

Micajah “Mike” McGarity Questionnaire

Columbia Council Candidate

What would you like to tell the residents about your experience living in Hickory Ridge Village and Columbia that will help them evaluate you as a candidate for the Columbia Council?

I have lived in Columbia since 2016 and love raising my four children here. The Columbia Association is deeply embedded in my family's life. I've trained for marathons on its paths and swum countless laps in its pools. Now, my kids participate with the Cyclones and Clippers and are cared for by CA's KidSpace. Events at the Hawthorn Center have also been wonderful for our family, and we have thoroughly enjoyed attending community events there, such as Bingo Night and Breakfast with Santa. My wife and I have also enjoyed helping organize neighborhood block parties complete with lots of s'mores, supported by Hickory Ridge's Block Party Grants. Serving currently on the Hickory Ridge Village Board has further connected me to the needs of our residents and given me direct, hands-on experience with our community's governance.

What is/are your career area(s) and any other professional experience, and how will that assist you in Columbia Council actions and activities?

Professionally, I hold a Ph.D. in Geography and Environmental Engineering from Johns Hopkins and work as an engineer, with a strong background in operations research and mathematical optimization. I am deeply passionate about sustainability and improving our lived environment. My daily work involves solving complex logistical, financial, and scheduling problems. This analytical skill set translates directly to the Columbia Council, equipping me to rigorously analyze budgets, optimize community resources, and find practical, data-driven solutions that improve the efficiency of our community operations while protecting our local environment.

Based on your knowledge of Columbia Council responsibilities, what issues concern you and what ideas would you contribute to Board discussions to address those issues?

A primary concern of mine is ensuring the Columbia Council strictly upholds its fiduciary responsibility. When comparing the Columbia Association to peer organizations like the

Reston Association, CA's annual charge is roughly double, yet Reston residents enjoy free access to their outdoor pools. I question the high overhead costs CA bears and would advocate for a comprehensive review to identify inefficiencies and make CA more affordable. Furthermore, I am deeply concerned that CA is underfunding its villages with respect to inflation. Meanwhile, CA has been stockpiling tens of millions of dollars to improve its bond credit rating, which it increasingly appears to care more about than affordability for its members or funding for its villages. If elected, I will push to recenter CA's focus on its residents and villages.

Are there any other ideas you would like to express to the residents of Hickory Ridge Village?

If elected, I will have three priorities:

1. Save the pools from becoming splashpads.
2. Improve CA affordability.
3. Fund the villages more.

Additionally, I stand firmly for the repair and revitalization of the Hickory Ridge Village Center—not its redevelopment. We must protect the character of our community hubs while ensuring they meet the current needs of our residents. Expanding targeted community engagement is also vital; for instance, creating dedicated programming like a monthly middle school Teen Night at the Hawthorn Center can provide safe, engaging spaces for our youth. By focusing on smart financial stewardship, protecting our existing amenities, and enhancing resident participation, we can ensure Hickory Ridge remains a vibrant and wonderful place to live.

Finally, I will strongly advocate for preserving Columbia's original design while pursuing thoughtful improvements. I will not support big changes like replacing our outdoor pools with splashpads. We should preserve our pools because children learn to swim in pools, not on splashpads. I understand the appeal of a splashpad. Splashpads are awesome, but we already have a great splashpad at the Swansfield Pool that I take my kids to frequently in the summer. If elected, I will push for increased availability of swim lessons and programming at underutilized pools—not their destruction. CA should use its undeveloped land, like the 10 acres next to the Hickory Ridge Village Center, before it touches a pool.