



To: Columbia Association Board of Directors  
From: Jane Dembner, Director of Planning and Community Affairs  
Subject: Lakefront Core Neighborhood Design Guidelines  
Date: September 8, 2017

## **Introduction**

At its September 14th work session, the Columbia Association Board of Directors (Board) will be discussing Howard Research and Development's (HRD) development proposal for the Lakefront Core Neighborhood in Downtown Columbia. This memo provides an overview of the required development review process and opportunities for public comment; summarizes the development proposal; and outlines CA staff identified issues and related activities to date.

## **Downtown Development Project Review Process and Opportunities for Public Comment**

When development is proposed in Downtown Columbia, the following submission documents are required: a Neighborhood Concept Plan, Neighborhood Specific Design Guidelines, a Final Development Plan (FDP) and a Neighborhood Specific Implementation plan. An Environmental Concept Plan is often included in the submission documents because it is required before the Site Development Plan (SDP) stage, but is not a requirement at this time. The FDP process for Downtown Columbia development requires a number of steps. Below those are outlined with project-specific dates (as known) for the HRD proposal. In addition, opportunities for public comment are highlighted.

- Pre-submission public meeting (held in June) where there is an opportunity for community input
- Design Advisory Panel meeting (held in June) where this is an opportunity for written community input only
- Submission of FDP and related documents to the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) (HRD submitted plans in July)
- County staff technical review of the plans (community input to DPZ by phone, email or letter)
- DPZ meeting with and written comments to applicant (September 6, 2017)
- Applicant resubmittal of plans within 45 days (due by October 20, 2017)
- County staff review of revised submission
- County staff determination that application is complete
- DPZ schedules Planning Board public hearing (hearing not anticipated until 2018)

- Planning Board hearing (community input at the meeting)
- Planning Board makes decision
- If FDP is approved, then applicant may continue on to a similar review process with the more detailed SDP

### **Overview of Lakefront Core Development Proposal**

HRD proposes to develop its property within the Lakefront Core Neighborhood of Downtown Columbia. The proposal includes four blocks/building sites. From south to north these are the lower level parking lot south of the Whole Foods building, the parking lot adjacent to the Teacher's Building, the former Copeland's restaurant site and associated garage site and the Exhibit Center and associated parking lot. An amenity area (Amenity Area A) is planned on the site of the existing Teacher's Building.

While specific building programs for building blocks/sites in the Lakefront Core neighborhood are not prescribed until the SDP stage, the overall development program proposed is a maximum of some 509 residential units, 54,244 square feet of retail uses and 113,402 square feet of office uses.

HRD's proposes an expansion of the Lakefront Core Neighborhood boundary to include the Teacher's Building and associated parking lot, as well as the former Copeland's restaurant site and associated garage site and a commensurate reduction in acreage in the adjacent Lakefront Neighborhood. HRD has also requested additional building height, a new private road connection and the relocation of a planned amenity area within the neighborhood to provide a stronger visual and pedestrian connection from the Columbia Mall to Lake Kittamaqundi. These changes are documented on the proposed FDP and related documents including the Lakefront Core Neighborhood Design Guidelines.

County Council adopted Downtown-wide Development Guidelines in November 2010. As each neighborhood develops, the applicant must prepare neighborhood guidelines, which are then used to evaluate the design elements of neighborhood projects. The proposed Lakefront Core Neighborhood Design Guidelines are comprised of the following sections: introduction, urban design, street design, amenity space, architecture, signage, definitions and an appendix, which includes sustainability, bicycle facilities, Downtown Community Commons Policy and Preservation Guidelines (for the former Rouse Company building).

### **CA Staff Identified Issues and Related CA Staff Activities to Address These to Date**

#### *Building Massing*

While the specific profile and massing (the shape of the buildings) will be addressed at the SDP stage, CA Planning staff has concerns about the massing of the proposed buildings at this point in the process and, as a result, raised this issue with DPZ and asked that it be addressed at the FDP/Neighborhood Design Guidelines stage of the development process. Specifically, we asked that there be written guidance to have the buildings step-down in height from their highest

point along Little Patuxent Parkway to a lower height along the Lakefront Plaza side of the building site. The DAP, at its June 14th review meeting, also discussed the importance of varying building heights and the need to step-down height particularly along the lakefront side. DPZ's September 6, 2017 memo to the applicant on required revisions and additional information needed includes a stipulation that the applicant add language to the Building Form and the Architecture sections of the Lakefront Core Neighborhood Design Guidelines, with specifications and diagrams showing building massing and building step-downs.

### *Building Height*

HRD has proposed to increase the building height on the former Copeland's restaurant and associated garage site and the Teacher's Building parking lot from nine stories to 15 stories: an additional six stories on two building sites.

CA planning staff has concerns about the potential impact the additional height would have on CA open space including the lakefront green and plaza, particularly related to building shadows and shade. One way to understand these potential impacts is with a building shadow study. Generally these are done using various days of the year to account for the seasons and varying angles of the sun. Earlier this summer, CA planning staff raised this concern with the developer and also in writing with the Director of Planning and Zoning. We asked that the shadow study be requested of the applicant. DPZ's September 6, 2017 memo to the applicant on required revisions and additional information needed includes that the applicant provide a shadow study.

### *Lakefront Visual Access/Amenity Area Relocation*

The Downtown-wide Design Guidelines envisioned the continued existence of the Teacher's Building and therefore had the east-west Mall to Lakefront amenity connection in a location to the south. The proposed Lakefront Core Neighborhood Design Guidelines and FDP envision Amenity Area A where the existing Teacher's Building is located, to provide improved access and views to and from Lake Kittamaqundi. Shifting the location of the amenity area as proposed provides a much-needed view corridor to and from the lake. This also complies with the Downtown Columbia Plan recommendation of creating a stronger visual connection between the Columbia Mall and Lake Kittamaqundi. The DAP recommended and reinforced the need for clear and open visual access to and from the lake in this location and CA planning staff agrees with that recommendation.

### *Private Connector Roadway*

In the Downtown-wide Design Guidelines, the street framework reflects the existing street layout in the Lakefront Core Neighborhood. The petitioner has proposed a street framework change in the Lakefront Core Neighborhood Design Guidelines to extend Wincopin Circle adjacent to the east side of the existing Teacher's Building and connect to the existing travel way in the Teacher's Building parking lot with access to Whole Foods. It is proposed as a private street, which the neighborhood guidelines state provide "the ability to close down this section of the

street will allow for greater flexibility for programmed events, temporary outdoor dining and community festivals.”

CA planning staff find this to be an important connection to improve pedestrian and local traffic flow within the Lakefront Core Neighborhood. Staff also agree with the DAP’s recommendation on June 14 regarding treatment of the Wincopin Street extension in which they stated that the applicant “...design the Wincopin Circle connection as a predominantly pedestrian-focused experience, with flexibility to limit vehicles during special events. This connection should be prioritized - 70% on pedestrians and 30% on vehicles. On-street parking should only be on the retail side of Wincopin Circle extension, not along the green and amenity space side.”

#### *Parking Deck Screening at Lakefront Edge*

HRD has proposed a residential tower to be built over an above ground parking garage on the current site of the lower level parking lot south of the Whole Foods building. From Little Patuxent Parkway, given the grade change, the garage will not be visible. However, it certainly would be visible from the Lake Kittamaqundi side of the building. This is a concern, given that Lake Kittamaqundi and the lakefront are central amenity spaces in Columbia.

While the proposed guidelines do state that garages facing amenity areas should be screened, CA planning staff is concerned about the potential negative visual impact of the garage on the lakefront environment and people who enjoy the beauty of this area and view it along the pathway from both sides of the lake and from the water. We raised this issue with the DPZ Director and asked that this be addressed. DPZ’s September 6, 2017 memo to the applicant on required revisions and additional information needed includes a stipulation that the applicant add language to the Lakefront Core Neighborhood Design Guidelines to “strengthen the requirements for architectural detail and screening along unwrapped portions of parking garages where they front or are visible from amenity spaces. *Standard/basic screening is not sufficient in these locations.*” (*emphasis added*)

#### *Multi-use Pathway*

A ten-foot wide multi-use pathway is planned along the eastern side of Little Patuxent Parkway. This will be a great benefit to improve pedestrian and bicycle circulation within and around Downtown Columbia. CA owns a strip of land along the corridor that currently includes a sidewalk in this location. CA’s land holdings vary in width along the corridor, but in this area, it is approximately 30 feet wide. While the land is owned by CA, CA planning staff understand that the requirement to build the pathway would fall upon the developer of the adjacent lands. In this case, HRD. We have asked DPZ to clarify and confirm this during the current FDP stage. Of course, the applicant would have to request and receive an easement from CA to access and construct this pathway.

### *Parking*

Many people visit the lakefront to enjoy the natural beauty of this open space amenity, socialize and participate in events hosted there. CA planning staff raised the issue with DPZ about the need for public parking for lakefront users. Shared parking has worked to date but as the Lakefront Core and the larger Lakefront Neighborhood are redeveloped, this will need to be addressed. DPZ's September 6, 2017 memo to the applicant on required revisions and additional information needed includes a request that the applicant "consider addressing in note form on the FDP, how parking will be handle to accommodate for existing and new open space aw well as for the existing and new development."

### **Board Discussion**

These and other issues are to be discussed at the September 14 Board work session. CA planning staff will be on hand to provide additional information and answer the Board's questions related to the proposed Lakefront Core development.