Baltimore, November 6th 2020

I attended the Sustainable Community Focus group for the topic "Economy" last night. I wasn't sure what to expect, but it was more a presentation of a survey conducted earlier and for the participants to ask questions. It was clear that there were as many cons as pros for Arbutus to become a sustainable college town. One of the biggest issues that I detected from the participants was that in the eyes of large corporations, retailers, and restaurants, Arbutus does not have much foot or car traffic. The strange thing is that UMBC is not counted as a body of people since it is not considered a residential University. In short, our 5000 on-campus students do not count as prospective customers.

Another obstacle is that the landlords in Arbutus are more interested in fast cash than to invest in the community. Therefore it is hard to find renters that can do anything with the available space without the landlord investing anything in renovations. The shopping center at the end of Leeds avenue that hosts a Dollar store and a Save-a-lot, and a few other obscure businesses have looked the same since it was built 30 years ago. It has great parking and could easily be configured in a different way to attract other retailers/restaurants. Lack of parking in Arbutus was an issue that came up as a general comment, along with that it is not considered safe to walk from campus into Arbutus.

It would be nice to attract something like Panera to Arbutus and a few other affordable restaurants for students. Today they have to go to Arundel Mills or Columbia.

Helena Dahlen

dahlen@umbc.edu