

# Howard



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## Bill would let county librarians unionize

Delegation approves of measure offering the choice; raise for sheriff opposed

By **BLAIR AMES**  
Baltimore Sun Media Group

The Howard County delegation approved a bill last week that would offer full-time employees with the Howard County public library system the opportunity to form a union without an endorsement by the library's board of trustees.

The bill, which was requested by the county administration, must be approved by the General Assembly.

The library's board of trustees has decided to remain neutral on the proposal because it was submitted by the administration, according to Christie Lassen, director of public relations for the library system.

At the delegation meeting on Jan. 30, Del. Guy Guzzone said this bill is about choice.

**"If that's the case, then I'm going to run for sheriff."**

State Sen. Jim Robey, on a proposed raise for the sheriff

"There is no requirement to form a union; they just now have the ability," Guzzone, a Democrat, said. "They can certainly choose not to do it."

Republican Sen. Allan Kittleman voted against the measure, saying he was disappointed

that the library board did not take a position on the bill.

Through conversations with some board members, Kittleman said, he believes trustees oppose the proposal, but are afraid to speak out, fearing repercussions from County Executive Ken Ulman.

"There's no question the board of trustees does not think this is a good thing for the library system," he said.

Kittleman was joined in voting against the bill by Republican Dels. Gail Bates and Warren Miller.

The delegation also, for the second time, delayed action on a bill that would increase the salary of the Howard County sheriff in 2014 and tie any future raises to those of lieutenants in the Howard County Police Department.

Requested by Sheriff James Fitzgerald, whose salary is \$85,000, the bill would increase the sheriff's salary to \$112,000 in 2014, equivalent to the pay of a 20-year lieutenant.

If the salary of lieutenants in the Police See **BILLS**, page 9



ALGERINA PERNA/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTO

Michael McCall, president of Strategic Leisure and a former Rouse Co. employee, is the creator of the new plan.

## NEW PROPOSAL FOR COLUMBIA

'Inner Arbor' would include elevated walkway through woods

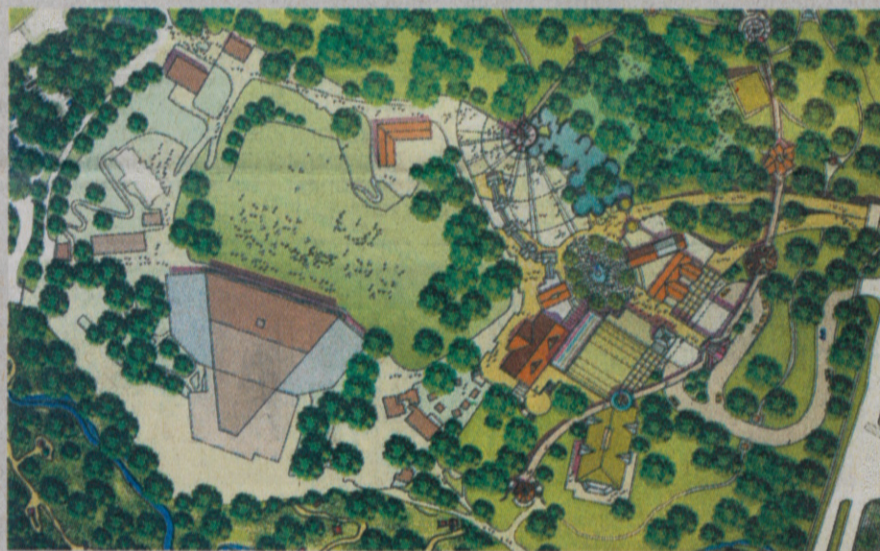
By **ARTHUR HIRSCH**  
The Baltimore Sun

Decades ago, developer James W. Rouse looked at a rundown industrial waterfront in downtown Baltimore and saw the makings of an attraction called Harborplace at the Inner Harbor.

Now a former Rouse employee looks at an expanse of woods in downtown Columbia and sees the possibility of an "Inner Arbor."

That's the name Michael McCall has given his proposal to turn 34 acres of woods surrounding Merriweather Post Pavilion into a place meant to celebrate both the arts and nature, a combination performing arts center, sculpture garden and elevated arboreal walkway.

"I was just talking to my wife, and I heard those words come out of my mouth," says McCall, recalling how the name Inner Arbor came to be. "And I thought, 'That's it that captures the import of the place,'" said McCall, who hopes the new Symphony Woods will stand some day as the sort of regional visitor magnet that the Inner Harbor has become.



This rendering of McCall's proposal shows the plan to recreate Symphony Woods as an arts and nature destination and regional tourist attraction.

McCall's is the latest proposal to emerge over the past 20 years for an area often described as "Columbia's Central Park," a natural refuge set amid what planners have envisioned as an urban

downtown. The park and downtown were part of Columbia founder Rouse's aspiration to transcend suburbia and build what he called a "real city." See **COLUMBIA**, page 8



# Planting a new vision for Columbia

**COLUMBIA, From page 1**

About 45 years after Columbia's first residents moved in, construction on a long-range plan to create that city has recently begun, and with it comes greater focus on Symphony Woods. Until now, the undeveloped enclave has served chiefly as a place for people to stroll among the trees, perhaps have a picnic, and, since the early 1990s, attend Wine in the Woods in the spring and Symphony of Lights at Christmastime.

"This is where we can differentiate Columbia the most," said McCall. "The idea of an escape in the heart of the city."

At the moment, McCall's notion of supplanting the Central Park comparison with the Inner Harbor exists only on a map drawn up at no expense to the Columbia Association by McCall's firm, Strategic Leisure. Two public comment sessions have been held on the plan, yielding mixed opinion, and views range from enthusiasm to caution on the Columbia Association board, which has to approve the plan for it to go anywhere.

The CA is expected to discuss the subject at its meeting Feb. 14. One member said it could be voted on then, but others urge more time to answer questions from the public and board members. In any case, McCall acknowledges it would take years to complete what he's sketched out.

Howard County Executive Ken Ulman supports it, has said the county would back it financially, and mentioned in his State of the County message this past week the work on a plan to "turn Symphony Woods into the world-class cultural and arts space that Columbia and Howard County deserve."

But so far, nothing has been submitted for approval to county agencies and there's no formal estimate of the cost or a detailed plan to pay for it.

## Evolving vision

The Inner Arbor plan adapts a few notions that have been floated over the years, and adds new ideas. The biggest structure inside the bounds of Symphony Woods would be built into a hillside slope with three levels, housing Toby's Dinner Theatre, a children's theater, a space for events, Columbia Association offices and a few restaurants.

An elevated walkway would lead to this "arts village" from a six-deck parking garage and transit center just to the east of Symphony Woods, where Toby's now stands.

Swinging over the pedestrian garage bridge, past the arts center and curving a few hundred feet to the north would be an element that has not been proposed before: a walkway raised into the trees, perhaps 40 feet off the ground. Braced along the way by seven "treehouses," the structure would amount to a smaller, woodland version of the High Line, a milelong "linear park" built on a portion of an old elevated train track in lower Manhattan.

An amphitheater with seating under the trees would be next to the elevated tree walk. At the southern end of the woods, a sculpture garden and walking paths would be developed along the existing man-made lake and natural stream.

This plan encompasses a bigger portion of Symphony Woods than several proposals offered since 1994, only one of which made it even halfway through the 16-step process for downtown Columbia development.

That plan, focused only on the northernmost 10 acres of the woods, called for three entrances at Little Patuxent Parkway: one in the center and in the northwest and northeast corners.

The central entrance — part of a



This bridge near Merriweather Post pavilion would be rebuilt under plans proposed by Michael McCall to create an "Inner Arbor" in downtown Columbia. Others have voiced concern about the probable multimillion-dollar cost of the project.

ALGERINA PERNA/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTOS



Phil Nelson says the Columbia Association could create a trust to finance the project.

cruciform paved walkway — led to a fountain plaza and eventually to the edge of the Merriweather pavilion.

Last July, the Planning Board approved this design as a Final Development Plan — a misleading term, as it's only Step 8 of 16 — and suggested a few changes.

In its 17-page decision, the board suggested that some way be found to remove fewer trees, to create more meandering paths and to coordinate efforts with the operators of Merriweather.

That's when McCall was "encouraged" to draft another design, said Phil Nelson, president of the Columbia Association. That set up a rivalry of sorts, as the approved design was crafted by former Rouse planner Cy Paumier and four other former Rouse employees.

## Price of paradise

A park designer with decades of experience, Paumier, who also worked on one previous Symphony Woods plan, wonders if McCall's proposal makes sense, both in design and expense.

"I'm appalled that intelligent people who sit on the [Columbia Association] board are not able to see what they're buying into," said Paumier, who worked for Rouse planning Columbia's downtown area between 1969 and 1972. "The whole plan is really not very realistic."

In his view, the point was to establish an entrance from Little Patuxent Parkway, where most people are likely to walk into the park. The McCall design shows a small entrance at the northeast corner, leading to a large sculpture plaza, but the main entrance is on the east side, at the garage.

Paumier said engineers he has talked with estimate that the McCall proposal would cost between \$45 million and \$50 million for the garage, pedestrian walkway and the elevated tree walk alone.

In his experience, he says that would be all public money, as private funds are not usually devoted to such purposes.

Nelson said the association hasn't yet estimated the cost of the project. He said the CA wants to establish a trust that could raise money, as the CA's tax status now does not allow it to pursue private grants.

The notion of the trust worries CA board member Alex Hekimian, who represents the Village of Oakland Mills.

"There was never any discussion about a trust," said Hekimian. "That's a big deal. That has major implications because then a lot of the decisions would be out of the public eye."

He said that while the proposal has created "excitement in the community," he's also heard from a lot of people who are

concerned that decisions are being made too quickly.

The McCall plan was first presented to the public in January and now may come to a vote in February.

"I'm sensitive to that," Hekimian said. "I do think there are a lot of questions. ... The plan is way more ambitious than anything that has been presented before."

Columbia resident Alan Klein said he feels the board is moving too quickly to approve a plan he considers too expensive, as it involves so much construction. He favors the Paumier group proposal, adding that he wants to see a project that "benefits the community as much or more than it benefits the developer."

Association Vice Chairman Andrew Stack of Owen Brown calls the McCall proposal "a very exciting plan," and is not concerned about things moving too quickly. If the Planning Board agrees to pick up approval of the northern portion where things left off, that still leaves Steps 9 to 16, and the rest would start at Step 1.

"I have a hard time believing that's rushed," he said.

Board Chairwoman Shari Zaret of Kings Contrivance said she wants to make sure the public has enough time to understand the plan. But she said she likes it. The name Inner Arbor, she said, "carries the message this is about preserving the beauty, but also making it a park that's a destination and an amenity for Columbia residents."

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