

Village Center Revitalization

King's Contrivance Village Center Listening Session

May 21, 2008 Session Notes

These meeting notes provide an overview of the presentation and meeting discussion. Comments are organized by topic, rather than arranged in the order that they were made.

Introduction

Mina Hilsenrath, Kimberley Flowers, and Tom Sprenkle of the Department of Planning and Zoning, Candace Dodson-Reed, the County's Community Liaison, and Jessica Feldmark, Senior Advisor to the County Executive, were present at King's Contrivance Village Board meeting on May 21, 2008. There were eight people in the audience, including Councilperson Jen Terrasa and Special Assistant Mary Clay. Mina Hilsenrath opened the listening session with the Village Board and Village Manager, and an open discussion ensued.

Village Discussion

What works well?

The Village Board unanimously agreed that the new Harris Teeter supermarket has made the village center "alive" again, especially now that one-stop shopping can occur. The range of merchants was appreciated by the board, as is the open and convenient nature of the village center, the pedestrian walkway, and that it is seen as a gathering place by the King's Contrivance village. The nearby presence of Amherst House and the interfaith center was also described by the Board as a positive asset.

What might be changed?

The Village Board was concerned that Kimco showed little interest in working with the village or the local merchants. Before Harris Teeter opened, Kimco regularly let maintenance issues slide by unattended, and trash frequently piled up in the trashcans. Concerns about crime and safety became an issue. While the Board was glad that Kimco brought in Harris Teeter, they still felt that Kimco could be a more responsive landlord. Kimco has refused to support programming of events in the village center, and by comparison, the board noted that Wegman's has a reputation for being active and involved in the local community.

The other issue at King's Contrivance is parking. The village center's parking lots and street access are poorly designed, and encourage dangerous driving. There are also no parking spaces designated for short-term parking to allow people to make quick errands. Howard Transit needs to move the location of its bus stop in response to the poor design of the parking lot and the limited amount of drop-off area.

What should be the Process for Village Center Revitalization?

Mina Hilsenrath brought up Howard Research and Development's (HRD) gatekeeper role and that the current zoning process doesn't address revitalization. The Board agreed that a gatekeeper was necessary, and Columbia should remain true to its history as a master planned community. It was suggested that the Board or the Columbia Association should be the gatekeeper in lieu of GGP. A member of the Board suggested that a hybrid relationship between the village boards, CA, and the County, might be the ideal solution for the gatekeeper who oversees the revitalization of the village centers.

The Board pointed out that people are frustrated with the Planning Board's role in the New Town process, and as it stands, the process is too confusing. In addition to the New Town Zoning process, the village centers have different covenant controls. Too often, many village managers are left unaware of possible changes to the village centers until the process is well underway. The Board asked that all village centers have the same oversight over future developments, and that the new process be more open and community based.

The Board, however, recognized that there are other village boards that do not necessarily want to see any changes to their village centers and to the process.

The Board supported a community based master plan process, to ensure the community's role. Pre-submittal community meetings should be required for both commercial and residential projects. The Board supported a design advisory panel. One member suggested that there should be laypeople on it.

What Land Uses Might be Appropriate in the Village Center?

The Board emphasized that it is important for the village center to remain the focus point of community life. The Board accepted the possibility of residential development in the village center, but pointed out that it comes with special issues and concerns, such as crime, traffic and security. The Board expressed particular concern over future traffic problems that might affect a higher density village center. It's possible that in a reconfigured King's Contrivance Village Center, transit stops and parking could be placed below the new retail and housing structures.

The Board expressed a desire to limit the encroachment of big-box stores into the village centers and that future development be constrained by height restrictions. The Board suggested that in the future, mass transit linking the various village centers may have an important role, and the redesign of the village centers should reflect this.