

Howard Hughes: Building A 21st Century Urban Village

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How often does a developer get the chance to spearhead the redevelopment of an entire downtown area?

The answer, says **Howard Hughes Corp.** vice president of development Greg Fitchitt, is simple: once in a lifetime.

Howard Hughes has been master developing downtown Columbia, Maryland, since **Howard County** passed an ambitious plan in 2010 to encourage walkable **mixed-use** development.

The plan calls for up to 13M SF of total development, including 5,500 residential units, 1.3M SF of retail space and 4.3M SF of new office space.



In one sense, the redevelopment's aim is to accommodate the economic demands of a boom in the region.

The county has seen a 34% growth in population over the past decade, per U.S. census numbers.

Its position roughly equidistant to Washington, DC, and Baltimore, along with affluent demographics — the county's median household income is over \$110K — mean it has the potential to attract major employers and become an even greater economic engine for the region.

But in another sense, downtown Columbia's rebirth is about unfinished business.

The city, which turns 50 this year, was the product of visionary developer **Jim Rouse**. Fitchitt's team at Howard Hughes has been tasked with marrying Rouse's vision of a harmonious and livable village with contemporary planning principles like higher density, walkability and sustainable design.

Fitchitt said the downtown area's original design has one significant hiccup, which he said is not so much a failing of Rouse's as a product of shifting tastes and a growing understanding of what works best in architecture and planning: Columbia was built around the automobile.



While the city, situated on the wooded shores of Lake Kittamaquidi, was laid out to include walking and biking paths, its original layout included far more surface parking and lower overall density than contemporary vibrant mixed-use commercial districts typically have.

The redesign includes measures to enliven the city's sidewalk life, along with a major bike route connecting Howard County Community College with the downtown core.

About 1.4M SF of new construction is either under construction or has been delivered, and the results can already be seen.

The **Frank Gehry**-designed former Rouse Co. headquarters has been transformed into a new **Whole Foods**.

MedStar Health has moved into One Merriweather, the first office building to arise in the city's core in the past 15 years.

Luxury apartments are attracting young professionals and empty nesters.

And the storied Merriweather Post Pavilion is undergoing a multimillion-dollar expansion and renovation with a redesigned ground floor that will include an innovative new restaurant and cocktail lounge with live music.

The pace of development will soon escalate: a \$90M tax-increment financing package passed in late 2016. It will help pave the way for Howard Hughes to develop two new office towers totaling 700K SF, another 750 residential units and 150K SF of new retail.

"Rouse wanted Columbia to be a real city, not just a better suburb," Fitchitt said. "And now it's getting a chance to live up to that goal in a much more full way."

We are thrilled Howard Hughes has joined us as a founding partner of our **Bisnow Beltway Bash**, to be held at the TAO Nightclub in the Venetian on Monday, May 22, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. in Las Vegas. [Register here](#).

See Also: [Donohoe Proposes Conversion Of Tenleytown Office Building To 716-Unit Residential Project](#)

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