal point locations. It’s not just about getting it built, but operating it over long term. We need a partnership to do needed programming of the spaces.
- What we have in Columbia and in Downtown already exceeds other similar communities.
- If we want arts as the Downtown identity, do we also want a swimming pool?
- We don’t have a complete inventory? Plot out what we have and plan for parking. What is the attendance at events? Do we really need certain things? Ideas about a Columbia Association headquarters have evolved; it could include civic and cultural uses. If we reserve space, what does it need to be? Be sure we put our money into things that are worth it. At a population of 90,000 people, some of these ideas don’t work.
- We want an art cinema.
- Look at possibility of trading things, uses should be sustainable. Concentrate them at the college and provide connections to the college from Downtown.

FAQ # 18: Design Advisory Panel (DAP) Process

Bill Mackey introduced the Frequently Asked Question sheet on the Design Advisory Panel and asked for comments from the Focus Group.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

- Why is the DAP advisory to staff, not the Planning Board?
DPZ Reply: Everything in Downtown goes to the Planning Board, but the DAP covers other areas of county that don’t get Planning Board review. The DAP process has to work for Route 1, Route 40 and conditional use senior housing as well. Staff consolidates all comments in their recommendations and decisions. The Planning Board will be looking at the DAP recommendations.
- The process is simple and straightforward.
- Can the Planning Board approve something that is ugly but meets criteria?
- This is an advisory function that works best as a dialog.
- Who selects what guidelines are used to select members? Could there be conflict? Wants to see the guidelines in writing.
DPZ Reply: Members are appointed by County Executive and the County Council must approve members at public meetings. If a conflict of interests occurs, members would have to recuse themselves from the discussion of that project.
- Need to be specific about the disciplines to include on the DAP.
DPZ Reply: The DAP will be a balanced membership, with members having technical expertise in their fields.
- It would be a good idea to have a lay member. They have different opinions than experts.
- The presubmission community meeting is where citizens will speak about their issues.
- Some ways of obtaining community input work, others don’t. We need to find out more about what works best for community review meetings.
DPZ Reply: There are other venues for citizen input. It is important that the DAP focus on design issues.
- Town Center presubmission meetings and DAP are advisory not mandatory actions.
DPZ: They are advisory because other regulatory requirements may supersede community and DAP comments. Applicants must comply with DAP recommendations unless there is a regulatory reason not to.
- It’s a good process. I am satisfied with it, let’s do it.

- Seems like it works, there is opportunity for public input.
- Public input isn't always responded to; it should be responded to.
- Where does it show that the DAP action is mandatory?
DPZ Reply: At the bottom of page three it says recommendations are advisory to the Director, but compliance is required unless specifically modified by the Director.
- Is it advisory or an approval? How many times would an applicant have to go back to DAP to gain approval? Need to clearly spell out process and intent, so it isn't like the Baltimore City process with 3 or more rounds of review. If it is advisory, the DAP shouldn't be approving or rejecting anything, only recommending.
DPZ Reply: The Design Guidelines present good direction for DAP decisions. The City is revising its process. The old City's process is arduous, and that is not our intent. We are still working to define the required level of detail for the review.
- Don't know enough about Design Guidelines to know how this will work.
- What will the DAP be bound by – their architectural principles?
DPZ Reply: They will be bound by the Design Guidelines. The DAP will help refine the process; staff also will work on process.
- Important to provide advice, but remain concerned about the requirement to comply.
- “Required to comply with DAP recommendations, unless...” This follows intent of the new Baltimore recommendations. Prefer the statement: “Generate dialogue with applicant and consultant that will lead to the best possible project.”
- Need a good design manual as basis for decisions.
- Applications should be posted on line.
DPZ Reply: Not able to post them at this point.

At the conclusion of the discussion, DPZ noted that this DAP proposal originated with the Route 1 Corridor Revitalization study. The idea of design review to ensure quality projects in the corridor was supported by several Route 1 developers. Last year, several members of the Downtown Columbia Focus Group participated in a DPZ round table discussion of design professionals to discuss models for design review. The DAP process will go through additional rounds of public review. Representatives from Downtown, Route 1 and other areas subject to the DAP process will all participate in that review.

FAQ # 19: Draft Zoning Regulations for CDO District

Due to the length of the discussion on FAQs 17 and 18, DPZ suggested that the discussion of the proposed draft zoning regulations for the Columbia Downtown Overlay District be deferred to a later meeting.

Schedule

- Focus Group wants 10 to 15 days to review the traffic study before next meeting on May 24.
DPZ Reply: Will get send the traffic study to the Focus Group as soon as possible, but cannot commit to a date at this time.
- Should the meeting be pushed back? Can it be a public meeting in the evening?
DPZ Reply: The traffic study will be brought to the public, but DPZ wants to start with Focus Group.
- This afternoon time works for the Focus Group and the many people who attend many meetings.
- Zoning would take an entire meeting. Should we do zoning at the May 24 meeting and delay discussion of the traffic until there is enough time to review the report?
DPZ Reply: To consider zoning at the next meeting and the traffic study at the June 14 meeting, we would need another meeting to discuss the development program, fiscal study and monitoring at the end of June.
- Agreed by consensus of the Focus Group.

Attendees

Focus Group

Brown, Maggie
Coren, Evan (Liz Bobo)
DeVerneil, Andre
Douglas Godine
Gray, Karen
Hekimian, Alex (Mary Pivar)
Hollis, Robert
Kirsch, Phil
Laidig, Patricia
Malone, Jud
McCord Nancy
Mugane, Bridget
Orenstein, Toby
Richardson, Lee
Sosinsky, Tim
Talkin, Richard
Tennenbaum, Robert
Tousey, Hugh

Press

Blakely, Andrei

Council Reps

Feldmark, Jessica
Templin, Scott

Public

Adams, Carolyn
Albanese, Tony
Birnie, Dunbar
Cole, Ray
Dunbar, Harry
England, Brian
Feldmark Joshua
Greenback, Laura
Hoke, Judy
Howell, Sherman
Johnson, Rebecca
Ketley, Jeanne
Klein, Alan
Levy, Julian
Knowles, Lloyd
Mikkelsen, Lisa
Meskin, Stephen
Seiler, Tom
Sigaty, Mary Kay
Taylor, William IV
Terrasa, Jen
Wengel, Linda

DPZ

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