



**HCCA**

**Howard County Citizens Association**

*Since 1961...*

*The Voice Of The People of Howard County*

Date; 19 October 2020

Subject: TAO1-2021 – Transfer of funds to Cultural Center

The Howard County Citizens Association, HCCA urges a no vote on this transfer of appropriation ordinance.

This is not the best way to spend County dollars and use County credit. We have public infrastructure that faces increasing pressure. We have overcrowded schools with the last count of 234 portables and schools with increasing class sizes, teachers are being asked to take a pay cut, we need money to pay for police body cameras, we need to pay for roads, and we recently almost raised recordation taxes to pay for some of these short falls. The county's debt financing cost is over \$100 million annually and we have \$100s of billions of dollars in issued debt.

Frankly the County has undertaken similar boondoggle projects where benevolent causes such as affordable housing are comingled to make the proposals more acceptable to the public. Unfortunately, the county has little to show for them because the developer reneges on its promise to build affordable housing with little accountability. Consequently, the county's affordable housing suffers every year.

The Downtown Columbia Plan offered Howard Hughes Corporation bonus density in particular 5500 additional units, TIF dollars and an extremely favorable DRRA's with nearly zero affordable housing to date. Why?

This is a risky proposal not the least of which is due to the concerns raised with respect to the operational risks, but also the financing scheme.

This was revealed when County Executive Ball sponsored legislation (CB74-2017) to repeal the Downtown Columbia TIF in 2017, a competing resolution (CR124-2017) to expand the TIF district was proposed by former Councilwoman Mary Kay Sigaty.

County officials at the time said that the TIF was not backed by the guarantee of special tax revenues that can be levied to pay back the bonds, which goes against County policy. According to testimony, it's called a "naked TIF".

While the issues of affordable housing and the arts are confounded and comingled in this particular case, the Housing Commission Executive Director at the time of the proposed "naked" TIF said the affordable housing and Arts Center rely on distinct sources of funding. The affordable housing component relies on tax credits and other financing. It does not rely on the nearly \$55 million bond. The bonds are intended to pay for a 500-space garage- these were the exact words of Councilperson Mary Kay Sigaty at the time.

But, when the proponents conflated the two projects it confused people. This is a typical tactic employed to syphon taxpayer dollars. Commingle projects and funds with benevolent projects or goals to make it politically difficult for people to oppose a bad idea.

The County Executive wants to use \$34 million from TIF revenue that the County should be using to pay off bonds for the crescent district. This misappropriation is like taking one credit card and paying off another and is a prime example of how County leaders have misappropriated County funds while our infrastructure languishes.

We urge a unanimous no vote.

Hiruy Hadgu  
HCCA Board of Directors

## Sayers, Margery

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**From:** Ray Donaldson <rtdonaldson@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 27, 2020 12:54 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Jung, Deb  
**Cc:** Marshall Cynthia; Mary Ka Kanahan; Farrell John; Leslie Linda; Curran Phil & Stephanie  
**Subject:** Re: TA01-FY2021

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Members of the Howard County Council,

I enthusiastically support everything John Farrell says in his statement below. John and I are of the same vintage when we moved to Howard County. My wife and I moved to Howard County on our third wedding anniversary in 1972. I am now 80 years old. Beginning in Columbia we have lived in three different places in Howard County since then. Some years ago Fran and I each made a list of where we would like to live when we were both retired. Only one place was on both of our lists: "Stay where we are." That has turned out to be moving from the home we loved and lived in for 34 years in Fulton to where we have lived the past 4 years in Ellicott City, but we will "Stay where we are" in Howard County.

We live in perilous times; the county must act with vision as John Farrell and Margaret Meade have said.

Shalom,

Ray Donaldson

On Oct 27, 2020, at 8:39 AM, [jbfarrell@comcast.net](mailto:jbfarrell@comcast.net) wrote:

Dear Council Members,

During the council meeting on Monday October 19 dozens of citizens testified passionately in support of affordable housing and the New Cultural Center. We heard testimony how the arts have immeasurably enriched the lives of those who have participated directly in theater productions, classes, training and performances, as well as the effect on audiences who have been enriched by attending a variety of performances.

In contrast to the heartfelt, passionate testimony of the positive, life-affirming experience of the arts, the council was focused only on the financial question and possible shortfall of funds to support the project. An admirable demonstration of fiscal responsibility, to be sure. I'm grateful for the council's sense of fiscal responsibility and admirable stewardship. I'm also grateful to council members Ms. Jung and Mr. Yungmann for their amendment to the budget last May to place funds for the New Cultural Center in contingency, thereby 'keeping the ball in play'.

How do we typically realize our goals? What is it that brings some large complex public projects to fruition, while other seemingly worthy projects wither and die unrealized? First, there is the dream and the shared vision of possibility. Next, the gathering of resources, of which financial resources is just one component, and, ironically, actually not the most important one. With sufficient financial resources committed (rarely 100% of the final cost) the project proceeds.

Fear and doubt begin to creep in, threatening the viability of the project. We've all experienced this because we are human. Do we succumb to the fear and quit or do we dig deeper into our True Selves, reconnect with our dream and

passion and move forward? I believe this is the essential ingredient that makes the project possible. Perhaps it was at such a crossroads that Margaret Meade said this:

**“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”**

Thoughtful, committed people get their energy first from the heart, from the power of love. That’s the energy that Jim Rouse tapped into. The energy of love was at the heart of Jim Rouse’s vision for Columbia. It was love that enabled him to envision a community offering quality housing and amenities for all of its residents; including those workers with more limited income and monetary resources. Affordable housing and a cultural center in downtown Columbia was part of the original vision for Columbia.

I call upon the Howard County Council to boldly and courageously vote unanimously to support the complete downtown development project. You can demonstrate inspired leadership in these exceptionally challenging times and make a way for Howard County to move into the future, continuing to make Jim Rouse’s vision of a community of equality and creativity a reality.

With the entire council behind the Downtown Development Plan and the creativity and passion of Howard County residents, the complete success of the project is the only possible outcome.

Thank you for your thoughtful and heartfelt consideration.

John Farrell  
District 4

## Sayers, Margery

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**From:** Susan Rose <susanhillsrose@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 27, 2020 8:50 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Support for affordable housing and arts center

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Council members,

I moved to Howard County nine years ago when I married. I immediately missed the sense of an artistic center anywhere. It seemed to me a profound failure of Rouse's vision. I was also very aware of the dearth of affordable housing, which required some people who worked in the county to live outside it. We need both to become the community we can and should be.

Please proceed with the previously approved vision of a more equitable and vibrant community.

Sincerely,  
Susan Hills Rose  
5455 Wingborne Ct.  
Columbia, MD 21045

## Sayers, Margery

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**From:** jbfarrell@comcast.net  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 27, 2020 8:39 AM  
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**Subject:** TA01-FY2021

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John Farrell  
District 4