

Housing Questions for Political Candidates

1. As you know, Jim Rouse developed Columbia to be a City in which all would live in harmony. He envisioned that there would be an economic and racial mix that would lead the way in showing that all can live together harmoniously. In recent years, reports have shown that there has been a clustering by income levels in certain parts of Columbia. One example of this clustering is shown by the fact that approximately 62% of the children attending Stevens Forest Elementary School receive assistance under the FARM program. Do you think such clustering is consistent with Rouse's dream?

I believe clustering is inconsistent with James Rouse's over-all vision for Columbia. Oakland Mills has been adversely affected by this clustering and has the lowest incomes of all ten Columbia Villages according to the Columbia Association/Howard County Marketing Study.

Is it appropriate in your view?

Clustering is inappropriate as shown by educational studies. Students suffer in schools that have 20% or more FARM students when it comes to long term achievement. The original Rouse idea was for every Columbia resident to have the opportunity to thrive. Low income clustering can also lead to higher crime rates.

If not, what would you do to correct it?

The school system is independent and not a part of Howard County Government. However, I would lobby the school board for changes in school districting such that FARM students are distributed to other schools to get to a 20% or lower FARM in all schools. The County Council should also take responsibility for ensuring that, based on housing and neighborhood conditions, all neighborhoods in Columbia are desirable living places.

2. The "Fee In Lieu" policy which allows funds to be paid for the development of subsidized housing in areas other than the immediate area under development, and the "Alternative Compliance" policy which allows the subsidized housing requirement to be fulfilled off site allow for the clustering of subsidized housing in certain areas of the county such as Oakland Mills. Do you support these policies?

No. I do not support these policies. They allow new developments to be free of any Low and Moderate Income Housing and adds to elitist housing. Clustering has occurred as a result of these policies which has led to the Housing Commission buying complexes like Verona.

Do you feel these are consistent with the dream of Jim Rouse?

Columbia was intended to provide housing for all income levels. There are no zoning requirements under the County's New Town Zoning for subsidized housing yet Columbia has the lion's share of this type of housing. The rest of Howard County has been immune from subsidized housing due to this "Fee in Lieu" policy allowed by this Howard County Council. Downtown Columbia development by Howard Hughes also allows for ALL housing development to be done under "Fee in Lieu" when the 5,500 dwelling units are built. This approach does not support the Rouse approach to housing.

If not, what would you do to change it.

I would sponsor a bill to require all builders to provide Low and Moderate Income Housing as part of their new development. This would relieve pressure to place subsidized housing wherever the developers can in Columbia.

3. Many houses in Columbia, particularly in Oakland Mills, are in foreclosure. Not only is this very unfortunate for the affected homebuyers, but it also affects the neighborhood in which these properties are located. The problem is exacerbated by "zombie foreclosures" where the banks are unable or unwilling to take ownership of the properties and then resell them. Thus, they stay unoccupied and unmaintained and serve as a blight on the surrounding properties. What would you do to hold banks accountable for proper property maintenance once they start the foreclosure process?

Banks have gotten for the most part a free pass on home maintenance when they initiate a foreclosure. The State of Maryland now requires banks to notify the State when a foreclosure is started. That information is only available to governments including Howard County but is not currently available to Homeowners Associations. Howard County has very limited authority when it comes to home maintenance issues and only intervenes when their are health related issues. I would work with the Howard County State delegation to get the state law amended to include Homeowners Association who DO have the authority under most Covenants to require that a property be maintained. The major issue here is identification of the bank for a foreclosed property especially for a "zombie foreclosure".

I would also seek a legal ruling from the State and/or Howard County that would allow Homeowner Associations access to this foreclosure information with out the need for amended State legislation.

4. In part due to the impact of the policies and issues mentioned above, Oakland Mills has one of the highest amounts of subsidized and low rent housing in the county. Not only is this absolutely inconsistent with the dream of Jim Rouse, it also tears at the very fabric of Columbia since it creates the same type of socio/economic segregation that Columbia was designed to eliminate. What specifically would you do to change this pattern?

Subsidized and low rent housing in Oakland Mills has occurred because the housing is 45+ years old and older housing relative to new housing is in most cases cheaper to buy and commands lower rents. There needs to be a moratorium in Oakland Mills that would stop any additional subsidized housing/low rent housing. I would sponsor, as a Council member, this type of legislation.

What would you do revitalize Oakland Mills to make it consistent with the dream of Jim Rouse?

Oakland Mills needs high end housing and removal of the preponderance of low end apartment units. This is what is referred to as "full spectrum housing". Housing for ALL income levels. I applaud you on what I've learned regarding your revitalization initiative in the housing area and your work to revise the Oakland Mills Master Plan. This is an excellent comprehensive approach to solving this issue by drawing your Master Plan Boundary to include housing AND the Village Center. I look forward to being a champion on the Howard County Council for your revitalization efforts.