



Howard County
Internal Memorandum

Subject: Testimony and Fiscal Impact Statement
Central Library, Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement

To: Brandee Ganz
Chief Administrative Officer

From: Felix Facchine, Deputy Chief of Staff
Office of the County Executive

Date: October 23, 2025

PURPOSE

Council Resolution No. CR__-2025, seeks action by the County Council to endorse next steps to implement the Downtown Columbia Plan and the Downtown Columbia Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement (DRRA) with respect to the Central Library. The Resolution endorses action by the County Executive to enter into a purchase and sale agreement with Howard Research and Development Corporation (HRD) for the fee simple acquisition of land for a new Central Library at the Columbia Lakefront, draft a land swap agreement pursuant to the DRRA, and prepare a project financing plan for inclusion in the FY2027 capital budget.

BACKGROUND

The Downtown Columbia Plan was unanimously approved by the County Council on February 1, 2010, by CB58-2009. The Downtown Columbia Plan was a General Plan Amendment that adopted the revitalization and redevelopment plan for Downtown Columbia over a 30-year planning horizon. On November 9, 2016, the Downtown Columbia Plan was amended by CB52-2016, which revised the Downtown Columbia affordable housing program and provided a new plan for affordable housing in Downtown Columbia. Along with the amendment to the Downtown Columbia Plan, the County Council approved and authorized the execution of a Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement (DRRA) between Howard Research and Development Corporation (HRD) and Howard County on November 9, 2016. The DRRA outlined implementation of the affordable housing plan for Downtown Columbia, which includes the creation of 900 Affordable Units at or before Full Residential Build Out in Downtown Columbia. Of these 900 Affordable Units, 417 Low Income Units are required to be built by the Howard County Housing Commission (HCHC) in partnership with the County, HRD, and the Columbia Downtown Housing Corporation (CDHC).

The Downtown Columbia Plan and the DRRA also called for the development of a new Central Library in Downtown Columbia. Planning for a new Central Library has been in the works for nearly 20 years. In 2008, Howard County Library System's (HCLS) Master Plan called for a new Central Library. In 2010, the Downtown Columbia Plan was approved, which called for a new Central Library in Downtown Columbia that "could move the Howard County Library in the direction of an 'Experience Library,' an intellectual, interactive learning center combining visual exhibitions with interesting architecture and typical library elements." In 2016, the DRRA reaffirmed the plans to construct a new Central Library in Downtown Columbia. In 2019, Howard County Library System hired G4 Architecture, a firm that works with libraries across the country, to update its Master Plan, underscoring the prioritization of a new Central Library.

In Spring 2023, the County announced plans to construct a new Central Library branch at the Columbia Lakefront. That same year, the State of Maryland contributed \$10 million in restricted grant funding to advance planning and design of a new Central Library at the Columbia Lakefront. Locating the Central Library at the Columbia Lakefront creates more capacity for mixed income housing at the Merriweather site originally designated for the library in conjunction with affordable housing in the DRRA. This plan also accelerates the redevelopment of the existing library site for much-needed mixed-income housing.

After approximately two years of additional public engagement and planning, in May 2025, the County Council directed the County Executive to advance plans for the new Central Library at the Columbia Lakefront by purchasing land for the library from HRD in fee simple. The County has engaged with HRD, HCLS, and HCHC during Summer and Fall 2025 to discuss parameters of a land transaction for the new Central Library and the Merriweather Affordable Housing site. Under this arrangement, HRD intends to sell a portion of the property located at 10227 Wincopin Circle in fee simple to Howard County for purposes of the County constructing a New Central Library consistent with the conceptual design presented in March of 2023. Pursuant to Section 4.4.C. of the DRRA, HRD is also prepared to enter into a purchase and sale agreement to convey the C-1 parcel in the Merriweather District, for mixed-income housing as referenced in the DRRA, at no cost to County, which will then convey the parcel to HCHC.

This Council Resolution endorses action by the County Executive to enter into a purchase and sale agreement with Howard Research and Development Corporation (HRD) for the fee simple acquisition of land for a new Central Library at the Columbia Lakefront, draft a land swap agreement pursuant to the DRRA, and prepare a project financing plan for inclusion in the FY2027 capital budget.

FISCAL IMPACT

The County does not anticipate any fiscal impact resulting from this resolution. Once a purchase and sale agreement has been negotiated, the County Executive intends to seek appropriation from the County Council in the FY27 capital budget for the purposes of land acquisition, at which time a fiscal impact will be prepared.