



**Written testimony in support of funding for New Cultural Center  
Submitted to County Council on October 19, 2020**

I am writing on behalf of the Association of Community Services and its over 170 member organizations and community advocates. I strongly urge you to approve the funds for the development of the New Cultural Center. Failure to move forward with this project would do long-term damage to Howard County.

Howard County is woefully in need of the 87 affordable housing units that the NCC will provide. Prior to the COVID crisis, the shortage of affordable units was estimated to be between 5,500 and 6,000. This number has surely increased.

We were extremely fortunate to receive a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit for this project. Failure to move forward on this project in the next few months would not only jeopardize this funding for this project, but for future projects as well. As you know, LIHTCs are very competitive. Our failure to use this tax credit would seriously undermine our ability to secure future awards that will be needed for the library, fire station and transit center.

We would be in breach of the DRRA that the County agreed to originally. Howard County has a reputation for being deliberate and for meeting its obligations. Future public-private partnerships rely on strength of this reputation. A breach of the agreement will jeopardize what was a painstakingly crafted plan for Downtown Columbia.

The New Cultural Center also promises to provide a much-needed venue for the entire community, not just those who can afford tickets to concerts. The programming provided by the Department of Recreation and Parks as well as the Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts is accessible to those of all incomes and honors the vision of this community to provide opportunities for all of its residents.

The space also promises to be an excellent venue for the many fundraisers that are critical to our nonprofit community. It will provide much-needed beautiful and flexible space for a wide variety of events that will be attractive to both donors and sponsors.

I understand the need for fiscal restraint. However, the need for this project far outweighs the risk involved. It has been carefully crafted. Failure to approve this project will result in the loss of \$2 million that has been spent on predevelopment and the loss of the cornerstone of the Downtown development.

Show your commitment to providing opportunities for all of our residents. Honor the County's agreement and the faith that the State has shown. Create a truly beautiful and functional cornerstone to Downtown Columbia by supporting the funding for the New Cultural Center.

Thank you.

Joan Driessen  
Executive Director