Monthly Columbia Association (CA) Update Report for Hickory Ridge

Hickory Ridge's Columbia Council Representative: Micajah McGarity

Month: November 2026

Disclaimer: Please note that the views and commentary expressed in this report are my own.

Here is a summary of the latest governance updates, planning efforts, and upcoming activities from the Columbia Association to keep the Hickory Ridge community informed.

1. Facility, Planning & Open Space Updates

Continued Support for the Headquarters Purchase: Following CA's due diligence process and continued negotiations with the sellers, the final agreed-upon price for the purchase of CA's headquarters at 6310 Hillside Court and the adjacent building at 6315 Hillside Court has been reduced from $10.3 million to $8.8 million. I want to express my continued support for this headquarters purchase, especially with the new reduced price, which makes building equity and eliminating our $1 million annual lease expense an even smarter economic decision for the community.

I also support the idea to create a CA-run daycare at 6315 Hillside Court. One of the reasons I like the CA-run daycare proposal is the idea that was floated by board members for CA to provide a tuition discount to children living at CA assessed properties. A notional 5% discount on a monthly tuition of $2,000 would be $1200 per year. If a family had two children in CA's daycare, their hypothetical annual savings would be $2400 per year. That discount alone would pay for most family's annual charge. This concept, if realized, has the potential to be transformative for Columbia because it would make living on a CA assessed property economically advantageous for families needing childcare. I applaud CA's staff for its bold idea and encourage them to continue pursuing it for the benefit of future children and families in Columbia.

2. Columbia Pools & Splash Park Proposal

The Splash Park Concept and Aging Pools: The CA Board is currently considering a proposal to eliminate an underutilized outdoor pool and replace it with a splash park. The proposal does have the value of serving as a proof of concept to determine if there is community demand for such an amenity. However, I believe this idea should be dropped by CA's Board. Ultimately, converting a single pool is a piecemeal solution to the much larger problems of aging pools, reduced attendance, and increasing staffing costs across our facilities.

A Need for a Pools Master Plan: Instead of one-off conversions, I am advocating for CA to develop a comprehensive Pools Master Plan for the next 60 years of Columbia. We need a bold vision for modern, up-to-date pools that feature the amenities today's families are looking for, such as full-depth diving wells, rock climbing walls, lazy rivers, whirlpools, and dedicated outdoor lap pools.

Evaluating Operational Impacts on Utilization: I also want to argue for the Board to direct CA staff to formally evaluate whether the way our pools are being run is actively contributing to their reduced utilization. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have not brought back snack shacks—despite no approval for this permanent change from the Board. Furthermore, morning lap swimming has not returned to Hickory Ridge, where it used to be offered at the Hawthorn Pool, and our pools consistently close a half-hour to an hour earlier than other outdoor pools in the area, such as Atholton Swim Club. The appropriate response to reduced attendance at pools should not be the closure of pools. CA should figure out more ways to draw people to its pools and should learn from its wildly successful Columbia Neighborhood Swim League, which continues to draw hundreds of families to CA's pools.

Reconsidering "Adult Swim": Finally, the traditional Adult Swim, which closes the pool to children under age 16 25% of the time, is a fun killer. As a parent with multiple young children, I see how the children excluded from the pool are miserable for the 15 minutes every hour they have to sit on the side of the pool and wait for their turn. Meanwhile, the adults in the pool awkwardly swim while the excluded children enviously stare at them. We need more inclusive policies to ensure our facilities remain welcoming and enjoyable for everyone.

3. Budget Priorities & Village Funding

Tying CA Merit Raises to Village Grant Funding: I am advocating for a CA policy that ties the merit raises of CA staff to the percentage increase in village grant funding. The relationship between CA and the villages is a Parent-Child relationship because CA effectively controls village funding. In theory village associations operate independently from CA and villages have the power to collect their own annual charges, but in practice the villages do not collect revenue from their members. Village staff are eligible for CA's health insurance plan, and CA's legal staff represent the villages in covenant dispute cases. I argue that the villages effectively operate as subsidiaries of CA. Recent years' reduced village funding increases, which have been far less than CA's merit raises, has created economic pressure on the villages and reduced their ability to provide annual staff pay increases that keep up with Columbia's cost of living increases. This underfunding of villages has also effectively created two tiers of employees within the CA-village system, with the CA employees treated as 1st class employees and the villages as 2nd class employees of subsidiaries. It is time to implement a policy at CA that ties village funding to staff merit increases and allow for villages to provide fair wages that keep up with annual cost of living increases.

4. Personal Announcement

Resignation from the CA Board of Directors: I am resigning from my position on the CA Board of Directors, effective December 1, 2026. My family and I are moving to Pennsylvania and anticipate selling our house in December. I do not believe it will be appropriate for me to serve past December, as I will no longer be a member of the Hickory Ridge Community Association. It has been a privilege to serve on the Board of Directors of both the Hickory Ridge Community Association and the Columbia Association. I wish both organizations continued success into the future in promoting the health, safety, common good, and social welfare of the people of Hickory Ridge and Columbia and their environment.