

2021  
Annual  
Report

# Downtown Columbia Partnership





## Downtown Columbia Partnership



*The Color Burst Park Ice Rink was a popular attraction for families.*



*The Downtown Columbia Partnership was a sponsor of the Howard County PRIDE event.*

**ON THE COVER** *The Food Market Columbia opened in the Spring of 2021.*

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.

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

## Letter from Board Chair and Executive Director



*Greg Fitchitt*



*Phillip Dodge*

The year 2021 stumbled and mumbled its beginning with postponed and cancelled activities, curtailed or closed businesses, confused and masked residents, employees and shoppers. People were consumed with getting vaccinated and then “boosted.” We worried about our parents, our children, our neighbors, friends and co-workers and ourselves.

With the perspective of looking back at the 12 months past, we can see the highlights of the year, most often when we were outdoors enjoying the beauty of our “city in a garden” or when we witnessed the irrepressible expression of art and energy. We marveled at the spirit of dedicated health care workers and intrepid teachers, of all innovative and imaginative people who found new ways to execute on their promises to families and jobs. For the most part, we were a community that suffered but was not defined by the bad times we were sharing.

The Downtown Columbia Partnership had already made its “pivot” in 2020 by relying on new ways of helping businesses affected by the pandemic. In 2021 we focused again on attracting people to local businesses by hosting safe activities of value that got people out of their homes and into community life.

Among the most successful of the year’s events was Books in Bloom which attracted an enormous and diverse audience, filling a huge tent set up in Color Burst Park and nearby pop-ups. Attendees were by turns sobered and inspired by the visiting authors. It was a fitting response to the upheaval of 2021 and its implicit and explicit call to recognize and address past and current inequities.

Better days are ahead, and we look forward to sharing them with you.



Greg Fitchitt  
President and Board Chair  
Downtown Columbia Partnership



Phillip Dodge  
Executive Director  
Downtown Columbia Partnership



*The Lakefront was again the site of community rallies in 2021.*



## Downtown Development Update



*Marlow apartment residence went from a drawing (above) to full construction mode during the year.*



*Clove & Cardamom restaurant opened on the ground floor of Juniper apartment residence.*

**New Apartments** The April groundbreaking of Marlow, a 510,000-square-foot apartment residence, was one of the top development news stories of 2021 in Downtown Columbia. Rising alongside its sister, Juniper, across Color Burst Park, the seven-story Marlow will feature 472 apartments (30 of which will be affordable units) and 32,000 square feet of retail in the center of the Merriweather District's walkable neighborhood of offices, shops and restaurants. It is scheduled for completion in Spring 2023.

**Merriweather District Dining** More choices were added to Downtown Columbia's growing restaurant scene in 2021. The Merriweather District diversified its dining options by adding the Indian-fusion restaurant Clove & Cardamom and Dok Khao Thai Eatery, both located on the street level of Juniper apartments as is The Charmery ice cream shop, which opened in March with a waiting line for its uniquely flavored treats.

Later in the year founder Andy Shallal opened his largest Busboys and Poets nearby. The 10,000-square-foot location includes bar, restaurant, bookstore and event space. During the first month of operations, Busboys and Poets verified its reputation for outstanding programming by participating in the Books in Bloom festival, hosting poetry on its patio, holding an artist reception, and presenting "An Evening with Nikki Giovanni."



*The Charmery ice cream shop opened in March.*

**Central District Openings** Merriweather District wasn't the only Downtown Columbia location welcoming new additions. In the Central District, another award-winning restaurateur, owner and chef Chad Gauss, opened The Food Market. The community was enthusiastic about the Hampden favorite taking over 5,000 square feet in the Corporate 40 office building along Little Patuxent Parkway.

**At The Mall** Not to be outdone, The Mall in Columbia's The Walrus Oyster and Ale House, already a local favorite, opened Walrus Roadside Stand, an outdoor eating spot perfect for diners eager for good casual food. Those looking for morning coffee and breakfast treats gathered at a new Dunkin' Donuts added to the menu of eateries at the Mall. In other food-related news at the Mall, Lidl, the German discount grocery store, opened in June.

On the retail side, Warby Parker eyewear store opened in The Mall in Columbia, as did Under Armour sports apparel and Akira clothing store.

**At the Lake** The Pearl Modern Spa & Boutique moved into the lower level of Whole Foods Market on the Columbia Lakefront in the space formerly occupied by Columbia Association's Haven on the Lake.



*Dok Khao Thai Eatery joined the dining scene in Merriweather District, as did Busboys and Poets whose owner, Andy Shallal, welcomed Books in Bloom headliner Nikole Hannah-Jones on the restaurant's opening day.*



## Downtown Development Update

**Upcoming** Howard Community College held a groundbreaking celebration for its planned mathematics and athletics complex, estimated to be completed in 2024, and announced it had selected a new president, Dr. Daria Willis, to start in early 2022. At the end of August, The Howard Hughes Corporation started the lengthy process to develop a medical office building in the Lakefront District south of Whole Foods Market.

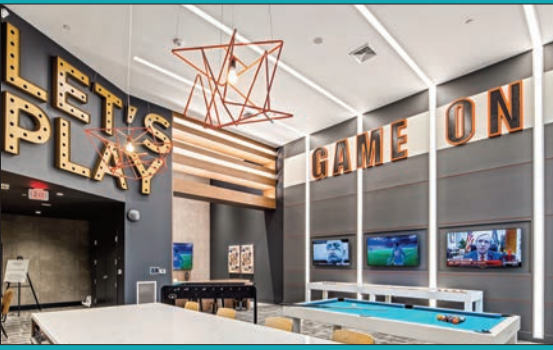
**Office Tenants** The Howard Hughes Corporation signed new office tenants to its properties in Downtown Columbia. Advarra compliance consulting company, Ames Watson private equity firm, tech company Applied Network Solutions, business solutions provider Insperity, and AI health care company Olive took a combined 50,000 square feet of office space.

**Awards** As in prior years, awards for Columbia and Howard County poured in throughout 2021. Below are some of the accolades.

**Safety** WalletHub named Columbia safest city in American for the third year in a row. The criteria included home and community safety, natural disaster risk and financial safety.

*Planning for a medical office building on the Lakefront has been announced.*





*Juniper apartment residence's amenities helped it win a Best In Real Estate Award.*



*Columbia was named the Best City for Jobs in the United States.*

**Jobs** Columbia earned Best City for Jobs in the United States by WalletHub, which compared 182 cities. The criteria ranged from job opportunities to employment growth to monthly average salary.

**Real Estate** The Baltimore Business Journal honored the Merriweather District's Juniper apartments with a Best In Real Estate Award. The apartment residence was cited for its amenities, among them a pool, a maker space and a music room with a grand piano.

**Happiness** WalletHub, which clearly keeps its eye on Columbia, named it one of the Happiest Cities in America, as indicated by such factors as depression rates, income growth and leisure time.

**Healthy** According to U.S. News & World Report, Howard County is 8th in its 2021 Healthiest Communities ranking of nearly 3,000 counties. County Executive Calvin Ball pointed out that the award is especially significant during "this past year, as we confronted a deadly pandemic... we are reminded how important our health is."

**Livability** Columbia was ranked 36 of Livability.com's Top 100 Cities with populations between 20,000 and 1 million people. Over 1,000 cities were evaluated based on eight factors: amenities, demographics, education, economy, health care, housing, social and civic capital, and transportation and infrastructure.



*Leisure activities are one of the reasons Columbia was honored as one of the Happiest Cities in America.*



## Downtown Development Update



*Opportunities for fun and recreation make Columbia “one of the best places to raise a family.”*

**Families** Based on family fun, affordability, health and safety, education and care, Columbia ranks 5th in the nation for the best place to raise a family, according to WalletHub which compared more than 180 cities on 48 metrics, such as the cost of housing, the quality of the local school and healthcare systems, and the opportunities for fun and recreation.

**Places to Live** Niche.com agrees that Columbia is among the Best Places to Live in the United States. The survey company ranked the city 8th of its top 50 cities with populations over 100,000 people. Columbia was noted as “a top spot for young professionals and families thanks to its highly rated public schools, employment rate, job and business growth, and cost of living. The city also ranks highly for its outdoor activities and nightlife. One such category that encompasses both: Columbia’s many summer music festivals.”





*As a top spot for professionals, Columbia was named one of the Best Places to Live in the United States.*

**Culture of Health** Later in the year, Howard County was one of four U.S. communities named a recipient of the 2020-2021 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Prize. This distinction recognized the county for “working at the forefront of advancing health, opportunity, and equity for all.”

**Rent** To determine where renters get the most bang for their buck, WalletHub compared more than 180 rental markets based on 22 key measures of rental attractiveness and quality of life. Columbia scored high, ranking 6th in the Best Cities for Renters listing.

**Emerging Leader** Downtown Columbia Partnership Executive Director Phillip Dodge was selected for the 2021 Emerging Leader Fellowship program by the International Downtown Association (IDA). In a week-long experiential program, the 30 selected fellows learn leadership and place management skills and gain practical tools in the areas of place-based economic development, the live-work-play experience, and public-private partnerships.

*Attractiveness, like that of mflats, is one of the factors making Columbia one of the Best Cities for Renters.*





## Events

*YogaSix held free sessions at Color Burst Park.*



*The Seventh Annual Veterans Day Parade & Celebration was held at the Lakefront.*



*Words on the Street featured free performances at Color Burst Park.*

**Ice Rink** The Color Burst Park Ice Rink started and ended 2021 as a popular attraction, allowing families stress-free recreation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Downtown Columbia Partnership hosted a Cocktail Pop-Up and Busboys and Poets served food during the finale event, “Poetry on Ice,” which included live music and spoken word performances.

**Movie Night** Maybe folks weren’t gathering in movie theatres, but The Charmery, Big Screen Flicks and the Downtown Columbia Partnership hosted a “full sensory drive-in movie” in the Sterrett Place parking lot in March. The original Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory was featured, along with a concession box of items timed to coincide with scenes in the movie.

**Fitness** Starting in June through October, Columbia Association held free once-a-month Community Outdoor Yoga at the Chrysalis amphitheatre in Merriweather Park. Meanwhile local fitness boutiques hosted the free Merriweather Fit Series with Columbia Bootcamp by F45 and Color Burst Flow with YogaSix, both at Color Burst Park.

**Words on the Street** In August Busboys and Poets in collaboration with the Merriweather District brought audiences of all ages to free spoken word performances, poetry readings, a book swap, adult spelling bee and more.





*Howard County resident Beth Aguilera went Over the Edge at the benefit for Special Olympics.*

**Live Entertainment** Color Burst Park in the Merriweather District was also the site for live music, food, outdoor games and more throughout the summer. A diverse and wildly enthusiastic, masked crowd turned out in droves for the free AMPED in the Park concerts featuring a wide variety of performers hosted by The Howard Hughes Corporation. In addition, Merriweather Post Pavilion resumed live performances.

**At the Lakefront** Other summer activities were held at Lake Kittamaqundi. Columbia Association's free Lakefront Summer Festival included Dancing Under the People Tree, outdoor movies and concerts starting in June through the first week in September. On June 19, The 3rd, a new gathering space and incubator for women of color entrepreneurs, held a Juneteenth Pop-Up Cookout and fundraiser outside its home now under construction.

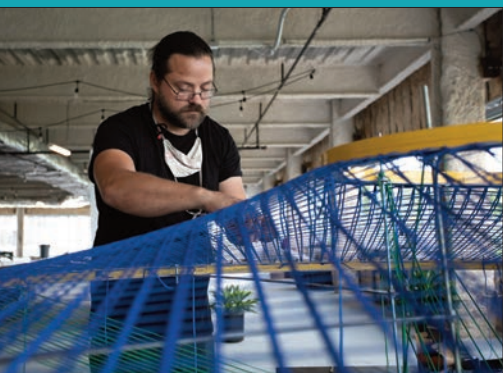
**What a Thrill** In August, Special Olympics, partnering with the Howard Hughes Corporation, held the 1st Annual Over the Edge fundraising event at the tallest building in Howard County: 6100 Merriweather. Elected officials and community leaders rappelled down the 12-story office building to Azlon Plaza below. The funds raised at the event supported year-round athletic training and competition opportunities for Maryland's children and adults with intellectual disabilities.



*Seen from above, Symphony of Lights attracted large crowds, as did the free "AMPED in the Park" performances.*







*Bobby Zokaite, one of the Merriweather District Artists in Residence, wove a sculptural piece.*

## Events

**Stompin' The Blues** The Columbia Festival of the Arts in collaboration with the Downtown Columbia Arts and Culture Commission and Merriweather District hosted a dance party series at Color Burst Park in August and September. Rare Essence, MamboCombo and JAMM Session drew enthusiastic crowds.

**Artists in Town** One of the highlights of the arts scene in Downtown Columbia is the annual program featuring the Merriweather District Artists in Residence. The 2021 awardees included transdisciplinary artist Morgan Bobrow-Williams, musician Andrew Burke, installation artist Chrystal Seawood and sculptor Bobby Zokaite. The quartet's work was featured in Huephoria, a four-day exhibition in September. The MD AIR program, presented in collaboration with the Howard County Arts Council, brings together artists to work, live and create in Downtown Columbia. It was established and is funded by The Howard Hughes Corporation which provides a \$10,000 stipend to each artist plus studio space and housing.

*The "Stompin' The Blues" dance party series brought crowds to Color Burst Park.*



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





*Synagogue leaders participated in "Chanukah on Ice" at Color Burst Park.*

**Fifty and Fabulous** The Mall in Columbia celebrated its 50th birthday in September with a month-long series of events for the public featuring county organizations in performance and other activities. Among other happenings, Toby's Dinner Theatre showcased their Young Columbians, and Columbia Festival of the Arts presented an outdoor screening of Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory in the Outdoor Plaza.

**What a Headliner** The Downtown Columbia Partnership's premiere event, Books in Bloom, sponsored by The Howard Hughes Corporation, brought award-winning journalist Dr. Nikole Hannah-Jones to the big tent in Color Burst Park. A standing room only crowd listened spellbound to the conversation between the creator of the 1619 Project and Busboys and Poets owner Andy Shallal who opened his new restaurant for the occasion. Acclaimed writer of detective fiction and former Columbia resident Laura Lippman and journalist and author Jake Tapper of CNN joined other compelling authors for the event.

**Festive** The Downtown Columbia Partnership, with co-host Columbia Association, concluded its year of events with the hugely popular Festive Friday at the Columbia Lakefront. Ice sculpting, holiday photo booth, arts and crafts, music and refreshments were featured. The hit of the night, however, was Columbia Association's fire pit where families roasted marshmallows and kept warm.



*The Young Columbians performed at The Mall in Columbia's 50th birthday.*



*The MERRI and Bright Holiday Market attracted shoppers.*





*“Pegasus” is a new sculpture installed at the courtyard between One and Two Merriweather.*

## Beautification and Connections

*Displayed in Symphony Woods, “Vapor Line” by Marguerite de Messieres and Tsvetomir Naydenov is one of the works in ARTsites, a public art exhibition by the Howard County Arts Council. Children (below) participated in the “Chalk It Up” series.*

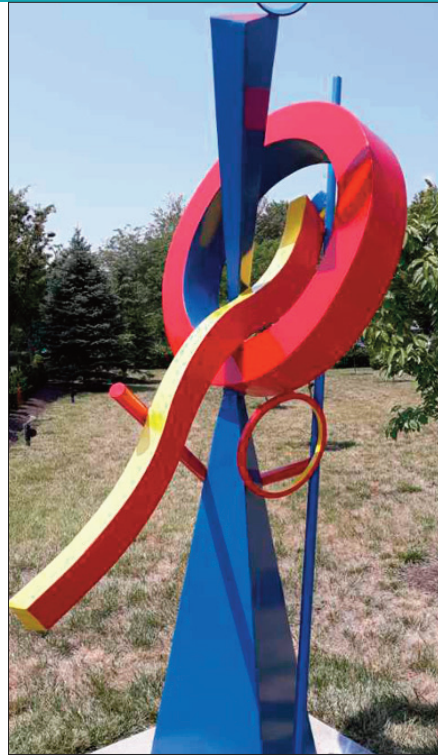


**Natural Beauty** In 2021, The Baltimore Sun featured Symphony Woods in a photo gallery of the “50 Most Beautiful Places in Maryland.” Supporting that natural beauty, EcoWorks, a local nonprofit organization specializing in storm-water management and workforce development, put their green jobs and conservation landscaping effort to work improving the woods. Funding for the project came from contributions and a gift from The Howard Hughes Corporation.

**Canopy** Through a partnership with the Arbor Day Foundation’s Community Canopy program, The Howard Hughes Corporation gave away 300 trees to residents to lower energy costs, filter air and water, reduce storm water and beautify green neighborhoods.

**Color** In its own attempt at beautification, the Downtown Columbia Partnership sponsored a series of “Chalk It Up” public art events throughout the year – encouraging residents and visitors to Downtown Columbia to be creative in recognizing Earth Day and Howard County PRIDE and making Columbia more colorful by decorating pathways, driveways and other surfaces.





**ARTsites** The Howard County Arts Council’s public art exhibit, ARTsites 2021, included installations at several Downtown Columbia locations. The sculpture, “Vapor Line,” created by Marguerite de Messieres and Tsvetomir Naydenov, was placed in Merriweather Park at Symphony Woods. “Quill Sail” by Bob Turan was installed at Howard Community College. “Gypsy Passion” by Hanna Jubran was located at Howard County General Hospital, and Icosahedron” by Kirk Seese was installed at the Central Branch of the Howard County Library System.

*ARTsites works on display include (from l.) “Icosahedron” by Kirk Seese at the Central Branch of Howard County Library, “Gypsy Passion” by Hanna Jubran at Howard County General Hospital, and “Quill Sail” by Bob Turan at Howard Community College.*

**Multi Modal** The Downtown Columbia Partnership used many community events to conduct a survey to understand the transportation needs of people working in Downtown Columbia with the intention of applying what is learned to the Transportation Demand Management Program (TDMP) it is developing.

**Bike Ride** One way to advance multi-modal transportation is to get folks out of their cars. The Downtown Columbia Partnership and Columbia Association hosted the Spring 2021 BikeAround Downtown in June. The event featured an eight-mile socially distanced course starting and ending in Color Burst Park.



## Beautification and Connections



*A painting of Langston Hughes covers a wall at Busboys and Poets. Electric scooters (below) were available for a trial run at Spin Scooter Demo Day.*



**Still Running** The Discover Downtown Columbia 5k/10k, hosted by the Downtown Columbia Partnership, attracted over 700 runners who traveled a round-trip course starting at Color Burst Park in Merriweather District. The race was timed to handle the large number of participants and keep them socially distanced.

**More Cycling** The Fall 2021 Columbia BikeAround, hosted by the Downtown Columbia Partnership, started and ended in Color Burst Park. In addition to showcasing Downtown Columbia, the ride went through the nearby villages of Wilde Lake and Harper's Choice. Displays included information about bike commuting and other ways to reduce use of single occupancy vehicles.





*Founder Laura Bacon of The 3rd participated in the Culinary Walking Tour.*

**Delicious Walk** Also in October, the Downtown Columbia Partnership held a Culinary Walking Tour, featuring stops at Cured, GrillMarx, Clove & Cardamom, The 3rd, Walrus Roadside, The Charmery, and Seasons 52. Nibbles and drinks pairings were a bargain for this walking event, which clocked in at between 2.5 and 3.2 miles, depending on your route. It sold out with 250 attendees, most of whom promised to walk, not drive, between destinations.

**Bike and Scoot** The Howard County Office of Transportation and Downtown Columbia Partnership held two events in November: Cranksgiving, a family biking event and food drive on two wheels which gathered items for Grassroots, and Spin Scooter Demo Day, an opportunity to learn about and test electric scooters slated for service in 2022.

*More than 700 runners joined the Discover Downtown Columbia 5k/10k.*



*The Spring BikeAround Downtown event took riders on an eight-mile course.*

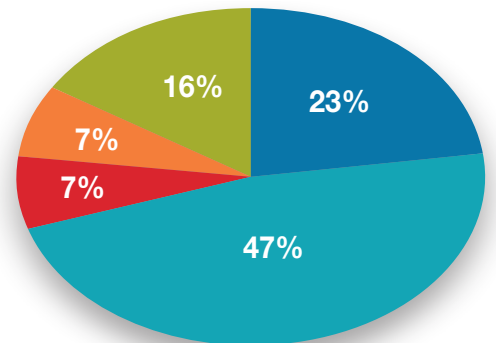




# Financial Snapshot FY21

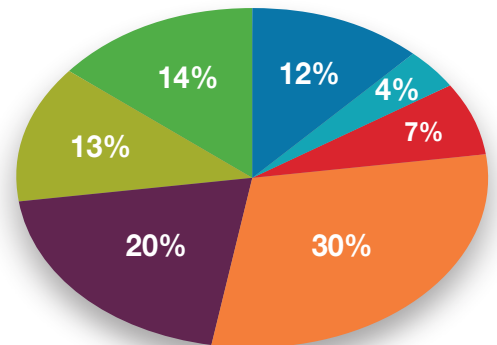
## REVENUE

The Howard Hughes Corporation	\$	140,000
CEPPA 25 Assessments	\$	280,156
Howard County Grants	\$	42,500
Memberships & Earned Income	\$	39,106
In-kind Services	\$	96,250
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>598,012</b>



## EXPENSES

Administration	\$	70,045
In-kind Services, Rent & Supplies	\$	22,250
Marketing & Advertising	\$	38,184
Events & Sponsorships	\$	164,181
CEPPA 25 Transportation	\$	114,435
Maintenance & Beautification	\$	74,000 *
Other Program Costs	\$	75,890
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>558,985</b>



\*All in-kind services



During The Mall in Columbia's 50th birthday celebration, 25 pivoting prisms were installed in the outdoor courtyard.

# Leadership

## Board of Directors

Greg Fitchitt

*Chair*

President, Columbia

The Howard Hughes Corporation

Rashida George

*Secretary*

Community & Legislative Relations

Manager

The Howard Hughes Corporation

Chuck Bubeck

*Treasurer*

Business Owner

Lakey Boyd

President/CEO

Columbia Association

Jennifer Jones

Deputy Chief of Staff

Howard County Government

Barb Nicklas

Sr. General Manager

The Mall in Columbia

## Staff

Phillip Dodge

*Executive Director*

## Advisory Committee

Kevin Fitzgerald

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

*The hit of Festive Friday, co-hosted by the Downtown Columbia Partnership and Columbia Association, was the fire pit where families roasted marshmallows and kept warm.*







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)

© 2021 Downtown Columbia Partnership