

March 22, 2021 Kimco hearing: ZB Case # 1119M

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Tonight I would like to make a few points.

First, I would like to address the board's decision to continue the hearings virtually. I think your decision was made with good intentions, not knowing how long a delay would be during the pandemic. However, I thought then and I still think, that changing the procedure mid-stream, so to speak, was not equitable. The petitioner had the benefit of a large room, a large screen, on hand tech support, eye contact, body language and all else that increases effective communication. The opposition was dispersed, relying on our own devices, literally and figuratively, without the benefits mentioned above. The screens alone provide an analogy: large screen versus small screen; large clear image versus small, less readable image rendering our testimonies less impactful, fumbling and diminished. As a county we are eager to get our students back to school because we know that in-person presentation is more effective than virtual presentation. The same applies here.

We know that CB 29 09 changed what is permissible in village centers. As a result of that decision and the changes it could bring to the village center, residents of Hickory Ridge gathered and wrote the Village Center Community Plan (VCCP) which makes recommendations for development /redevelopment of the Hickory Ridge Village Center (HRVC). *SECTION 125.0 NT District Section J, 4a 7 reads **Comment on whether the proposed redevelopment is in harmony with the Village Center Community Plan.*** I will refer to Mr. Oh's closing statement and highlight a few of the places where the proposal is not in harmony with the VCCP.

(Mr. Oh, p. 14). Yes, CB 29 09 permits residential units in the village centers. But, p. 19 of the VCCP Area A states:

Office uses in this area would be acceptable as well as some limited residential uses. It is recommended that residential uses only be permitted as a secondary use to the retail and designed as part of a

mixed use development with the retail as the primary use. It is also recommended that no single family residential (attached or detached) be developed in the area.

Mr. Oh quotes the last sentence of this paragraph and also states “*the VCCP expressly recommends that the only residential use that should be permitted in the HRVC is apartments*”. The word “apartment” does not appear in that paragraph. *Apartment* could refer to a single unit or to a building of several hundred units. The VCCP states “*limited residential*” which could be part of mixed use and “*secondary*” to retail. This isn’t an either/or situation (single family or apartment block). Residential could be small units above, between or at the ends of retail shops or offices, not necessarily an enormous block of housing that dominates the first floor retail as currently proposed. There is room for imagination here.

On p.15 Mr. Oh references Mr. Fitzsimmons’ testimony for a 230 unit apartment building as “*needed to enhance the commercial portion of the HRVC*”. The petitioner gave no clear number of prospective residents; and at the same time the 4 story apartment will block visibility of the retail center from Cedar Lane counter to the recommendation of the VCCP.

VCCP p. 28 **GENERAL LANDSCAPE CONSIDERATIONS**

Along the Cedar Lane arterial frontage, the intent is not to screen and block entirely the view of the village center retail core. Landscape should be used to block the car parking lots and trees used to soften the view but corridors of view to the village center retail buildings should be permitted so that passersby may see the center and know it is there. This only applies to Cedar Lane, the main artery to that side of Columbia, now home to hundreds of residents in new housing units along that corridor.

These two points go hand in hand—the retail core must be primary to residential (not apartment) and must be visible from Cedar Lane.

Mr. Oh p. 28 (top) in the section about Compliance with Environmental Standards, states the “*proposed redevelopment will be “green” being registered as a LEED for Homes and a LEED Campus.*” There are several levels of LEED certification. On p. 24 the VCCP specifically recommends Silver designation, a higher standard often met by other new commercial buildings/apartments in Howard County.

VCCP p. 24 Design Concepts.

HISTORIC or SIGNATURE ASPECTS of THE VILLAGE CENTER

This plan does not identify any historic aspects of the village center. It does, however, identify the following signature features of the retail core space that should be retained and enhanced including the following:

The “avenue” design with shops facing towards a tree-lined, pedestrian street.

Pergola entrance with exposed trellis in the canopy.

White brick facades.

Green metal roofs.

Yellow awnings.

Diamond logo design repeated throughout the center.

Stage/gathering area.

The proposed demolition of one of the retail buildings destroys the architectural integrity of the center and the avenue design.

On p. 15 Mr. Oh states that the petitioner used “*folded facades, recessed upper floors, and contrasting color palettes*” to ensure compatibility with the “*surrounding community*”, but it made no effort to integrate the design of the buildings closest to it as outlined above into its own design. So, it will be compatible with buildings in downtown Columbia or Clary’s Forest, but not with those on the same piece of land? This is not harmony.

The redevelopment as proposed is too large for this site. The space is finite. To accommodate 230 units, the footprint of the apartment building reduces the area designated for setbacks (in county code) along Freetown Road and Cedar Lane. Closer to the Giant, there is no room for safe access from Freetown Road or a roundabout on Street B (as specified in my testimony on January 27, 2021). There is no room for a wide pedestrian

avenue or covered walkways. Every square foot used for that building takes away from land that could support the amenities we current shoppers enjoy and expect in the future as outlined in the VCCP.

In closing, I would like to comment on the opposition. Mr. Oh states some community members' testimony is redundant. Yes, our testimony may seem redundant at times. We are not a cabal that met to organize against this proposal. We live in different parts of Hickory Ridge—some in the immediate neighborhood of the HRVC, some in out parcels. Some see the HRVC from our homes, some do not. Some were acquainted before this procedure began, some still are not acquainted. Faces we might recognize at the Banneker Building are not easy to fit to names on a list of attendees on the side of a computer screen. Some of us met because we saw each other at small meetings, large meetings, village board meetings, and hearings during the last 5 years. We did not gather to decide what features we opposed and then to hammer those home in our testimonies. Rather, individually we came to the conclusion that these are the parts of the proposal that are unacceptable—that is why our testimonies are similar.

When you make your decision, look at the artist's renditions, charts and maps that you saw on the big screen last year and recognize that the petitioner's design cannot successfully be retrofitted to this site and still meet the criteria set forth in the VCCP. When you make your decision, remember the practical, functional, aesthetic and safety concerns opponents have with this proposal. Opponents are the long time patrons of this HRVC, not experts, but residents with common sense who see that the proposal does not meet the criteria established in the VCCP. As a result of those shortcomings, I believe we as a community will lose more than we gain.

Please vote to deny.

