

**Testimony to the Howard County Zoning Board**  
**Hickory Ridge Village Center (ZB1119M)**  
**January 29, 2020**

My name is Harry Schwarz, living at 11668 Dark Fire Way in the Clary's Forest Neighborhood of Hickory Ridge. I also blog at HoCoMD.cc. I support the Kimco proposal. This is a win-win-win for all concerned. Kimco is able to improve the profitability of its property with a more attractive design than was constructed at Wilde Lake. The residents of Hickory Ridge are assured that our Village Center will not become another Oakland Mills or Long Reach but will continue to thrive for many years to come. Our property values will likely increase with the added amenities and improved diversity of our Village. And Howard County will be able to accommodate 230 additional families with "Smart Growth."

Jim Rouse hated sprawl, so he set out to build a better city. From the beginning, planners committed to creating "complete neighborhoods" by integrating multiple uses within close walking distance in order to accommodate people's varying needs. By increasing the density of neighborhoods, Columbia retained more of our land for open space. Mixed land use and varying density are the cornerstones of Smart Growth and Columbia has always been a model of Smart Growth.

According to the Baltimore Sun, Howard County grew by 3,822 people from July 2017 to July 2018, tying us with Queen Anne's County for the second highest population growth in the State at 1.2%. At this rate, Howard County will add another 50,000 people by 2035. Where are these folks going to live and shop? We can create more suburban sprawl, eat up more of our open spaces, build more highways, and ignore environmental impacts, or we can implement Smart Growth and meet the challenge of increased population by accommodating them in an ecologically sound way.

Increased densities in appropriate locations throughout Columbia, such as the Merriweather District and the Village Centers, is Smart Growth for Hickory Ridge, for Columbia, and for Howard County as a whole. Putting housing on land that currently serves as a parking lot helps reduce our consumption of land elsewhere and allows us to protect valuable open space, farmland, and habitat. It improves the fiscal health of the County by expanding the tax base and reducing the need to duplicate infrastructure elsewhere by making efficient use of present capacity. Expanded transportation options become possible with higher ridership.

Kimco's proposal helps assure the continued viability of our community by providing a robust Village Center for all of us to enjoy far into the future. It offers a great place to live with expanded options for how to get around and how to interact with the people around us. I imagined life in the revitalized Village Center in a blog post, which is attached to my testimony. Kimco's proposal serves the interests of Columbia and Howard County for Smart Growth and has been determined by the Department of Planning and Zoning to meet all New Town standards and criteria. I urge your support.

Applicant/Protestant

W. Harry Schwarz  
HoCoMD.cc

*Supporters* Exhibit # 2 Date 1/29/20



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Correspondence and  
Collaboration for a better  
Howard County, Md.

# Life at the new Hickory Ridge Village Center (circa 2024)

Harry Schwarz, Blogpost 8-11-16

<https://hocomd.cc/2016/08/11/life-at-the-new-hickory-ridge-village-center-circa-2024/>



I live in the new Hickory Ridge Village Center that was finally completed in 2022. Locals will remember that Kimco proposed to redevelop the Village Center in 2016 with an [initial plan](#) that was roundly criticized for the height and number of apartments being introduced, the parking lot-centric design, the lack of intimacy for the Village Green, and the failure to embrace the future Columbia Association Park. The [revised plan](#) attempted to address all these issues, including reducing the size of the apartment building, and was approved in 2018.

Cathy and I were pleased The Apartments at Hickory Ridge Village Center, with all its amenities and high-end finishes, was available after the kids moved out of our single-family home. By moving here from Clary's Forest neighborhood, we have been able to keep in touch with our friends and pursue a lot of the same activities. Cathy is a Tai Sophia-trained acupuncturist; is able to see her patients in an office here in the Village Center. I work for a nonprofit in Town Center and bike there when I can, traveling mostly on the new [Downtown Columbia Trail](#).



The Apartments at Hickory Ridge Village Center (Kimco)

Most of our immediate neighbors are professionals. There are some retirees, a doctor at the Hospital and his wife, a Philosophy professor at HCC, a couple who operate a day spa with two kids, a young lady that does animation for a firm, a plumber and his adult son, somebody that works at NSA. Our friends from over Quarterstaff Road are downsizing and moving here next month.

It's easy to get to know folks here -- the apartment has monthly activities that bring people together. I'm a member of the HRVC Merchant and Resident Advisory Council that works with Kimco to make sure this stays a nice Village Center. Cathy and I also play in the monthly bocce league that meets in the new [Columbia Association Park](#) at the end of The Avenue. We have players from the Clemens Crossing neighborhood, and some folks from Sunrise and Harmony Hall retirement homes as well.



The new "Avenue" at Hickory Ridge Village Center (Kimco), with the Columbia Association Park at the end.

We love being able to walk to all the stores here; thank goodness [Decanter Fine Wines](#) agreed to remain in the Center. There are Village concerts and other events in the [Columbia Association Park](#), along with a tot lot, trails, and picnic tables. And it is true bliss to be able to amble out of our apartment and eat at the new coffee shop, dine at one of our favorite restaurants (including a new Argentinian steak house), or hang out on the Village Green. We'll meet friends or just come down on a whim. And among the shops are two places my wife frequents, a new upscale hair salon for women and a yoga studio and apparel shop.

People dismissed the idea when the apartments were proposed, but we hardly ever use our car. The Apartment has its own pool and fitness center. Cathy and I use our bikes even more with the improvements that have been made to the Columbia Trail system. And the increased density in Town Center and a few of the other Village Centers has enabled buses that come through here every hour. A new transit hub in Town Center makes it easy to take advantage of longer distance transportation.



Hickory Ridge Village Center (Kimco)

*People were [skeptical](#) back in 2016 about the impact a 230 unit luxury apartment building would have on our Village Center. From my perspective, it has made the Center more of a focal point for our community of Hickory Ridge. The apartments have brought greater stability to the merchants, has encouraged Giant to improve their store, and has attracted additional retail. The quality of the stores and expanded amenities have been cause for an even greater diversity of people gathering here and making it a part of their lives. Life at the new [Hickory Ridge Village Center](#) is everything I could want.*