

Letter: McCall plan creates 'heart for Columbia' in Symphony Woods

Central to my identity as a Columbia kid are my memories of Symphony Woods, Toby's and Merriweather. I remember as a child excitedly entering those woods to visit the petting zoo. At Toby's, I enjoyed everything from "Fiddler on the Roof" to "West Side Story" to "Seussical the Musical," just to name a few. Starting as a teenager, I appreciated having Merriweather around the corner, close enough for my parents to let me go with friends but grand enough to attract bands we actually wanted to see.

Although I still enjoy Merriweather and Toby's, I rarely enter Symphony Woods anymore. Besides the annual Wine in the Woods events, I have not seen a reason to go there and frankly have not felt welcome to visit. I think that is why when asked during the charrette what the heart of Columbia was, many Columbians thought only of the lakefront and not of Symphony Woods. It's hard to see the woods you simply drive by as the "heart" of Columbia. What I love about the McCall plan is that it invites the community back and creates a heart for Columbia right in Symphony Woods.

Growing up in Columbia, I learned the importance of art and culture, of community gathering spaces and of an interconnected system of pathways that bring all of this together. The McCall Plan captures all of these, bringing everything together through a system of elevated walkways. These walkways not only connect Merriweather, Symphony Woods and Toby's, but they also leave open the real possibility of tying directly into the lakefront and even eventually to Oakland Mills. The McCall plan is a focal point for the downtown, one that highlights the importance of art, culture and community in making Columbia unique. As I look at the McCall plan, I know that my kids (and one day my grandkids) will be able to make their own memories right here in Symphony Woods — the heart of Columbia.

Jen Terrasa

Chair, Howard County Council