Inner Arbor Trust
Pre-submission Community Meeting
December 2, 2013, 6:30 pm
Rouse Company Foundation Student Services Building
Howard Community College

Topic: Development of Symphony Woods: Site Development Plan (SDP) Public Meeting

Purpose:
The Inner Arbor Trust is a not-for-profit organization that is currently in the process of applying for 501(c)(3) status created to implement and manage the Inner Arbor concept plan in Symphony Woods in Downtown Columbia. On Monday December 2, 2013, the Inner Arbor Trust held a Pre-Submission Community Meeting on for the purpose of presenting concept plans to the community regarding the development of Symphony Woods and answering questions about those plans.

Presenters/Panel:

- Michael McCall, President & CEO, Inner Arbor Trust
- Martha Schwartz, Founder & Principal, Martha Schwartz Partners
- Raj Patel, Principal, Arup
- Marc Fornes, Founder & Principal, THEVERYMANY
- Mimi Hoang, Co-founder & Principal, nARCHITECTS
- Scott Rykiel, Co-founder & Principal, Mahan Rykiel Associates
- Chris Streb, Ecological Engineer, Biohabitats, Inc.

Approximately 100 people were in attendance based on the sign-in sheets and an attendance seat count. Meeting was called to order at 6:40 p.m.

Presentation Slides: http://inartrust.org/community-presentation/

Overview
Inner Arbor Trust President & CEO Michael McCall brought the meeting to order. He started the presentation with slides that introduced the panel and laid out the structure of the talk. He then reviewed the background and history of the Trust and project, noting that the Merriweather-Symphony Woods Neighborhood is included the Downtown Columbia Plan adopted by the Howard County Council through Council Bill CB58-2009 and Symphony Woods is mandated to become a new kind of cultural park. Embracing the mandate, the Columbia Association (CA) developed an initial Final Development Plan for the property Symphony Woods, which it owns. In accord with the process established by Howard County in its Zoning Regulations for the redevelopment of Downtown Columbia, CA’s plan has completed the eight steps of the Final Development Plan (FDP) approval process (which precedes the Site Development Plan approval process).
As a part of the FDP approval, McCall noted the Planning Board stipulated two things that impact the Site Development Plan:

1. That meandering paths should be created as opposed to geometric paths that would require more trees to be removed; and,

2. That the development of Symphony Woods must be include collaboration with Merriweather Post Pavilion to the benefit and cohesion of the whole neighborhood.

In February 2013, the CA Board of Directors:

1. Approved the Inner Arbor conceptual plan for Symphony Woods;
2. Set into motion the process that lead to the creation of the Inner Arbor Trust, a not-for-profit organization intended to implement and manage the Inner Arbor concept plan;
3. Authorized CA entering into a perpetual easement to the Trust; and,
4. Provided $1.6 million in seed capital to the Inner Arbor Trust for the project. Later Howard County Government provided the Trust $3.5 million to do the first vertical development, an amphitheater.

McCall explained that the Inner Arbor Trust (which has been in existence since May when its bylaws were approved) began its work by:

1. Entering into a collaborative planning process with the operator and owner of Merriweather Post Pavilion (a major anchor attraction to the region and is completely surrounded by Symphony Woods);
2. Commissioning market research and feasibility work, currently ongoing; and,
3. Commissioning a design team to begin implementation of the Inner Arbor master plan and new (the “Chrysalis”) amphitheater.

The Inner Arbor Trust’s name for the whole of the future Merriweather-Symphony Woods Neighborhood is Merriweather Park, which is composed of Symphony Woods, which surrounds Merriweather Post Pavilion. As Merriweather Post Pavilion holds events for approximately 13% of days each year, Merriweather Park strategy is for the concert venue to become part of the public domain for the remaining 85% of the time. In addition, currently, during events at Merriweather Symphony Woods is unused by the public. Additionally, a unique cultural area – with indoor and outdoor venues – could be developed for use by both the public and concert-goers, “beyond the berm” where today the hill divides the back of the pavilion from the park. The whole of the Merriweather-Symphony Woods Neighborhood called for in the plan for Downtown Columbia – Merriweather Park – can and should combine what are now two separate areas and operations by moving away from traditional fencing to a different sort of value added barrier, the Art of Bounds that provides flexibility of use and movement. With these goals in mind, and in the collaborative context of working with Merriweather Post Pavilion, the Trust engaged their design team to develop concepts for the 16.5 acre Symphony Woods area of the park which will be developed first.

McCall then reviewed the Howard County Land Development Process for Downtown Columbia and its 16-step FDP and SDP public review process for development in
Downtown Columbia with an emphasis on the opportunities at each step for public comment. The audience was encouraged to take a copy of the printed Process Chart that was available at the front desk at sign-in (a copy of which is attached). McCall then summarized the strategic and experiential framing of the design to be to create a “wondrous,” “sensuous” “park” in Symphony Woods.

**The Design**

Martha Schwartz was introduced next to present the concepts that have been developed for Symphony Woods. First she introduced the design team and talked about the value of and the beauty of the property as it is now.

Schwartz stated that the driving force behind the design team thought process is “the trees come first.” Secondly, the team sought to establish Symphony Woods as a destination in itself and created a series of compelling “insertions,” elements set into what is already there and located to avoid trees. “Insertion” elements of the park concept were introduced one by one, by the appropriate members of the design team.

A **Garden of Letters** will greet park visitors near the area’s north entrance road and Little Patuxent Parkway. It is designed to be an engaging, dynamic area that would use flowerlike stemmed letters in a sculpture to communicate with passersby and park-goers, and convey a sense of “speaking for” and from the trees. This messaging element would be controlled by park management and might feature whimsical seasonal messages, quotations from poems or direction to events like Wine In The Woods.

**The Caterpillar** is a living green tube 12 feet high and 800 feet long. It will serve as an “Art of Bounds” boundary between the two primary constituent components of Merriweather Park, thus allowing the use of the Symphony Woods area during concerts. The Caterpillar will launch off the forest floor in two areas and will act as gateways to other areas of Merriweather Park, including the Merriweather Post Pavilion for concertgoers, and allow for control of access to paid events, when needed. The Caterpillar will consist of “skins” of structure, membranes, soil that will be irrigated for planting and increasing the diversity of living things and varying the regional ecology within the park.

The Caterpillar will be multifaceted, making it far more than just a living, round, green wall. It is planned to be highly interactive and may include musical or other sound elements, technologically interactive components and other opportunities for engagement with the visitor. Technology will play a key role. Lighting will be an artful, information and safety element. The Caterpillar may be a digital hub where people can plug in and work or play or otherwise interact. It is planned to contain two information booths for the park or other internal elements in support of the plan.

Conceptually, **The Maze** started as a children’s play area, but has grown in thought to be an area for all ages. It could be made up of different kinds of mazes – rooms, hallways, doors, walkways – layered onto/into each other providing, for a highly explorative and interactive experience. Play objects and slides are incorporated at various places.

**The Picnic Table** area is a subtle, yet dramatic, intervention in the woods – a 300-foot long, 24-foot wide raised table topped with high quality artificial turf, and cut around existing trees. The Picnic Table is intended as a place for people to gather. They can sit on it, pull up a chair to it or lie on it, using it as a table or a just a dry “forest floor”. In the summer
time, its green will be camouflaged, blending into the woods; in the winter it will provide a dramatic element of color.

The Chrysalis will be a performance amphitheater in the eastern area of the park and is designed to be adaptable to a range of performers, with two stage orientations. Covered and designed to visually borrow from the natural look of the landscape, it provides a unique visual experience – a sculpture in itself, and acts as a signal to attract park goers to performances. When not in use for performances, the Chrysalis will be used as a beautiful park pavilion for both groups as well as causal park-goers.

The Butterfly is a multi-purpose guest services building to be located between the Merriweather Post Pavilion and the new Chrysalis amphitheater, facing and embracing both. It will support the whole of Merriweather Park and contain food services with indoor seating, a gallery, bathrooms, a rooftop deck, and a wood terrace. The Butterfly aims to take advantage of the theatrical nature of the trees and the canopy. The lightness of the structure and its materials will help maximize a sense of immersion into the landscape. The roof deck will feature a bar and line-of-site views to both Merriweather Post Pavilion and the Chrysalis, and is itself is planned to be a small venue for up to 299 people; and, a large seating terrace will cascade down the hillside toward the Chrysalis.

Green elements, such as bio swales and rain gardens, will be incorporated to capture rainwater. Geothermal heating and cooling may also be incorporated to preserve the integrity of the buildings aesthetic by eliminating rooftop equipment. The northeast side of the building and its terraces will have no basement and be supported by small pillars in order to both embrace and protect existing trees.

After the various park elements were described, there was review of the current and future state of Symphony Woods as a forest. Currently, Symphony Woods, “is a barren forest, a forest without children,” that is, without a self-regenerating understory. In the proposed plan, over 156 new trees may be added (10 times those planned for removal), and a native understory will be planted in much of the eastern portion of the park, allowing for more dynamic, organic growth in the future.

Great care will be taken to incorporate all the proposed elements of the park into the existing treescape. Primary pathways will be ADA accessible, some paths will be constructed as boardwalks over the varied terrain or root systems and the preponderance of pathways will also be constructed of permeable materials. Streams will be renovated to bring the water back to the surface as both an environmental and aesthetic asset, and plantings along the streams will be developed to prevent further erosion. The meandering pathways throughout Symphony Woods will connect inserted elements, as well as integrate Symphony Woods with Merriweather Post Pavilion into the whole of Merriweather Park.

At 7:40 a short break was called so those in attendance could review illustrations of elements of the concept plan. At 7:50, Michael McCall opened the Question and Answer session.

1. Ginger Scott

   **Question:** Will all the plants be native species?

   **Answer:** Yes, that is the intent.
2. Maya Guinn

**Question:** Where will people visiting Symphony Woods park?

**Answer:** For the time being, people will visit Merriweather and Symphony Woods in the same manner they do now. In the future, there will be new parking facilities available for use in adjacent areas, like the Crescent neighborhood, as those projects proceed.

3. Steve Sternheimer

**Question:** How will the park be maintained?

**Answer:** This plan is an initial step to create what the park should be. The “what” must come first, and it will be followed by “how” and “when”. As the Trust does not have tax-payers or lien-payers, and limited opportunity for earned income, the costs of operation and maintenance of the park will have will need to be addressed and sorted out with the Trust’s partners. Operational design and economic design of the park, with P&L statements, is part of the Research & Feasibility work that is currently underway.

**Question:** What is the plan to keep the permeable payment permeable and how will streams be maintained?

Permeable paving requires a bit more maintenance than traditional asphalt. It employs materials that are used extensively in site construction as a result of more restrictive storm water management practices, and both materials and maintenance methodology is developing rapidly. Primarily it requires vacuuming in lieu of sweeping. The Trust will, work to assure it is appropriately maintained.

**Question:** What about security, won’t people steal the letters in the Garden of Letters?

**Answer:** On one level, the park will provide safety through “safety in numbers,” as more people will use it than do now. On other levels, security elements like lighting and proximity sensors will be used, but they are not part of this presentation. It is expected that the area will be safer in the future than it is now.

The letter elements will be locked into place and managed by park personnel. It will not be possible for visitors to make their own words or phrases no matter how charming that might be.

4. Linda Wengle

**Question:** Is additional parking part of this project?

**Answer:** There will 30 new parking spaces built for this project phase. Parking spaces within Symphony Woods will follow what was approved in the FDP process, which corresponds to the amount currently along the CA road between Little Patuxent Parkway and the Merriweather barn and entrance.
**Question:** Will there be benches, furniture?

**Answer:** Yes. There will be plenty of furniture elements, and some of it might be designed to blend into the look of the park as a whole. Also, knee-high walls designed for seating will be scattered around the park in areas, especially the entrances. Other places, like The Butterfly, will have seating that can be brought out as needed.

**Question:** Will there be chairs to rent?

**Answer:** Quite probably, as that is seen as potential revenue source in the future for the park to facilitate the guest experience and help to support operating costs.

---

5. Michael Hassett

**Question:** What happens in the winter months?

**Answer:** Plantings, such as those in The Caterpillar, will change with the seasons, providing visual elements throughout the year. The park will also include some evergreen elements.

It is also thought that different activities might be developed within the park during the winter, and it may be that the Picnic Table element is heated, perhaps with collected energy, for use in the winter.

---

6. Denee Barr

**Question:** Will the park be pedestrian and bike friendly?

**Answer:** The multi-use path between the hospital and Blandair Park will border the park, along the south edge of Little Patuxent Parkway. Certainly the park will be sensitive to bikers and have bike racks. The Trust is talking with bike advocates as it develops ideas. Also, there will be pedestrian friendly improvements for the intersection leading to and from The Mall. Gateways into the park will make statement to encourage that it is a special and walkable place.

It is also good to remember that this is just a first piece of Symphony Woods, which is part of a bigger plan to bridge from Merriweather Park to the Lakefront, for pedestrians and bike riders in future.

---

7. Lee Anderson

**Question:** How soon can you start?

**Answer:** With a lot of effort and luck, we hope to start in less than a year with the Chrysalis pavilion.

---

8. Mark Sullivan

**Question:** If it was decided that this plan was too much, what parts of the project would be deleted.
Answer: The Trust feels that with this number of insertions in Symphony Woods the pace of visitor experience is right, that there is a balance between the spaces with installations and the space of the park in between.

9. Terry Hill

Question: Can I step off the fabricated elements and get on the real grass areas of the park to walk or picnic?

Answer: Yes, absolutely. It is a green and growing park first and foremost.

Question: With the Picnic Table, what happens to the space underneath?

Answer: The Picnic Table will be porous, designed for rain to go through it and drain into the ground. Underneath will be a rubber material, which will be safe for a kid to crawl under, explore and play. There will be lighting under the table, creating an effect of a carpet of light.

10. Jervis Dorton

Question: Where will people park?

Answer: Parking for the area will continue much as it is today. As downtown Columbia develops, new parking facilities in areas, like the adjacent Crescent neighborhood, will be created as those projects move forward. The park will not have its own parking garage.

Question: How will people get to the places within the park?

There will be a network of meandering paths within the park that connect all the elements and allow for easy navigation between each.

11. Alan Klein

Question: How will events like Wine in the Woods happen?

Answer: Much in the same way it does now. In the concept plan, there is an area in designed to provide for booths along the pathway and facilitate such a festival. The park is being planned to make water and power available for this type of event.

12. Sue Sternheimer

Question: Will Merriweather Post Pavilion have its own bathrooms and food?

Answer: Yes Merriweather Post Pavilion will operate much as it does at the moment.

Question: Will performing organizations have within-park transportation access, such as golf carts, to move equipment in and out?

Answer: Yes.
13. Liz Henzy

**Question:** How are local arts groups going to fit into this? What are the gallery elements going to be like?

**Answer:** Programmatic elements, as well as economic elements of the design, will come in the future. At this point, concepts are being created and presented, like the fact that there will be gallery space in the Butterfly. As to the running of those spaces and curating them, these are things to define in the future; and, the Trust will fully engage the arts community in this planning.

14. Alan Klein

**Question:** Will the Picnic Table insertion require a railing?

**Answer:** With the elevation level only going up to 22 inches, a railing is not required.

**Question:** Are there development projects comparable in scope to this one that Michael McCall has managed that can be reviewed as parallels?

**Answer:** The Festival Marketplace projects in Michigan and Ohio undertaken by Jim Rouse’s company are comparable management projects.

15. Frank Hecker

**Question:** As it could seem that the Caterpillar has too many interactive functions and could be confusing to visitors, what are the one or two things the thing has to accomplish?

**Answer:** The main goal for the Caterpillar is to create a boundary between Symphony Woods and Merriweather while simultaneously fostering a seamless integration of the two. That is its raison d'être. Its ornamental elements are designed to make it a beautiful, high impact amenity. Interactive elements will keep it interesting and help it live over time. It is also a conduit for electricity and water into the and across the park.

16. Dick Boulton

**Question:** What is the central focus of this plan, as the insertions look like they could be seen as a lot of little things scattered around? Where is the continuity that relates among the different elements? Will the elements be substantial enough to last?

**Answer:** Ultimately, Merriweather Post Pavilion is the centerpiece for the park. As more elements get designed in future phases, this will become more obvious. This first phase is just a portion of what is to come.

Continuity in these insertions comes from responsiveness to the land. One idea, for example, is to incorporate wood from dead trees within Symphony Woods to create elements for the park. Signage and furniture elements in the park will also add continuity throughout. These elements are being designed to be substantial and long-lasting.
17. Russ Swatek

**Question:** Is there a maximum number of trees you would commit to taking down in this phase?

**Answer:** As of now in the planning process, there are 15 trees that we know we will have to lose with these phase one projects.

**Question:** When will we hear Merriweather Post Pavilion’s owners say they support the plan?

**Answer:** That is up to them. Regardless of timing, the Inner Arbor Trust will continue to collaborate and work with Merriweather. The Trust has a very good relationship with Howard Hughes Corporation and we communicate on a frequent basis. Everything being considered for the Symphony Woods portion of the neighborhood serves, in part, to bring value to the whole property. We are confident that our productive relationship will continue, and we look forward to working together.

18. Steve Drakos

**Question:** Columbia is a very diverse place. Is there any thought of incorporating languages other than English into the letter garden?

**Answer:** That is a really good idea, yes, now that you have brought it up.

**Question:** Assuming that the park will be used into the evenings, will the pathways be lit for later events?

**Answer:** Yes, we aim to see this as an artfully-lit park, the “best lit” area of Columbia, best as in that is will not be overly lit, but well and artfully lit.

19. John Slater

**Question:** Previous concept plans for Symphony Woods featured CA Headquarters and a canopy walk through the trees. What happened to those elements?

**Answer:** They could be a part of future designs along with other elements, in the Arts Village. While no one has lost sight of those elements, they have not been immediate focus of this team.

**Question:** Does the fence come down in phase one?

**Answer:** We are not, yet, ready to say when that is happening.
20. Ursula Kondo

**Question:** In previous designs for the park there was a large fountain for kids to play in, where is that in this design?

**Answer:** There is a fountain element in this concept plan that is in a plaza that is at the center of the whole Merriweather Park, on the Merriweather Post Pavilion side of the Caterpillar.

**Question:** Where is the money to come from?

**Answer:** Howard County and CA are already partners in this project. This is a park that will ultimately be a regional destination, drawing attention and attendance from areas well beyond County borders. The Trust foresees engaging the State for support of this strategically important investment. The State, for example, invested in Montgomery County’s Strathmore Theater which has a much narrower audience than Merriweather Park. The National Endowment for the Arts is another resource to be explored. Other partners will become apparent and pursued in the future. There will also be opportunities to have the public engaged with funding, like buying naming on bricks and benches.

21. Alan Klein

**Question:** Has the initial $1.6 million been spent? How far will the remaining $3.5 million left go? Will it build the whole Chrysalis?

**Answer:** We have spent $400,000 to date and there are commitments beyond that. While definitive costs for elements of the project have not been yet determined, the aim is to develop the Chrysalis within that budget. We are going to work very hard to make sure it happens within that budget, or find additional funding.

**Question:** Does $30 million cover the cost of whole phase?

**Answer:** Next steps are to take the concept designs and develop proper project budgets, so no definitive figure exists yet for the cost of all of these phase one projects. However, it is expected to be in the realm of $30 million.

**Questions:** Will the Chrysalis have restrooms?

**Answer:** Restrooms will not be a part of the development of the Chrysalis amphitheater. They will come with the development of the Butterfly later in phase one.

**Question:** In what way is the Inner Arbor Trust, a trust?

**Answer:** In name and hopefully in spirit.

The meeting adjourned at 9 p.m. to a round of applause.
SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN (SDP)

STEP 1: Pre-Submission Community Meeting
Property owner must hold a meeting prior to submission of SDP to DPZ
This step requires prior approval of the FDP and ECP

STEP 2: Design Advisory Panel (DAP) Meeting
Advisory meeting required for SDP

STEP 3: Submission of SDP to DPZ

STEP 4: Review of SDP by Subdivision Review Committee (SRC)
SRC Meeting or review held 3 to 4 weeks after initial application date
(if applicable)

STEP 5: SDP is Approvable
Revised Plans
If required, 45 day resubmittal deadline. Return to Step 3

STEP 6: Planning Board Public Meeting
Community Input*
(via meeting)

STEP 7: Payment of Surety by Property Owner for SDP
Executes Developer's Agreement and payment of fees (180 days)

STEP 8: SDP Originals (Mylars) Submitted for Signature Approval
180 day deadline from Planning Board Approval

Review Process Complete for SDP Stage
Apply for Building and Grading Permits

* Community input is welcomed at any point in the review process; points indicated are the most opportune times. Please see Section 16.128 of the Howard County Subdivision and Land Development Regulations for more detailed information concerning pre-submission community meeting requirements.