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**Oakland Mills**

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**Resident Speak Out Remarks to the CA Board of Directors**

Good evening and thank you for this opportunity to speak. I am Jonathan Edelson, the chair of the Oakland Mills Community Association Village Board, and I am speaking on its behalf tonight.

I come to you with concerns about transparency in the relationship between the Columbia Association and Columbia's villages. What I have to say is Oakland Mills Village's perspective and is not intended to represent the perspectives of any of the other villages.

Early in the pandemic, the village board chairs met with the former CA President and former CA board chair. One of the themes of that meeting was that we want to partner with CA, but partnership requires transparency. Decisions affecting the villages made without having conversations with us are not in the spirit of partnership. Yes, we have a formal agreement via the management contract that requires a degree of partnership, but during most of my nearly 20 years living in Columbia, there has also been a tradition of partnership between CA and the villages beyond what the management contract requires.

This brings me to the present day. As you know, Oakland Mills was already concerned about the position CA took on Maryland House of Delegates Bill 1060, also known as the Residents' Bill of Rights, on behalf of not just itself but the ten Columbia Villages. In a letter to you, we pointed out that we were concerned to learn from a CA board packet that CA was already working toward having this bill amended to exclude us. We also requested that we be omitted from this exclusion request. CA did not respond to us timely, nor did they honor our request. OMCA ultimately supported this bill, so now CA and OMCA find themselves in a unique position with the Maryland General Assembly where one entity supported the bill and the other tried to get the supporting entity excluded. There were no discussions with our village boards or village managers as CA formed its position. This is not partnership.

We are even more concerned after events last week. We learned that CA notified the Villages with contested elections on the day before election day that it would not be casting its corporate votes in the election. While CA, like any other voter, has a right not to vote, the timing and rationale of this decision is very suspect. Some villages rely on the CA votes, which do not change the outcome of an election, to establish their quorum. Learning that these votes are not coming in for the first time anyone can remember was quite the shock, and learning this the day before the election again speaks to lack of transparency. Furthermore, the rationale given for this decision was the candidate pool. What does this mean? And if there was a questionable candidate pool for which CA's votes could be considered an endorsement, per the language of the notification, isn't CA making as much of a statement by declaring it would not cast votes that have never changed the outcome of an election anyway?

A portion of this candidate pool will be taking office in a few days. Although OMCA did not have a contested election, we still consider those who ran to be candidates and part of this pool. Do we really want to start the new year with the candidates elected to office wondering if they were part of the pool that CA staff had concerns about? How do we move forward and work together after such a statement?

Furthermore, CA's attorney apparently reviewed each village's legal documents and determined that we don't need quorums in our elections because they aren't annual meetings. OMCA's bylaws, Article 1, Section 1.01 clearly state: "The Association shall hold each year, commencing with the year 1969, an annual meeting of the members for the election of directors, the election of a representative to serve for a one-year term as the representative of the Association on the Columbia Council..." How do you reconcile this new legal opinion with such a clear and unequivocal statement? This is literally the first sentence in OMCA's bylaws.

As with the HB 1060 situation, once again, CA's legal staff and President did not talk to the villages about this. We are independent entities. Each village has unique legal documents, and more importantly, each village should be shown respect. Having CA's attorney review our legal documents and form an opinion without our knowledge or any discussion with us is not respectful and it's not partnership. For the record, the OMCA village board discussed this Tuesday evening, and we continue to maintain that our election is our annual meeting. We will not incur additional expense to hire an attorney to review our legal documents in response to what CA has done, as we have had several reviews in recent years as we modified our Articles of Incorporation and our by-laws, and as we addressed how we would hold our annual meeting election in 2020 during the early shut-down period of the pandemic.

I fear what might happen if CA continues this policy into the future, putting CA and a village at odds over whether a village election is valid and whether a village has officially elected a candidate to the CA board. Normally, when one party's counsel reviews another's legal position without any discussion, that's indicative of an adversarial relationship. Is that where CA stands with the villages? Should the villages be "lawyering up" to protect our positions relative to our "partner?" How will residents feel if villages have to cut back on events and community support due to growing legal fees as we try to maintain our independence and react to the latest position of CA staff?

I don't have specific answers to any of the questions I've raised in this speak out, but I hope the outgoing and incoming CA Board of Directors will. My general answer is that we should once again be partners. These situations do nothing but cause stress for our respective staff and boards, and they further erode Columbia residents' desire to engage in the affairs of CA and the villages.