



Testimony of Friends of Bridge Columbia

Howard County Council FY 2016 Capital Budget Hearing

April 16, 2016

Good evening. My name is Fred Gottemoeller. I am representing the Friends of Bridge Columbia. I am a resident of Town Center, a former resident of Oakland Mills, and a bridge architect and engineer.

First of all, we would like to thank you for the resolution congratulating us for being named Volunteers of the Year by the Oakland Mills Village Board. We have been working toward the creation of Bridge Columbia for 7 years now. That recognition is very gratifying.

Here is an important point about Bridge Columbia: it is more than just an Oakland Mills project. When most people think of Bridge Columbia they picture the existing pedestrian bridge or the possible new bridge we have sketched. But "bridge" is also a verb. "To bridge" means "to connect" separated places or separated people. To us, "Bridge Columbia" means to bring together East Columbia and West Columbia. That is one reason why the Town Center Village Board and other village boards support the project.

Pattie Laidig, the recently retired village manager for Town Center, got it. Last spring, when the county's bridge feasibility study started, it was called the Oakland Mills Bridge study. At the first meeting of the Advisory Committee Patti insisted that the name be changed. A bridge has two ends, she said. We want our name on it, too. So, the study is now called the Downtown Columbia Bridge Study. The Harper's Choice Village Board gets it, too. We just received a letter from them indicating their strong support.

We are glad to see that the administration is moving ahead with the project using the \$530,000 balance from the 2013 appropriation. Please urge the executive to spend that money on the planning and engineering necessary to obtain Federal or state grants for construction. There is no need to spend money on cameras, lighting or paint. The cameras are already there; the important part of the lighting will be installed as part of the Blandair trail improvements; and the benefits of paint will be gone in a few years. We're much better off now working toward a permanent solution by laying the groundwork for a successful construction grant.

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We also ask you to support the \$750,000 proposed for next year's budget. We will need it then to finish the engineering so that we can start construction in 2018. If we get moving now this bridge could be dedicated and in use in four years.

You know, Bridge Columbia was a good idea when we started this project 7 years ago. It is a much better idea today. It will give Columbia and Howard County sustainable, flexible and more vibrant transportation that meets the needs of Millennials, seniors and many others.

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