



HICKORY RIDGE VILLAGE BOARD TESTIMONY FOR ZB 1119M

My name is Allison Sultan and I am the chair of the Hickory Ridge Board of Directors. I am here today to do my best representing the Hickory Ridge community after a period of four years which has, frankly, been quite difficult for the community. During this time, we have seen our thriving, friendly, fully occupied Village Center change dramatically as stores have closed and others have entered a period of marked uncertainty. There have been and are differing viewpoints within the community as to what direction redevelopment should take. To state it simply, it has been a hard time for our community and while we recognize that the current state of our village center demands that some action be taken, we do not believe that the plan before you, as presented, is the right fit for our community. Today, I am hopeful that the Zoning Board can hear our testimony and will agree that there is an opportunity before us to come to a reasonable compromise that will revitalize the Hickory Ridge Village Center while still honoring the input of the residents of Hickory Ridge, as laid out in our own Village Center Community Plan. The ability to balance both demands exists. I look forward to using the next several minutes to explain our compromise position.

HICKORY RIDGE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION POSITION

I would like to start my testimony by stating our current position: The Village Board has given careful consideration to Kimco Realty's proposed redevelopment plan for the Hickory Ridge Village Center. After four years of community meetings, resident input, and the changing conditions at the Village Center and throughout the area, the Village Board is willing to support the redevelopment of the Village Center to include residential development only in so far as any residential development does not overwhelm the other uses of the center and provided that certain requirements are met, including the implementation of the 11 points already negotiated between Kimco and the Village Board.

BACKGROUND

Our position has evolved during the process, and so that you can understand how we arrived here I would like to provide some background.

In September 2015 Kimco representative Greg Reed first attended a Village Board meeting and expressed Kimco's desire to redevelop the Hickory Ridge Village Center. Kimco returned on November 7, 2015, to officially take the first step in the process for the *Redevelopment of a Village Center--Major*.

At that point a series of meetings and community outreach began that looked to engage as many residents as possible in the redevelopment process. Kimco held a series of large and small meetings that both the public and members of the Village Board attended. Throughout the nearly four year process the Village Board has held numerous meetings, conducted an online survey, and received written and oral testimony from residents.

In addition to these community outreach efforts the Village Board took this opportunity to review and reconfirm our Village Center Community Plan. The VCCP was first developed in 2010 when the Howard County Council, as part of Council Bill 29-2009, requested that each village develop its own vision for their Village Center as a tool to ensure that the community has input in future Village Center redevelopment and to assist the Zoning Board in accomplishing that vision for the community. Hickory Ridge undertook a 16-month public process to develop the Hickory Ridge Village Center Community

Plan. The Board appointed a subcommittee of resident volunteers which met over 25 times to study the existing village center and its potential redevelopment. The subcommittee encouraged and received input and feedback from Hickory Ridge residents, landowners, and merchants. The VCCP was approved by the Village Board in December 2011 and delivered to Howard County in January 2012. With a redevelopment plan on the horizon the Board reconvened the original group of residents who wrote the VCCP to review if the plan needed updating in light of an actual proposal to redevelop the center. In March 2016, the Board passed an addendum to the VCCP that reflected minor changes and updates while noting that the 2011 plan had stood the test of time. We urge the Zoning Board to review both the original VCCP and the addendum as you consider Kimco's plan before you as we view it as fundamental in any decision that is made about redevelopment of the center. It is truly a reflection of the wants and needs of our community. Both the VCCP and the addendum have been provided to you and to the Department of Planning and Zoning. The village did not receive any comments or questions from anyone at Howard County regarding the content of the Plan.

The Village Board has reminded Kimco on many occasions that any plan should substantially conform to the Village Center Community Plan including no residential uses that would overwhelm the other uses and that building heights should be limited to three stories (36 feet) as per the Plan.

In December 2016 and January 2017, Kimco went before the Howard County Design Advisory Panel. After giving a thumbs down at the first meeting, the DAP recommended approval at their second meeting. Village residents didn't understand why the DAP changed its decision so drastically after Kimco only made minimal changes to the plan and, therefore, requested the Village Board contact the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ). When the Village Board requested clarification from DPZ as to why the DAP had changed its opinion on adding such a large apartment building to the Village Center, we were told that the DAP was not required to explain its position to the public. We found this response to be most unfortunate and not very helpful.

In the summer of 2017, the Board began to work in public meetings on its draft Community Response Statement (CRS). (CRS provided.) The 21-page statement sent to DPZ in November 2017 detailed the numerous reasons why the Village Board believed the proposal, as submitted, did not meet the requirements of the Village Center Community Plan and should therefore be denied.

We were surprised that the VCCP and the CRS were given no consideration by DPZ because their Technical Staff Report recommended approval prior to the January 2018 Planning Board meeting. Although the Village Board testified in opposition to the plan, the Planning Board unanimously recommended approval of the redevelopment.

The Village Board met with our attorney and was fully prepared to argue against approval of the Kimco plan at the scheduled February 28, 2018 Zoning Board hearing. Less than 30 days before the scheduled date, the Zoning Board postponed the hearing and ultimately didn't reschedule until a new Zoning Board could be seated.

During the long process of meetings, delays and postponements stretching to more than four years now, the once-thriving Hickory Ridge Village Center has lost two popular restaurant tenants and four other businesses. Reasons vary, but a consistent theme has been related to the inability of merchants to plan their futures when they cannot sign long-term leases, as well as the loss of business due to a reduction in foot traffic. Concern has been expressed that the continued delays in the process have only exacerbated the decline of the Center. Therefore, in the fall of 2018, the Village Board began to

reconsider its opinion of the proposed Kimco redevelopment plan. After several community meetings and more input from residents, on January 20, 2019, the Village Board passed an Addendum to the Community Response Statement and Planning Board Testimony. (CRS Addendum provided.)

CURRENT POSITION

The Addendum to the CRS states that the Village Board is willing to support the proposed redevelopment plan only if the five requirements below are met:

1. As a fundamental tenant of our Village Center Community Plan, the number of apartment units must be reduced so as not to overwhelm the other uses at the Center.
 - Overwhelm. This term has been interpreted differently by the Village Board, Kimco, and even the Planning Board. Meanings of overwhelm include “to overpower; to cover completely, submerge; to overcome by superior force or numbers; and to overpower in thought or feeling.”
 - The residential aspect of Kimco’s plan most certainly overwhelms the retail component of our village center. The proposed residential square footage is 254,636 square feet plus additional square footage for the parking garage as compared to retail square footage of 105,100 square feet. This is a fact. The mass and height of the building will submerge the retail core. The apartment building, with its height of 45-55 ft and location along Cedar Lane, will most definitely loom over the center’s retail core. The apartment building essentially sits right on the sidewalk and will block the retail from view along Cedar Lane. There is just no way the residential building won’t look like the main feature at the center. It would be, by far, the tallest and biggest building on the site.
 - Overwhelm means to overpower in thought or feeling. We feel that the mass of the residential building as currently proposed does *feel* like it overwhelms the retail. It’s true that thoughts and feelings do not always have facts as their basis, but they certainly do create a perceived reality that does affect communities, retail centers, and more. For our residents who come to Giant to do their food shopping or to let their kids play along the avenue while they catch up with neighbors – this will now be done in the literal shadow of an apartment building. The marketing industry does not ignore thoughts and feelings, nor should the Zoning Board when deciding our community’s future.
 - The Board attempted to be objective in our interpretation of the word *overwhelm*. We look forward to the Zoning Board taking a similarly objective approach when considering this requirement for village center redevelopment.
2. The height of the apartment building is reduced to comply with the three story (36 feet) height limit specified in our Village Center Community Plan.
 - The Village Center Community Plan was thoughtfully written to maintain the identity of Hickory Ridge. The residents of this community took the time to prepare a template for

future change. This is what the County requested, and our residents took that task to heart. The VCCP allows for change and even welcomes thoughtful upgrades. At the time the VCCP was developed and now, Sunrise Senior Living, located directly adjacent to the village center, was the tallest structure. We recognize that the Sunrise building is 45-feet in height at its maximum, but it is only three stories. Our concern is that Kimco's proposed apartment building is at a minimum of 45-feet, with portions that are taller, with four full stories, creating a more overwhelming profile.

- The residents of our community felt that any new structure at the center any taller than Sunrise would visually look out of place and overwhelm the retail core.
 - The arrangement of buildings in Kimco's plan also factors into the equation. The proposed apartment building will reside in front of the retail along the main corridor, Cedar Lane. The backside of the building, which is all residential, is what people will see as they drive by. The tall profile of the proposed apartment building will give the appearance that it is a residential area, as opposed to a retail center designed for our entire community. To be clear, our amended position is not in opposition to apartments, nor is our Village Center Community Plan. We just want the apartment building to be thoughtfully integrated into the existing village neighborhood and not to overwhelm the retail. I believe this is the County's goal for a village center as well.
3. The proposed parking meets existing Howard County Parking Regulations set for commercial and residential uses.
- While we understand that Kimco believes that the County requirements for parking are too high, we agree with the County and feel that the County's current parking regulations support healthy growth. It is our understanding that the proposed residential building will have 1.6 spaces per unit, which is much less than the required 2.3 spaces. It is also our understanding that there will be a mix of apartments sizes, 1/2/3 bedrooms, but we haven't been given any specifics on the ratio. However, it has been said by Kimco that the building is designed specifically to entice young professionals who will commute and an older population wishing to downsize. With that said, it is very reasonable to assume that many of the units will have two cars.
 - Another point to consider, Kimco's model is to provide one space per unit, with a fee for additional spaces per unit. Renters not able or willing to pay for the extra parking may use the retail spaces. This is a very plausible scenario and we do not want to risk people avoiding our shops because parking is difficult or have overflow parking spill into the residential areas that surround the village center.
 - Kimco wishes to not only reduce parking for residential, but also for retail. Kimco is proposing 4 spaces per 1,000 square feet instead of 5 spaces, which is what the FDP currently requires. In fact, current County requirements for shopping centers are 6 spaces per 1,000 square feet of retail. Kimco's proposal is a 33% reduction in what the county currently considers adequate for retail centers. If the center does not have enough parking, people will avoid it. That is a fact. Historic Ellicott City is just a real-time example of that. Montpelier Center on Johns Hopkins Road where Facci is located is

another example. We are not willing to gamble our center's retail viability over Kimco's prediction of parking and we hope the Zoning Board isn't either.

- Also, you need to consider the location of the center. It is not a dense, walkable location like Downtown Columbia or Wilde Lake which both have a high number of existing multi-family dwellings surrounding it. The Hickory Ridge Village Center sits on the fringes of Columbia, and frankly the center is not considered a walkable area with exception of the limited number of single-family houses located very close by. Yes, it is a great location for commuter routes to 29/32, which is why it may be desirable for those who work and own cars. However, most residents wishing to come to do their weekly food shopping or take their families to buy ice cream at Meadows or a bottle of wine a Decanter are not going to walk to the Village Center. Most residents currently drive to shop and use the retail parking spaces and will continue to do so. Appropriately allocated parking is a must for success at the Hickory Ridge Village Center.
4. The county will ensure the accuracy of any traffic study conducted by Kimco and works with Kimco to implement pedestrian safety measures and traffic calming at the Freetown Road and Quarterstaff Road intersection.
 - We have a real concern about traffic safety on the roads that surround the Village Center. Freetown Road already deals with a heavy volume of traffic as a result of Atholton High School which is located just one quarter mile from the village center, and unfortunately accidents have been common. Volume will only increase on all surrounding roads as a result of this development and others in the pipeline. The Board requests that Howard County Department of Public Works ensure that the traffic study addresses safety concerns for vehicular and pedestrian traffic in and around the center.
 5. That the 11 points I am about to outline, which were previously negotiated between Kimco and the Village Board, are included in the approval.

Prior to the year-long postponement of the hearing by the Zoning Board to consider ZB-1119M, Kimco and the Village Board had negotiated and agreed to 11 updates and minor revisions to the Redevelopment Plan. Each of these points – some minor and some more significant – address items of concern that our residents have raised. They were the following:

1. Specifically review the parking study for both residential and retail use to make sure that the numbers proposed are adequate and properly located for the uses on the site.
2. Adjust the setbacks along Cedar Lane and Freetown Road by shifting the apartment building slightly to 40' on Cedar Lane and 22' on Freetown Road from the Right-of-Way.
3. Provide a roundabout at Street B terminus and coordinate with CA to provide 20 parking spaces on CA property for the eventual park.
4. Work with DPW to provide enhanced pedestrian crossing at Quarterstaff Road and Freetown Road including an island refuge crossing similar to what is on Freetown Road near Hickory Crest.

5. Provide raised pedestrian crossings on Street A & B including a mid-block crosswalk on Street A.
6. Collaborate with the Village Board on programming and design for the village green including all items on the list included in the Community Response Statement:
 - Space for concerts or gatherings
 - Raised stage area with electrical outlets
 - A safe environment for children to play
 - Artwork and/or interactive sculptures
 - An intimate feel to the public space, similar to that which currently exists
 - Community notice board
 - A variety of seating options (tables, benches, step seating)
 - Other amenities for community activities
7. Enhance the covered walkways along the retail frontages.
8. Update the monument sign on Cedar Lane and entrance signs to match the new design.
9. Provide recycling bins with trash receptacles as part of LEED certification.
10. Enhance the landscaping in the island between the proposed bank building and Sunrise.
11. Place short term (15 minute and 2 hour) parking along a portion of Street B.

CLOSING STATEMENT

As I close my testimony, I would like to say again that the proposed Village Center Redevelopment has been a challenging issue for our community, including the Village Board. We have listened to passionate residents on both sides throughout the process. The Village Board recognizes that there are those residents who support the redevelopment plan and welcome the changes and others who do not. In addition, regardless of who has responsibility for what has transpired the last few years, the Village Board feels we must address the current state of the center and the possibility of further deterioration. It is an understatement to say that it has been quite a challenge balancing the interests of our community and not knowing what the future of the center will be if it is not redeveloped.

In conclusion, the Village Board acknowledges the need to collaborate with all parties to develop a plan for the Hickory Ridge Village Center that will best serve the entire community while restoring and preserving the health of the Village Center for years to come. Our current position today is one of compromise. The Village Board understands that not all aspects of the redevelopment plan are in line with our VCCP, but we are hopeful that our requests – a more moderately sized residential building, reduced building height, a more careful consideration of parking allocations and traffic concerns, and the codifying of our already negotiated points - will bring the plan into better alignment with our vision for the center. In good faith, we ask that the County and Kimco reciprocate our compromise. The Village Board respectfully asks the Zoning Board include all five of our requirements outlined in the Addendum to the Community Response Statement in the Final Decision and Order if the plan is approved.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.