

Rob Hollis, DAP Chair

Design Advisory Panel 07-13-2011 **Symphony Woods Park – Phase 1**

Concept

- 1) What is driving the design? The plan seems to be engineered for grade but lacks an overall theme.
- 2) There are four major quadrants defined by pathways, this offers very little variety of experience.
- 3) The park has a quasi formal layout yet lacks significant structure. Aside from the mall axis extension and a loose connection to Merriweather Post Pavilion (MPP) there seems to be no rationale for the path organization. The lateral axis western edge is especially weak simply ending at the parking lot.
- 4) The plans lack adequate information as to the existing tree locations, new tree locations, additional planted areas, clearings, seating areas, amenities (if any), etc. I assume more information will follow with subsequent submissions, but is there more to the park design than paths?

Fountain

- 1) Is there a conceptual direction for the appearance of the fountain?
- 2) In the proposed location, the fountain appears to be approximately 12' below Little Patuxent Parkway (LPP). How tall is the fountain? I fear it will not be visible from LPP. Strongly consider moving the fountain closer to LPP. Connecting the fountain to the stair plaza will create a more dynamic gathering place establishing a visual bookend for the mall plaza axis. The proximity of the fountain to LPP will draw attention into the park from the street.

Circulation & Entry

- 1) Columbia has a well established system of paths, parks and community space. The boundary between in and out is largely undefined in all scales throughout Columbia (i.e. When do you arrive in Town Center?). However, this is a defined park and should offer a special experience. Consider a "gateway experience" into the park. Please consider marking all entrances into the park. Parks are able to create a special sense of place while being only a street away through screening and spatial manipulation. Consider edging along LPP to further define the bounds of the park and force use of the entry points.
- 2) The new connection on the western site edge from LPP to Merriwether appears less accessible than the existing connection.
- 3) Strongly consider shifting the fountain and central lateral path to the northern edge of the site. This shift will allow for a large loop through the park without having to leave the park and walk on LPP.
- 4) The nodes at path intersections lack depth. What are the elements at each node to create a place of interest?

Café

- 1) Parks that most successfully accommodate a café will usually have enough mass of park users for the economics to work. The café is not the draw but the support for the place to go. There needs to be an amenity of significance to populate the café (i.e.: a playground, skating rink, etc). Aside from concert days, is there such a draw?

Conclusion

A park should be a very special place that offers a place for everyone with a variety of spatial, environmental and communal experience. However, all too often, a park can also be a one loop through and never return again. As one of the first projects in a "new" Town Center, this park should set the example for other projects to follow. It is imperative that Symphony Woods Park be of the highest design standards. The Merriweather-Symphony Woods Neighborhood Design Guidelines do establish a good foundation for the ultimate build out of the park and greater neighborhood. However, without stronger design influence Symphony Woods Park will be just an assortment of paths, a fountain, a café and a set of stairs. At this point, I fail to see strength of design in the Symphony Woods Park submission.