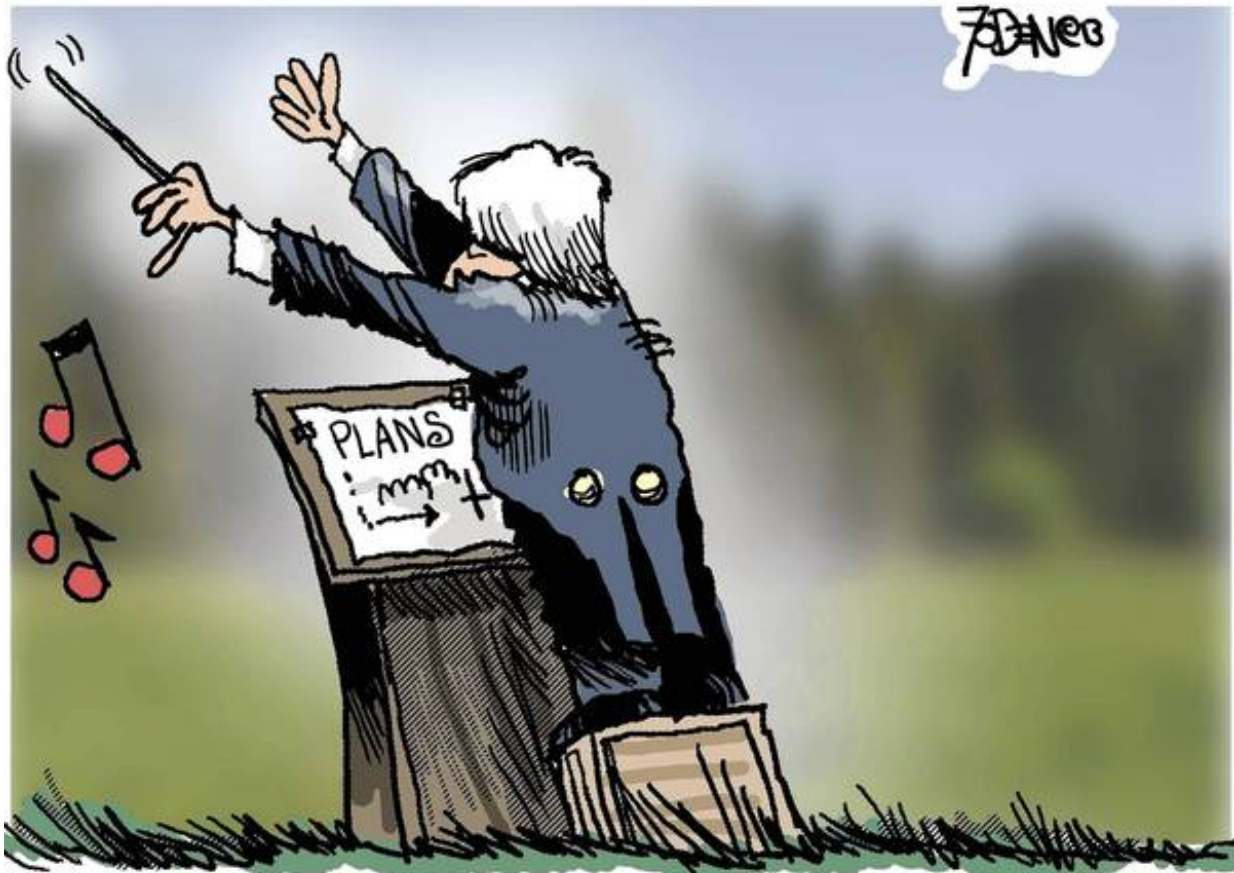


Baltimore Sun Editorial

http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2013-12-04/news/ph-ho-cf-editorial-inner-arbor-1205-20131204_1_arbor-trust-symphony-woods-art-gallery



Finishing the Unfinished Symphony Woods

There's plenty to like in Inner Arbor plans [Editorial]

December 04, 2013

If we learned anything from the legacy of Columbia founder Jim Rouse, it is to dream big, to push boundaries and to innovate. The practical can come later.

With this in mind, we find ourselves drawn to the Inner Arbor Trust's plans for Symphony Woods.

The plan, which was officially unveiled to the public Monday evening, was designed by a six-member international team and takes advantage of the current landscape. Minimal trees are lost, long a concern of those who opposed changes to the property. The natural beauty of the property seems to be the cornerstone of nearly all that is being proposed.

The Trust's plan includes an amphitheater known as the "Chrysalis," a "Butterfly" building that would include an art gallery and large decks, a "picnic table" sitting area and something called the "Caterpillar," which has been described as "a great big worm kind-of tube" that stretches from one side of the park to the other, serving as a boundary between Merriweather Post Pavilion and Symphony Woods. Down the road, the Trust would like to build something on current Merriweather property called "the Black Barn" that would include two theaters, a restaurant, an art gallery and a party deck that would provide a view of the Merriweather stage, much like a skybox at a sports stadium.

The idea has the potential to transform what is now an under-utilized piece of land in Columbia's Town Center into a Central Park-like area that will draw people for a visit. And years down the line, a second phase of the Inner Arbor plan could connect the site to the Columbia lakefront. That's another thing to like.

Frankly, when the Trust was formed several months ago, many were skeptical about what plan would be presented, especially given previous attempts to "wow" the community. No one could have imagined something so simple in concept yet so grand in scale.

Still, dreaming isn't going to be enough. As Michael McCall, the president of the Trust, said Monday night, the first step in the process was to decide what Symphony Woods could become. Once that is settled, operational and funding decisions must be made. This could be a formidable task considering the estimated

\$30 million price tag. The county already has committed \$5 million and the Columbia Association another \$1.6 million. McCall will have to look for grant money and other income sources since taxpayer funds should be used sparingly. In the end, money will be the real challenge of this project.

Nearly 50 years ago, Rouse took a dream and made it work. Now, it's time to see if the Trust can do the same. Now, it's time for the practical.