

Some notes from our CA Council Rep: Dick Boulton

Two years ago, the CA board decided to livestream its meetings but not its work sessions. Now that we are holding all our activities virtually, the public has no real-time access to our work sessions. I have objected to that and requested that IT find a way to make everything open to the public. I'm told that there are security issues, but no one can tell me what they are. Our IT Director has been asked to attend the next meeting with an explanation.

Ordinarily, the board sets next-year budget parameters at this time of the year. This gives our financial people a framework for working on a proposed budget for board review. Due to the current revenue uncertainties, the board will postpone this preliminary activity until September, when we should have a better fix on where things stand. There are board members who support a annual charge rate increase, but they appear to be in a minority at this time. I do not support an increase and believe that any discussion of such is premature.

CA has taken a position that the Hammond High School project include certain amenities such as a new sidewalk and other features if it is to be considered open space. The county appears amenable. Discussions about the Erickson and the Hickory Ridge Village Center projects are ongoing. The Starbucks project at Snowden will be reviewed again by the county again next week. CA is rightly opposed to the planned development, which will increase usage while reducing parking and will move a dumpster to the front of the property.

The sale of the section of Old Route 108 at the junction of Route 108 and Columbia Road has been tabled by the County Council, which means it can be brought up for a vote at any time.

Stream stabilization is taking place near Rustling Leaf. Phase One of the Hobbits Glen clay courts is completed, and the courts are now reopened. Basketball courts have reopened. There is a weed harvester machine active at the three main lakes. While the back country areas are not getting the same CA maintenance as before, the high-use areas are and are seeing increased usage.

The annual charge statements have gone out with a good response to date -- as of this week \$1.2 million has been received in payments. Cash flow is tracking well. Gyms are tracking at 30% of normal use. Swim Center is tracking at about 90%. Programming compares to nationwide data. Overall, staff is happy to be back and engaged, and we have gotten a good response from those members who have chosen to return. Not all staff have been recalled so far, as staffing is scaled to match facility use. Senior hours have shown a very positive response.

The question of the \$10/month fee to freeze memberships has been contentious. This was once a concession to "snowbirds" who wanted maintain their memberships while

out of town for extended periods. The board feels it was inappropriate to extend it to members who are reluctant to return during the pandemic, but at this point, it has been in effect for several weeks and would be confusing to reverse. The advantage to those who have taken this option is that it would allow them to return at the same membership rates they had enjoyed in the past.

Staff was also asked why the villages are told that they must pay for UV air purification fans. Response was that CA would bring facilities up to county guidelines, but villages would pay for anything above and beyond. It was pointed out that Long Reach had a fan installed without having asked for it. Staff agreed they were in error and CA will eat that cost.

Open Space continues to use contract workers as well as CA employees. Board urged that CA employees are a priority. Staff response was inconclusive. I plan to follow up.

Howard County is moving forward with a new General Plan, and CA intends to take a proactive advocacy role, particularly as it impacts NT zoning. In order to prepare and determine the concerns of Columbia residents and businesses, CA will conduct a series of discussion sessions led by consultants hired by CA. Each village will be asked to provide a volunteer to participate. There will be seven sessions on Thursday and Tuesday evenings from July 30 to December 3 in which we can share our vision of what we want to see for Columbia in the future.

Wednesday evening a meeting was held at the Chrysalis with the villages, CA staff and board. There were mixed feelings about the success of the event, and it was agreed that the villages should have a greater role. It was suggested that meetings of this type be held quarterly or perhaps twice a year with meeting leadership shared and greater engagement by all encouraged. It was also agreed that communications need to be improved and that villages need to be seen as equal partners in this thing we call Columbia. Let's consider this event as a learning experience we can build on.

The board will create a new communication working group composed of three members who will coordinate with CA staff to develop more rapid and multi-mode communications with the community. I have been asked to chair the group. (I also learned a new word, "voluntold," but I really am looking forward to the challenge.) With the communication staff furloughed, there is only a consultant on deck to communicate fully and rapidly with stakeholders. A clear plan for the next six to twelve months is needed.

Next week, the board will be meeting with the chairs of our advisory committees. The representative of each committee will present observations/recommendations so the Board can ask questions and take advantage of their advice.

-- Dick Boulton