

2020  
Annual  
Report

# Downtown Columbia Partnership



## Downtown Columbia Partnership



*The Merriweather District will see more development in the year ahead.*

The establishment of the Downtown Columbia Partnership (DTCP) was an integral part of Howard County government's adoption of the Downtown Columbia Plan, which was passed unanimously by the Howard County Council in 2010 to guide the redevelopment of Columbia's center.

Created by legislation in 2013 as a non-profit organization, the DTCP is singularly focused on working on behalf of every business and resident in Downtown to support an urban community that is a destination of choice for people to live, work, play and visit.

The functions of the DTCP also include supporting transportation initiatives; initiating and sponsoring cultural arts and sustainability programs; implementing Downtown beautification and maintenance projects; and promoting public safety.

### **ON THE COVER**

*The new ice rink attracted residents and visitors to Color Burst Park.*

Everything the DTCP does involves partnerships. It partners with other organizations – such as the Columbia Association, the Downtown Columbia Arts and Culture Commission, and the Inner Arbor Trust – and, of course, it partners with Downtown Columbia businesses, especially developer The Howard Hughes Corporation, which has been the primary funder of the Partnership.

This annual report showcases some of the events and activities of the past year, most of which would not have been possible without DTCP's partners.

# Letter from Board Chair and Executive Director



Greg Fitchitt



Phillip Dodge

The year 2020 started off with congratulation and celebration: Feb. 1 marked the 10th anniversary of the unanimous passage of the Downtown Columbia Plan by the Howard County Council, and the long-awaited revitalization of Columbia's center was dramatically underway. Six weeks later in mid-March, the COVID-19 pandemic began causing unprecedented closures.



In 2020, the national election was a daily focus, and festering inequities erupted in public across the nation, including here. One of the year's highlights for Downtown Columbia was the Black Lives Matter vigil on June 2. Former President Barack Obama commended the young marchers in Columbia via tweet.



With businesses floundering, in-person events off-limits and visitors and residents closeted at home, the Downtown Columbia Partnership, re-imagined its activity schedule and redoubled its efforts to help local businesses. Contests were developed to promote carry-out dining, and outdoor pop-ups were set up. Races were held virtually, and Books in Bloom, was put on-line.

It was a bonanza year for reaping awards. Columbia was named the "Safest City in America" for the third year in a row by WalletHub, which also ranked it among the "Least Stressed Cities in America." Columbia was ranked #5 as "Best Places to Live in America" by *Money Magazine* and "Fittest City in Maryland" by Insurify, which also named it "Greenest City in Maryland."

It was a year in which we learned gratitude. We thank the first responders, teachers and other essential workers who bore difficult burdens. At the end of 2020, there was a glimmer of light and we look forward to 2021 being a better year for us all.

Greg Fitchitt  
President and Board Chair  
Downtown Columbia Partnership

Phillip Dodge  
Executive Director  
Downtown Columbia Partnership

## Downtown Development Update



*Community leaders celebrated the 10th anniversary of the passage of the Downtown Columbia Plan.*

**Plan Celebration** As was noted by host Greg Fitchitt, The Howard Hughes Corporation President for Columbia, there aren't many communities that throw a party to celebrate a plan. But throw a party we did, to mark the 10th anniversary of the unanimous passage February 1, 2010, of the Downtown Columbia Plan to transform the center of the community.

Civic, business and elected leaders gathered on the 4th floor of the Tenable building with its 360-degree view of the construction completed and underway in the Merriweather District, a burgeoning center of culture and commerce surrounding Merriweather Post Pavilion.

There was delicious food from Downtown Columbia restaurant Cured, congratulations from Maryland Secretary of Commerce Kelly Schulze and reminiscences by Howard County Executive Calvin Ball, former Howard County Executive Ken Ulman, Maryland Delegate Jessica Feldmark and former Howard County Council member Mary Kay Sigaty, all of whom played key roles in the development of the Plan now guiding the transformation underway. Jill Shapiro, Senior Director of Government Affairs for Tenable, and Andy Shallal, owner of Busboys and Poets, talked about why they selected Downtown Columbia for their businesses. Merriweather Post Pavilion Artistic Director Darin Atwater concluded the program at the piano.



*County Executive Calvin Ball and Greg Fitchitt The Howard Hughes Corp. President for Columbia, enjoy the party.*



*Clove and Cardamom, located on the first floor of Juniper apartments, will open in early 2021.*

**DTC Eateries** With closures and restrictions on number of customers, Downtown Columbia restaurants pivoted and ramped up ambitious carry-out and delivery services. They created attractive boxed meals for holidays, like Mother’s Day, that we were spending at home, and they added fancy cocktails to their new menus. Some newly announced coming attractions to the restaurant scene postponed plans, but others – like Akira Ramen & Izakaya at m.flats apartments, Urban Hot Pot at Ten.M apartments and Grill Marx Steakhouse & Raw Bar in Little Patuxent Square – went ahead and opened.

The Downtown Columbia Partnership supported DTC restaurants with contests, such as DTCEats and DTC Business Bingo, to draw customers and sponsored food and beverage pop-ups, and an Octoberfest that could be a new tradition.

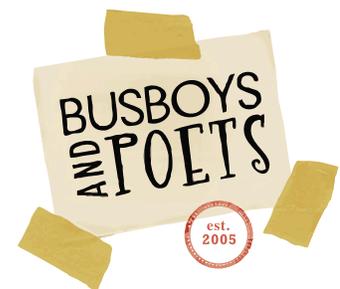
In 2021, the Merriweather District will feature the opening of The Charmery ice cream shop, Clove and Cardamom, and Dok Khao Thai Eatery at Juniper apartments, and the long-awaited Busboys and Poets opens nearby in its own standalone building. Baltimore dining favorite The Food Market will open a restaurant in 40 Corporate Center in the Central District. Food market Lidl, a German-based chain, will open at The Mall in Columbia.



*The Charmery ice cream shop will be open in time for warm weather.*



*The mural at the soon-to-open Busboys and Poets restaurant served as a backdrop for a selfie.*



## Downtown Development Update

**Color Burst Park** The most popular new attraction in Downtown Columbia in 2020 was Color Burst Park, the swatch of green beside Juniper apartments.

The outdoors beckoned to families in the summer with its child-friendly pop-up fountain and splash pad featuring synchronized bursts of water, colored lights and recorded music. Furniture and games provided a place to play and stay safe.

By winter, the park was transformed into an ice rink, and people flocked to skate under the lights amid seasonal decorations.

*Color Burst Park was the scene of safe family fun during 2020.*

The Partnership sponsored a Downtown Columbia Cocktail Pop-Up. Even with masks on, it was clear people were having fun.





*Greg Fitchitt, The Howard Hughes Corp. President for Columbia, and County Executive Calvin Ball tapped elbows after signing the transfer of Bailey Park from HHC to Howard County Government.*



*Local dignitaries and the honoree (center) gathered to cut the ribbon on the new Vivian C. “Millie” Bailey Park at the Lakefront.*

**Free Speech** In October, community leaders celebrated the ribbon cutting and opening of Vivian C. ‘Millie’ Bailey Park at Lake Kittamaqundi in Downtown Columbia. Bailey Park, named after the 103-year-old Columbia resident and World War II veteran, was developed by The Howard Hughes Corporation and officially turned over to the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks at the ceremony.

“Bailey Park is a direct result of the Downtown Columbia Plan recognizing the importance of freedom of speech in civic life,” said Greg Fitchitt, President, Columbia, The Howard Hughes Corporation. “The Plan called for the dedication to the public of an outdoor amenity space available for public assembly and discourse. This area – with its playground, its connection to the beloved Columbia Lakefront, and its future as the site of the Howard County Veteran’s Monument – is truly a park for all people.”

**Working in DTC** When completed, the Merriweather District will include 2.3 million square feet of office space. One Merriweather, Two Merriweather and 6100 Merriweather (Tenable building) are already home to major health, education, tech and cyber security firms as well as the area’s top startups. The area will also include 320,000 square feet of retail. F45 opened its store on the ground level of Two Merriweather in 2020.



*Equipment was tested by young visitors at the grand opening of F45.*

## Downtown Development Update



*Leasing has been brisk at Juniper apartments in the Merriweather District.*



Living in DTC Leasing of the Merriweather District's Juniper apartments soared in 2020, as residents there enjoyed the new Color Burst Park and safe outdoor common spaces. New restaurants add to the other nearby amenities. In 2021, construction of Juniper's sibling building, Marlow, will be underway with an opening expected the following year.

Juniper includes the first affordable housing units developed in accordance with the Downtown Columbia Plan. Of the 382 units, 24 are indistinguishable from the others and are available for income-qualified renters. Marlow will also include affordable units, as will the New Cultural Center project.

Other housing developed in Downtown Columbia under the Downtown Columbia Plan includes The Metropolitan, m.flats and Ten.M apartments on the edge of The Mall in Columbia.



*A father and his daughter enjoy an ice cream break.*

**New Cultural Center** It has been more than a decade since expansion of visual and performing arts spaces was envisioned in the Downtown Columbia Plan to help create “a 21st century cultural identity for Downtown Columbia.” Designs have been created for the New Cultural Center, and construction will be underway in 2021.

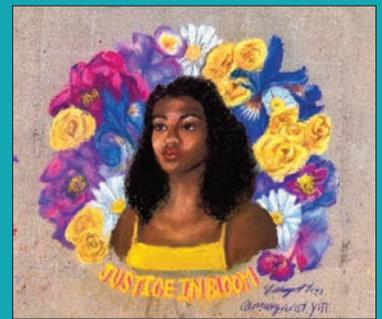
The complex will include a dinner theatre, two smaller performing arts spaces, exhibition space for visual arts, and artist studios, as well as 193 apartments, 87 of which will be affordable units. The remaining apartments will be market rate. The project will be built at the current site of Toby’s Dinner Theatre at the intersection of Symphony Woods Road and South Entrance Road.

**Pavilion Featured** The biggest attraction of living in the Merriweather District is the Merriweather Post Pavilion, sadly missed during pandemic closings of large venues. Before COVID-19 hit, Inside Merriweather, a 26-minute, behind-the-scenes look at more than 50 years of performance at and news about the Pavilion, premiered on Maryland Public Television (MPT).

*Construction of the New Cultural Center will start in 2021.*



The Partnership's "chalk it up" events featured thoughtful art work.



## Events



*Despite the pandemic, there were still a variety of activities in Downtown Columbia in 2020. With imagination and ingenuity, organizers found ways to celebrate and compete and entertain while maintaining safety protocols. Downtown Columbia was also the scene of what was perhaps the most inspiring community event in its recent history.*

*The Black Lives Matter vigil was led by young people.*



*HoCo Pride Fest brought out followers to participate in a “chalk it up” event.*

**March and Rally** Thousands overflowed Lakefront Plaza in Downtown Columbia on June 2, to protest American racism and police brutality. The youth-led march and Black Lives Matter vigil attracted the attention of former President Barack Obama, who tweeted support for the young marchers. Local elected officials, including Howard County Executive Calvin Ball, were on hand to support the demonstrators. Police Chief Lisa Myers walked and talked with participants.

A week later, the Solidarity Rally for Black Lives by Muslims of Howard County again attracted hundreds of participants to the Columbia Lakefront. It was sponsored by CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations), ICNA (Islamic Circle of North America) for Social Justice, and the Muslim Family Center. Iman Johari Abdul-Malik, Director of Outreach at the Dar Al Hijrah Islamic Center, was the lead speaker.

**Chalk It Up** The Partnership hosted #ColorColumbia and #ChalkYourWalk events to spread color and excitement throughout Downtown and elsewhere in Columbia. The campaign started with chalking up the multi-use pathway from the hospital to the Lakefront. HoCo Pride Fest participants were invited to chalk up Color Burst Park, and Roll Up and Dye scheduled a Black Lives Matter chalk event. Prizes were awarded to participants for chalk art work of beauty and substance.

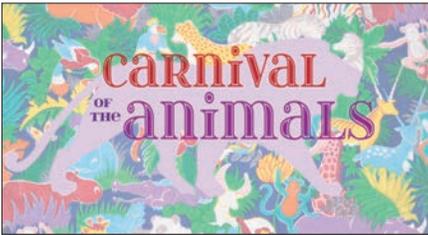


*Demonstrators at the Black Lives Matter vigil held signs and marched peacefully.*



*A Solidarity Rally for Black Lives by Muslims of Howard County was held at the Lakefront.*

## Events



*The Columbia Orchestra performed “Carnival of the Animals” at the Chrysalis.*



*Cured held a Whiskey Smash cocktail-making course.*

**Arts Award** The Howard Hughes Corporation was presented the Howie Award for Outstanding Business Supporter of the Arts by the Howard County Arts Council at the Celebration of the Arts in August. HHC was honored for working to create a regional hub for culture and commerce in Downtown Columbia through engaging public art and transformative arts programs.

Efforts cited include the acquisition and installation of the Azlon kinetic sculpture; major sponsorship of the annual Books in Bloom festival; presentation of OPUS, a bold music and art festival; creation of the Merriweather District Artist-in-Residence program, a collaboration with the Howard County Arts Council; and support of Soulful Symphony, a visionary orchestra that celebrates American music and culture.

**Artists in Residence** In 2020, four artists were selected for the third annual Merriweather District Artist-in-Residence program, created and supported by The Howard Hughes Corporation. The quartet created new projects while living and working in Downtown Columbia, sharing a studio in 6100 Merriweather, and living in the adjacent Juniper apartments. The four artists in residence were multi-media artist Johannes Barfield, artist and scientist Peter Krsko, musician and visual artist Amy Reid and installation artist Ying Zhu.



*Artist-in-Residence Peter Krsko made good use of the studio space.*

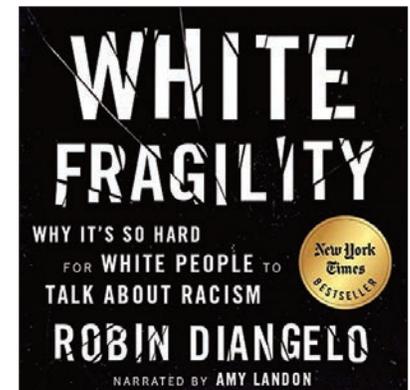


*Symphony of Lights continued its holiday tradition.*



*Social distancing didn't keep people away from the Lakefront.*

**Blooming Success** In August the annual Books in Bloom festival hosted by the Downtown Columbia Partnership with major support from The Howard Hughes Corporation attracted 2,510 online attendees to 17 virtual events. The festival began with an “Immigration and Identify” panel discussion and concluded with a “Conversation with Robin DiAngelo,” author of *White Fragility*. Sponsors included Columbia Association, The Mall in Columbia, Howard County General Hospital, Howard Community College, TD Ameritrade, Merriweather Post Pavilion, McKenzie Commercial Real Estate, Residences at Vantage Point, Thrive, UHY Advisors, Wecker Hospitality, Fulton Bank, and The Wendy Slaughter Team.



**Octoberfest** The Partnership sponsored the Downtown Columbia Octoberfest during the month's weekends. Octoberfest-inspired food and beverages were on sale at Cured, and Howard County General Hospital was the recipient of fees from table reservations.



*The Partnership sponsored a new Octoberfest event.*

**Virtual Runs** Clyde's 10K and the Partnership's 2020 Discover Downtown Columbia 5K were held virtually with fewer runners but with great enthusiasm. Participating runners enjoyed running the official course at any time of their choosing, as well as a “running playlist” contest on Facebook.

**Still Shining** Set in Merriweather Post Pavilion and made up of more than 300,000 bulbs in animated and stationary holiday light creations, Symphony of Lights is a seasonal tradition for thousands of families.



*Butterfly sculptures dazzled a young visitor.*

## Beautification and Connections



*The Howard Hughes Corp. and Blossoms of Hope held another planting.*

**Pretty in Pink** The Howard Hughes Corporation and Blossoms of Hope joined forces once again to plant 100 pink-blossoming trees – 84 Kwanzan Cherry and 16 Native Dogwood – in Downtown Columbia. The planting is intended to maximize and draw attention to the natural beauty of Downtown Columbia by eventually lining the streets with flowering trees from the Merriweather District to the Lake Kittamaqundi Lakefront and in other areas. The Howard Hughes Corporation purchased the trees from Blossoms of Hope, a local nonprofit organization which raises funds to benefit the Claudia Mayer/Tina Broccolino Cancer Resource Center and other charities.

**Free Trees** The Howard Hughes Corporation gave away 600 trees to residents of Columbia and elsewhere in Howard County through the Community Canopy Project, an Arbor Day Foundation program that helps expand the tree canopies of cities and towns across the United States.

**Colorful** The Kittamaqundi Community Church has put up a temporary art installation featuring butterflies on the corner of their property on Vantage Point Road in Downtown Columbia. The work was painted by local artist Martha Lohaus, a member of the congregation.

**On the Wall** The Howard Hughes Corporation commissioned Katherine Tzu-Lan Mann, one of the artists in the second annual Merriweather District Artist-in-Residence program, to create a mural for Juniper apartments.

**Lit Up** The Downtown Columbia Partnership and The Howard Hughes Corporation honored Howard County 2020 high school graduates by lighting up the 6100 Merriweather office building with the colors of their schools. Students and their families were invited to Azlon Plaza to take photos or videos. First responders were also recognized by lighting up 6100 Merriweather office building with blue lights.

**Signs** The distinctive new yellow signs in the Merriweather District are helpful for wayfinding and branding and for beautification.

**Bike to Work Week** Cycling commuters were given a full week to model environmentally friendly transportation in 2020. The Partnership, working with the Howard County Office of Transportation, sponsored the largest pit stop in the Central Maryland region. DTCRadio featured a special podcast with Allison Calkins from the Office of Transportation to celebrate bicycling as a healthy and environmentally beneficial commuting option.



*New signs were installed in the Merriweather District.*



*Artist-in-Residence alum Katherine Tzu-Lan Mann created a mural for Juniper apartments.*

## Beautification and Connections



**Cycling** Hundreds of bicyclists turned out for the BikeAround Downtown organized by the Downtown Columbia Partnership in partnership with the Columbia Association in October. The ride featured a 7.8 mile course that started and ended in ColorBurst Park in the Merriweather District and took riders past Merriweather Post Pavilion and around the Lakefront. Participants took photos and shared them on social media for the chance of winning prizes. The event is designed to encourage cycling.

**Pathways** As part of the continued implementation of the Downtown Columbia Plan, The Howard Hughes Corporation funded and built a new multi-use pathway linking Wilde Lake to Downtown Columbia along Twin Rivers Road. This multi-modal, 10-foot-wide connection for pedestrians and cyclists also includes crosswalk improvements, enhanced signage and ADA features.

The Columbia Association and the Partnership signed a five-year Pathway Maintenance Agreement. CA is mowing, removing snow and providing other maintenance for the multi-use pathway.

The Columbia Association also installed about 1,500 linear feet of pathways in Merriweather Park at Symphony Woods between Little Patuxent Parkway and the Chrysalis, and between the entrance road to the front of Merriweather and the new pathway.

*The BikeAround ride started and ended at Color Burst Park.*





*Cyclists rode around Downtown for recreation and for transportation.*

**TDM Update** The Downtown Columbia Plan called for the development of a Transportation Demand Management Plan (TDMP) for Downtown Columbia to ensure it will be multi-modal as it grows. TDM helps people use the infrastructure in place for transit, ridesharing, walking, biking and telework. It is cost-effective in guiding the design of our transportation and physical infrastructure so that alternatives to driving are naturally encouraged and our systems are in better balance.

In late 2019, surveys were distributed to gather information about resident and workforce needs, and a Complete Streets and Bike Howard Open House was held in January to gather and share more information. The Partnership's Pedestrian Safety Committee met and reviewed concerns, and property owners and the County were informed of findings. The signage committee is identifying a firm to develop a wayfinding plan for Downtown Columbia. In addition, conversations with the State Highway Administration have begun regarding signage on Route 29 to include "Downtown Columbia."

**Podcast** Another sort of connection was also launched in 2020: DTCRadio featuring Partnership Executive Director Phillip Dodge in conversation with community and leaders, including those heading DTC businesses.

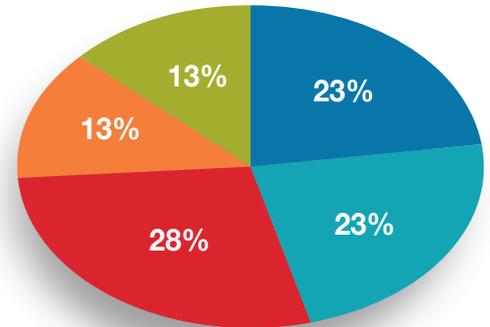
*Tribute was paid to High School graduates and to first responders via lighting of the office building at 6100 Merriweather Drive.*



# Financial Snapshot FY20

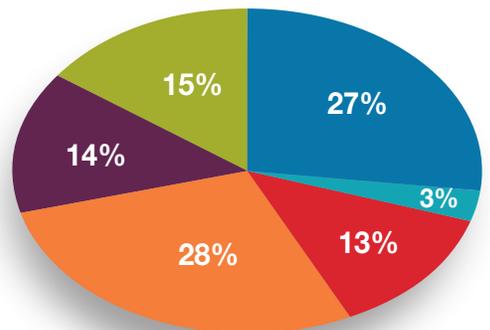
## Revenue

The Howard Hughes Corporation	\$	168,500
CEPPA 25 Assessments	\$	167,127
Columbia Association Grant	\$	200,000
Sponsorships & Earned Income	\$	95,626
In-kind Services	\$	94,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>725,253 **</b>



## Expenses

Administration	\$	159,613
In-kind Services	\$	20,000
Marketing & Advertising	\$	76,003
Events & Sponsorships	\$	162,446
CEPPA 25 Transportation	\$	83,515
Maintenance & Beautification	\$	86,264 *
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>587,841</b>



\*includes \$74,000 in-kind services

\*\*\$102,463 of CEPPA 25 Transportation restricted funds are not included in these charts and are being carried over from FY19 to FY20.



*Busboys and Poets restaurant will open in 2021.*

# Leadership



The Marketing Center in the Two Merriweather office building won an Amenity Award in 2020.

## Board of Directors

Greg Fitchitt  
*Chair*  
President, Columbia  
The Howard Hughes Corporation

Nancy Tucker  
*Secretary*  
Community Relations Manager  
The Howard Hughes Corporation

Chuck Bubeck  
Business Owner

Jennifer Jones  
Deputy Chief of Staff  
Howard County Government

Milton Matthews  
President/CEO  
Columbia Association

Barb Nicklas  
Sr. General Manager  
The Mall in Columbia

## Staff

Phillip Dodge  
*Executive Director*

## Advisory Committee

Lynn Foehrkolb  
Town Center Village Board

Elizabeth Kromm  
Howard County General Hospital

Joan Lancos  
Resident Representative

Barbara Lawson  
Resident Representative

Leonardo McClarty  
Chamber of Commerce

Kristy Myers  
Kettler

Larry Twele  
Howard County EDA

Minah Woo  
Howard Community College



New Merriweather District signs were put up in 2020. Juniper apartment residence is in the background.



P A R T N E R S H I P

10960 Grantchester Way | Suite 110 | Columbia, MD 21044 | 410.964.4984  
[www.downtowncolumbiamd.com](http://www.downtowncolumbiamd.com)

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