

# Strategic Plan Progress Report

Fiscal Year 2016



July 2016

## Introduction

This report provides a one-year review of actions taken to achieve Columbia Association's (CA) Strategic Plan goals and objectives. This is the second annual Strategic Plan Progress Report. It highlights CA's accomplishments in FY 2016 (May 2015 through April 2016) as CA works toward achieving its vision of "Making Columbia the community of choice — today and for generations to come."

Columbia Association's current Strategic Plan was developed in 2013 and 2014 and became effective May 1, 2014, as approved by the Board of Directors. The strategic planning process included a review of trends and driving forces, as well as self-examination. CA also engaged an extensive group of different stakeholders and organizations that interact with or are impacted by CA. This helped CA develop a framework of goals and objectives to achieve its desired future.

## Moving the Needle - Recent Progress/Activities

Columbia Association's Strategic Plan identifies five high-level goals to guide the organization.

1. Deliver programs and services that meet stakeholders' expectations and enhance the quality of life in Columbia
2. Maintain and enhance Columbia's facilities, open spaces, connectivity and environmental stewardship
3. Develop and communicate a shared community vision for Columbia and advance the vision through advocacy, partnerships and alignment of CA programs and services
4. Strengthen communication and community engagement in CA
5. Demonstrate the practices of a high-performing and responsive organization

This progress report is organized by Strategic Plan goal. Additional detail is provided in the appendix.

## We're Serving

"Deliver programs and services that meet stakeholders' expectations and enhance the quality of life in Columbia"

### Overview

CA's mission is "Working every day in hundreds of ways to make Columbia an even better place to live, work and play." CA offers a wide array of programs, events, activities and services putting that mission into action. Some of the most notable programs and services include before and after school care, summer camps, a Lakefront Summer Festival featuring free concerts and movies, an archive with a collection that includes materials from the planning and development of Columbia, a volunteer center and a sister cities program. At its sport and fitness facilities, CA offers hundreds of indoor and outdoor fitness classes and programs. Highlights of recent projects that demonstrate how we are adapting to the changing needs of Columbia in order to better serve our community are provided below.

## Highlights

**ADA Improvements:** Columbia Association has made a concerted effort to retrofit existing facilities to better serve all segments of the population. CA continued to make accessibility improvements in line with CA's Accessibility Report and Plan (2014). In the past year, CA has made the following facilities ADA accessible: Faulkner Ridge and Dorsey's Search wading pools, and parking lots at Hawthorn Center, Amherst House, Hobbit's Glen Golf Club, Swansfield Neighborhood Center, Columbia Ice Rink, Owen Brown Community Center, Linden Hall, Oakland Manor, and Dorsey Hall Meeting Room. CA also has improved the accessibility of our pathway system. The cross and running slopes were adjusted along the pathway from Little Patuxent Parkway and Vantage Point Road to the Lakefront plaza, the pathway along White Acre Road and the pathway along Lake Elkhorn from the dam to the main dock.

**Customer Service:** In November 2015, CA launched a "Service Excellence" program for all team members. The goal of the program is to teach team members customer service skills and make clear the organization's expectation that each team member provide an excellent experience for all CA members and customers. Approximately 200 team members have completed Service Excellence to date including the entire senior leadership team, as well as the majority of team leaders and nearly 140 team members.

## We're Greening

"Maintain and enhance Columbia's facilities, open spaces, connectivity and environmental stewardship"

### Overview

Columbia Association owns and maintains more than 3,600 acres of open space as a permanent asset for residents. This open space, which tightly weaves through Columbia's residential and commercial areas, is a defining feature of Columbia. Amenities include lakes, ponds, parks, tot lots, basketball and tennis courts, fishing piers, landscaped features and 94 miles of paved pathways. Columbia Association also operates and maintains three fitness clubs, a roller skating rink, an ice rink, a horse center, two golf clubs, four tennis clubs, 23 outdoor swimming pools, five indoor pools and a hot water therapy pool, Haven on the Lake mind body wellness retreat, Columbia DogPark, and Columbia SportsPark. Through funding allocated in capital and operating budgets, CA maintains and reinvests in all of these facilities.

Columbia Association is committed to environmental sustainability. Major sustainability initiatives include watershed management and energy management. Columbia Association is actively working to restore Columbia's watersheds through public education and projects to reduce water runoff and restore our streams. In addition, CA is also working to reduce energy consumption and our greenhouse gas emissions.

## Highlights

**Energy Management:** This past year, CA continued to make significant strides in its efforts to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. In FY16, CA completed numerous heating ventilation and air conditioning equipment upgrades, installed nearly 1,000 LED light fixtures, and optimized the operation of existing equipment. Additionally, CA completed a 60 kilowatt combined heat and power generating station at Supreme Sports Club to provide

electricity and hot water more efficiently, becoming the first such installation in Howard County. As a result of these efforts, the energy use intensity of CA's facilities decreased 2 percent compared to FY15. Further advancing the sustainability of our operations, CA has offset 100 percent of its electricity use with green power from wind and solar sources – reducing our carbon footprint by nearly 50 percent. Columbia Association's energy management efforts have been recognized by the U.S. Department of Energy's Better Buildings Challenge program and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's ENERGY STAR® program.

**Improvements for Walking and Cycling:** Columbia Association has made a strong commitment to improving Columbia for those who walk and bicycle. Based on the Bike Share Feasibility Study conducted in FY15, CA partnered with Howard County and others in FY16 to fund the implementation of a pilot bike share program in Downtown Columbia. The pilot is anticipated to be implemented in calendar year 2017.

Columbia Association also committed to continue widening several pathway segments that are "primary pathways," facilitating pedestrian and cyclist use of pathways and access to major destinations within Columbia. In FY16, CA widened pathways at key destinations including Lake Elkhorn, Wilde Lake, Lake Kittamaqundi and White Acre Road in Oakland Mills.

To increase ease of navigation on CA's pathways, CA continued to add more navigational signage along the pathway network. In the past fiscal year, navigational signage was added from Lake Elkhorn to Route 108, from Great Star Drive near the River Hill Village Center to the River Hill Pool, and from Wilde Lake to the Swansfield Neighborhood Center. These and other investments in CA's pathways have had an impact on pathway usage. The second annual Pedestrian and Bicyclists Count program conducted in FY16 indicated that pedestrian usage more than doubled and cycling usage increased more than 50 percent at Lake Kittamaqundi following CA's completion of the loop pathway around the lake.

Columbia Association has also coordinated guided walks along its open space pathway system, implementing one of the recommendations in the Older Adult Plan. Each walk features a different topic that focuses on environmental features. This has long been desired by the community and has proved very popular with anywhere between 40 and 90 people attending each walk.

## **We're Columbia**

"Develop and communicate a shared community vision for Columbia, and advance the vision through advocacy, partnerships, and alignment of CA programs and services"

### **Overview**

Columbia Association is the organization that has the largest role in ensuring that the shared community vision for Columbia remains well understood. To do this, CA goes beyond its programs, services, activities and events by working with community partners and advocating on issues that will affect the quality of life of individuals who live or work in Columbia. CA also is the steward of Columbia's history through the Columbia Archives, which collects and preserves the history of Columbia through its conservation of historic materials, as well as its educational

programming. Through the Archives' various programs, CA promotes the community's understanding of the history of Columbia and its founding values.

### Highlights

**Advocacy:** Columbia Association advocated for several items of particular importance to the Columbia community. The proposed Patuxent Branch Trail extension (from Downtown Columbia to Lake Elkhorn) is a priority project in CA's Active Transportation Action Agenda and a project identified in the county government's new bicycle master plan called *BikeHoward* and the county government's capital budget. Columbia Association successfully advocated for the retention of this project in *BikeHoward*, as it was under deliberation by the Planning Board and County Council. CA further advocated for the overall passage of *BikeHoward* to improve bicycle connections in Columbia and Howard County.

Under direction from CA's Board of Directors, CA also advocated and provided testimony before the Howard County Council urging it to retain the stormwater management fee, which has helped fund needed stormwater environmental improvements. This effort, along with the efforts of others in the community, was successful. Columbia Association also raised land use and transportation issues concerning a proposed gas station at the corner of Minstrel Way and Snowden River Parkway. This development proposal was subsequently denied by the Planning Board.

**Partnerships:** Columbia Association has more than 35 partnerships with other community organizations and entities. Partnerships are collaborative efforts CA undertakes with other organizations that support CA's strategic mission: "Working every day in hundreds of ways to make Columbia an even better place to live, work and play." These partnerships are characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility. CA management and staff also serve on various boards and committees. For instance, CA President/CEO Milton Matthews serves on the boards of the Howard County Economic Development Authority; the Inner Arbor Trust; the Downtown Columbia Partnership; and the Downtown Columbia Arts and Culture Commission.

Columbia Association and Howard County Government partnered with the University of Maryland, College Park through the Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability (PALS) program. Columbia Association and the county government identified challenges and research needs in the community to help equip both organizations to better serve the community. The PALS program paired the best professors and courses to address the identified needs. More than 20 courses were undertaken through the PALS program, of which Columbia Association funded five. The program has brought to Columbia the knowledge and intellectual capital of university faculty along with the fresh ideas of the university's students. CA benefited from this expertise across a wide range of disciplines, including anthropology, urban ecology, landscape architecture, social work, real estate, and public policy. The results of these projects are being finalized by the university and are anticipated to be completed by summer of 2016.

Columbia Association also partnered with the Horizon Foundation on the Open Streets event, which took place on the Little Patuxent Parkway loop west of Cedar Lane in Clary's Forest. The Open Streets event demonstrated how Howard County's streets could be reimagined to encourage more daily physical activity by creating safe, comfortable accommodations that

support walking and biking. The event was a great success, with approximately 1,000 people participating.

Columbia Association also partnered with the Horizon Foundation on the Howard County health survey, a public study designed to assess health-related behaviors and risk factors among the adult population in Howard County. This biannual study was first conducted in 2012, then again in 2014, and is now being conducted this year. In addition to CA, other cosponsors of the survey include the Howard County Health Department and Howard County General Hospital. The survey provides detailed data about how health behaviors and needs vary across different demographic groups. The data is used to understand where resources should be focused to meet the greatest needs and to improve the health of Howard County residents.

## **We're Engaging**

“Strengthen communication and community engagement in CA”

### **Overview**

Columbia Association informs residents, members and the general public about our programs, events, activities and opportunities through myriad channels, including ColumbiaAssociation.org, print, digital, and broadcast media and a presence at CA community events. The Customer and Member Service Center team, in conjunction with the Maggie J. Brown Welcome Center, are available six days a week to greet residents and assist them with the information and services they seek. In addition, CA seeks input and ideas from the community to help us understand what changes or enhancements are desired. The avenues for civic engagement include resident speakout at the public Board of Directors meetings, surveys and social media.

### **Highlights**

**Website Redesign:** Columbia Association’s previous website was not user-friendly. This made it difficult for community members to find information they were seeking. In FY16, the website was completely overhauled based on best practices and community and stakeholder surveys. The new website features more tabs to quickly access information, including a new tab called Explore Columbia that serves as a portal for Columbia for people who want to discover more information about the community, such as arts and culture opportunities, Columbia’s history, community events, new development and redevelopment, how to get around Columbia and recreational facilities. The webpage also features information on why people should move to Columbia and highlights the awards that Columbia and Columbia Association have received.

Another feature of the new webpage includes better SNG (CA’s registration program and app) integration. The result is a better user experience for members who are attempting to sign up for individual or group fitness classes.

**Multilingual / Multicultural:** Columbia is a diverse community and is growing ever more diverse. This diversity is an important characteristic of Columbia. To more effectively communicate and provide outstanding customer service to the Columbia community, the Customer and Member Service Center now offers both Korean and Chinese translation services, in addition to the Spanish services already provided. These translators have also

accompanied new members during their initial free consultation at CA fitness clubs. In addition, CA has started advertising this service and the various programs offered in local Korean and Chinese publications. CA's new website also has a Google Translate function, which allows the website to be translated to any language selected by the user. This allows CA to engage with a wider audience.

Existing cultural programs that CA provides, which are very successful, include the World Languages Café and multicultural festivals. The World Languages Café meets every month at the 50+ Center at the East Columbia Library and gives participants the opportunity to practice a foreign language with a table host who is fluent in the language. There are currently 17 languages represented through this program. This past year, CA organized Eastern European, Western European and Ghana cultural festivals. More than 500 people participated in each of these events to celebrate the heritage and culture of these regions, with the Eastern European cultural festival having nearly 1,000 participants.

## We're High Performing

"Demonstrate the practices of a high-performing and responsive organization"

### Overview

When CA talks about our employees, we often refer to them as "team members." Team members work together to achieve CA's mission "every day in hundreds of ways to make Columbia an even better place to live, work and play." As team members focus on service to the community, they play an important part in enhancing the quality of life in Columbia. CA needs to continue to manage its financial assets, provide team member training and make investments in technology that result in a high-performing and responsive organization.

### Highlights

**Board Structure Changes:** Columbia Association's Board of Directors changed some of its processes to improve the overall function of the board and to make its workings easier for community members to understand. Three committees were eliminated so topics are now discussed by the entire board, rather than in a committee structure. The Board of Directors also changed their board meeting schedule to one work session and one board meeting per month to allow more time for discussion of important issues.

**Inter-County Broadband Network:** This past year, Columbia Association partnered with the Howard County Government to participate in the Inter-County Broadband Network (ICBN): a high-speed, high-capacity fiber optic network covering hundreds of miles throughout central Maryland. This will provide greater reliability and secure access to CA's cloud-based and network programs to the community (high-speed WiFi, streaming meetings and events, etc.). Additionally, CA will increase access speed by nearly a factor of 100, while saving significant money. ICBN allows future needs and growth to be accommodated through software rather than infrastructure construction. The ICBN is a network that will serve CA for the next decade and beyond.