



NEWS RELEASE

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Councilmembers Ball and Terrasa to Introduce Legislation to Repeal Downtown Columbia TIF

Ellicott City, MD (August 24, 2017) – Today, Howard County Councilmembers Calvin Ball and Jen Terrasa announced that they are introducing legislation to repeal Council Bill 56-2016, which authorized the County to issue \$90 million in tax increment financing (TIF) Bonds to finance a public parking garage, roads, and intersection improvements in Downtown Columbia.

The Council has learned that, as a result of unresolved issues between the County and the developer regarding the ultimate operation and maintenance of the proposed TIF garage, the County Executive has made the final determination that TIF financing will not be used for the construction of a public parking garage as proposed in Council Bill 56-2016. Dr. Ball and Ms. Terrasa noted that this decision raises numerous questions about the financial data presented to the Council during its consideration of Council Bill 56-2016 and significantly alters the potential public benefit to be realized through the proposed investment of public funds.

The proposed public garage, which was discussed extensively during the legislative process to approve the TIF, represented the majority of the cost of public improvements to be financed under that legislation. “As a significant public amenity and a key component of a comprehensive parking solution for Downtown Columbia, the \$67,000,000 garage would have provided substantial value to the County in return for the investment of public funds,” said Dr. Ball. “If the TIF no longer includes public parking and no longer supports Merriweather Post Pavilion’s long-term success as a thriving arts venue, then we need to take a big step back and re-evaluate this investment of public funds,” he continued.

Dr. Ball and Ms. Terrasa expressed disappointment in the lack of transparency around the issue. “Funding the garage was central to public support for the TIF. When that changed, the public should have been informed. If the County Executive intends to work with the developer to use those funds for other purposes, the community has a right to know about it and to be a part of that discussion,” Terrasa added.

“The Executive may think that it’s appropriate to make such a significant policy shift unilaterally while only including the developer in those discussions, but I believe it is our duty as the Council to revisit this issue in an open and public manner and to ensure that it receives the scrutiny and deliberation that is inherent to our fiduciary responsibility,” stated Dr. Ball.

The proposed legislation will be introduced at the Council’s legislative session on September 5, 2017. Testimony will be accepted at the legislative public hearing on September 18, 2017. To sign up to testify, visit <https://apps.howardcountymd.gov/otestimony/>. If you would like to submit your testimony electronically, email councilmail@howardcountymd.gov.

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