

MEMORANDUM

March 9, 2011

TO: Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee
Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Jeff Zyontz,  Legislative Attorney

SUBJECT: Resolution to Amend the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan

Staff recommends disapproving the proposed amendment on the basis of the 2009 public hearing and current options for handicapped parking presented by the Planning Board. The strongest argument for the bridge is its convenience to library users. This convenience would make the new library less of an asset to the street vitality of Silver Spring. Disabled parking can be accommodated on the same side of Wayne Avenue as the library, if not on the same site. A pedestrian bridge, in contradiction to the Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan, would detract from the County's current investment in sidewalks. The Wayne Avenue Garage has a maximum clearance of 8 feet 2 inches above the first floor; high-top vans equipped with wheelchair lifts could not get to a third floor bridge.

The cost of the pedestrian bridge is another reason to disapprove the amendment. The cost of the building as described in its project description form may be above its previously estimated cost unless the program is reduced, even without the bridge. If the Council approves this amendment, it should also amend and add \$1,000,000 to the project description form in the capital improvements program. The maintenance and utility costs for the bridge would increase future operating expenses.

Although 8 speakers, including the County Executive, favored the pedestrian bridge and one was opposed, the argument and information presented has not changed since the Council's June 2009 public hearing on this same subject.

Background

On December 14, 2010, the Council introduced a resolution to amend the Silver Spring CBD Urban Renewal Plan sponsored by Council President Ervin. The current plan prohibits pedestrian bridges in the urban renewal area. The Council President believes that an elevated pedestrian walkway across

Wayne Avenue is warranted for the Silver Spring library project.¹ The attached resolution would amend the plan by adding the underlined text to the current plan:

Pedestrian bridges and structures that cross existing rights-of-way will not be permitted over Georgia Avenue, Colesville Road, Cedar Street, or Wayne Avenue with the following exception: An elevated walkway, which complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards for accessible design, is permitted over Wayne Avenue, connecting the Wayne Avenue Garage with a County facility that includes a public library, located on the opposite side of Wayne Avenue outside of the Urban Renewal Area. Elsewhere in the Urban Renewal Area, pedestrian connections could form an arch, gateway, or covering, and utilize transparent construction materials. Such connections must provide for attractive and active pedestrian environments underneath them.²

On December 14, 2010, as required by §56-12 of the County Code, staff forwarded the proposed urban renewal plan amendment to the Planning Board for their comments. On February 10, 2011 Planning Board Chair Carrier described the Planning Board's lack of support (2-2) for the Urban Renewal Plan proposed in 2009 and the approval of the Planning Board's mandatory referral of the library without a bridge on June 18, 2010. She noted that planning for the Silver Spring CBD for the past 3 decades has focused on activating the existing sidewalk and avoiding pedestrian bridges. A memorandum from Planning Staff suggested options for handicapped parking without constructing a bridge.

Public Hearing

The Council conducted a public hearing on March 8, 2011. Eight of the nine speakers were in favor of the proposed amendment. The convenience for disabled persons and families with children were cited as the essential reason for support. The groups in support include the Commission on People with Disabilities, the Silver Spring Library Advisory Committee, Friends of the Silver Spring Library, and the Disability Center Library Advisory Committee. The Pedestrian Traffic Safety Advisory Committee spoke in opposition to the proposed bridge.

Status of the Silver Spring Library Project

Cost

In a report to the HHS Committee, the Executive Staff reported that the project as designed was over the amount requested in the last CIP budget. The following comments were made:

¹ September 23, 2010 memorandum to HHS Committee members from Councilmember Ervin:
"While I initially did not vote to amend the Urban District Renewal Plan (Resolution No.16-1086, 8-1 vote, with HHS Chair voting in favor of reopening the plan), I cast my vote with the belief that Executive Branch staff would be able to accommodate accessible parking for our disabled residents in and around the site. While several options have been explored, it's my understanding that the only access to parking for a significant number of disabled patrons is in the parking garage on Wayne Ave. This parking issue is exacerbated by the plan to make the new Silver Spring Library one of the few libraries in the County serving those with special needs. Since no other solutions were developed to address this issue, I believe it is time for the Council to reconsider constructing a pedestrian bridge for the Silver Spring Library."

² This proposed amendment would have the same effect as a Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan Amendment proposed by the County Executive on February 19, 2009. After a public hearing, the recommendation of the joint Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee and Health and Human Services Committee, and Council deliberation, the Council disapproved that amendment on July 28, 2009.

While we are optimistic that the market conditions will offer savings of up to 10%, we cannot count on that alone and are proactively managing the design process to include a variety of strategies to bring the project in on budget. In this process we have been careful to avoid options that might adversely impact the library program.

One strategy is to identify design elements that can be substituted with less costly alternatives without severe impact to the approved design. One such example is substituting a more conventional glass curtain wall for the structural glazing at the Fenton Street entrance. Design upgrades can still be included in the construction solicitation as add-alternates that may be reincorporated into the design should market conditions be favorable.

Another strategy is to reduce the amount of un-programmed space, such as building support and circulation space. These options included:

- reducing the floor-to-floor height of the library floors from 20 ft to 18 ft, which will still allow for a comfortable ceiling height
- eliminating the 3-story escalator, replacing it with 2 elevators, thereby reducing the size of the entry pavilion
- relocating the meeting rooms to a lower floor, thereby reducing the area of emergency egress stairs
- reducing the amount of County office space or eliminating this floor altogether. Under this option the space can be designed so that at the time of bid a decision can be made to include all the finished space, include it as unfinished space, accept some reduction in the size of the space, or eliminate the floor altogether as a deduct-alternate.

Handicap Accessibility

The staff memorandum for the September 27, 2010 HHS meeting also includes the following comments from the Department of Government Services concerning access for disabled persons:

Currently the access to the Library Building is provided at three locations.

The primary entrance is at Wayne Avenue. A bus stop is located in front of the entrance and the Wayne Avenue garage is across the street. At the garage, parking will be set aside for patrons of the library and additional parking for the disabled will be provided close to the elevator bank closest to the library entrance. All library patrons will take the elevators to the ground floor, exit the garage, turn left and travel to the corner, cross Wayne, and travel to the Library Building entrance.

The Fenton Street entrance will include escalators, a stair and one elevator. A bus stop is located on Fenton Street near this entrance.

A vehicular drop-off is located at the west side of the building along the service drive. This provides a ramped entrance to the main lobby of the building. The drop off is covered and is immediately adjacent to where the Metro-Access bus will stop.

Arguments in favor of the bridge

A bridge is a cost-effective means to:

- 1) provide access for disabled persons, the elderly, and parents with young children;
- 2) shorten the walking distance from the Wayne Avenue garage to the library;
- 3) provide safe and secure access;
- 4) get non-library users across the street;
- 5) eliminate the need for any new parking spaces on the library site;
- 6) avoid hardship to other CBD users (or businesses);
- 7) remain independent of future construction; and
- 8) enhance sustainability.

“The primary rationale [behind the bridge] is not one solely of safety. It is primarily one of accessibility and sustainability.”³

Arguments against the bridge

A pedestrian bridge would:

- 1) promote driving;
- 2) reduce the number of pedestrians on the street;
- 3) be anathema to a walkable community;
- 4) create more opportunities for crime on the bridge and on the street;
- 5) be an unwise use of resources; and
- 6) be contrary to the Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan.

As the arguments for and against the bridge have not changed since 2009, the following is a repeat of staff’s 2009 memorandum, with minor revisions to reflect the most current estimate of the cost of the pedestrian bridge.

Analysis of Arguments

1) Accessibility/Convenience

Pro-bridge

Allowing a pedestrian bridge between the parking garage and the new library would make it more convenient for people arriving by car and making a single-purpose trip to the library. It would reduce the walking distance by eliminating the need to first get to the street level, walk to the crosswalk and walk up to the library entrance. Those drivers who could park on the bridge level of the garage would be able to enter the library without the need for stairs or elevators. It would take less time to make a trip from the garage to the library on a bridge than it would to make the same trip at street level; the bridge would eliminate elevator and traffic signal waiting time and also shorten the distance between the

³ Letter to the Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee and Silver Spring Citizen’s Advisory Board from Ike Leggett, June 4, 2009.

parking garage and the library. The trip from the car to the library would be weather protected; it would avoid waiting for a traffic signal to change and looking out for turning cars in the crosswalk.

In addition to persons with disabilities, elderly persons and parents with small children deserve special consideration. The elderly population is the fastest growing segment of the population. The first baby boomers are qualifying for social security. A short weather-protected trip would make it easier for more people to use the library.

The Rockville library, touted by anti-bridge advocates, does not have a direct connection to a parking garage, but library patrons must only cross one lane of slow speed traffic. Pedestrian bridges are already used in Silver Spring (City Place), private Silver Spring businesses, and elsewhere.⁴

The convenience for library users provided by the bridge does not take away on-street parking spaces. It also avoids any interference with the development of surrounding properties.

Pro-street

The added convenience of a bridge to a parking garage gives a preference only to people arriving by car. It is a step back from Silver Spring's emphasis on mass transit use. The convenience given to those car occupants isolates them from the rest of Silver Spring. The single purpose trip made more convenient by the bridge does not add to Silver Spring CBD as an urban place. A bridge from point to point does not lend itself to any synergy with other places and businesses in Silver Spring.⁵ If convenience were the measure of success, jurisdictions that have pedestrian bridges would not be tearing them down.⁶

The Rockville library demonstrates that all categories of users will walk in the open air to get to a well-designed library. The fact that the country is aging does not mean that all elderly are disabled. If or when an elderly person becomes disabled, the person would be treated accordingly.⁷

Parking could be accommodated on the County-owned site next to the library without interfering with parking on Bonifant Street. This would require coordination with future construction, but the County is the owner and developer of the project.

⁴ Des Moines, Calgary, Minneapolis, and Fargo.

⁵ "Cities are places where people are drawn together to experience one another. Skywalks rob us of that." Elliot Willensky, vice chairman of New York City's landmarks preservation commission, *Time*, August 1988; "Great cities are about the life, energy and vitality of what happens on the street." John Alschuler, *Downtown Skywalk Falls into Disfavor*, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 1, 2003.

⁶ Cincinnati; Baltimore; Charlotte, N.C.; Hartford; and Kansas City, Mo – *Urban Skywalk Concept Brought Down to Earth*, Lisa Cornwell, Associated Press, January 29, 2006.

... many cities are gripped with builders' remorse. They say the skyways and tunnels have choked off pedestrian traffic, hurt street-level retailers and limited development in the city core. "The skywalks were not the best-developed scheme in recent history and have not served us all that well," said Jim Tarbell, a Cincinnati councilman. As cities try to draw residents downtown with loft conversions and tax incentives, several are trying to divert pedestrians back to the street and do away with the walkways, which critics say are antiseptic and have transformed cities into places to pass through, not live in.

--*Decades Old, Skywalk Idea Doesn't Seem to Fly Anymore*, *The New York Times*, August 2005.

⁷ The qualifications for a Maryland handicapped tag includes the inability to walk 200 feet without resting. It parallels the provision for ADA access that requires areas wide enough to pull out of the pedestrian traffic flow not less than 200 feet apart.

2) Safety

Pro-bridge

A bridge overcomes the hazards of busy intersections. Only the traffic in the parking garage could interfere with people parking and walking across the bridge. People would not be subject to slips and falls due to wet or snowy pavement.

Providing a bridge does not prevent pedestrian safety improvements to the Wayne Avenue at-grade crosswalk. The Executive is committed to making those improvements.

The amount of library users that will use the bridge is only 10 to 12 percent of the total number of library users. That limited number of people should not affect safety issues on the street.

Pro-street

People on the street make it safer from crime for everyone. Eyes on the street help prevent crime and provide opportunities for social interaction. Pedestrians using the bridge could become targets for criminal activity. This possibility is acknowledged by the bridge advocates' request for surveillance cameras on the proposed bridge and the requirement for transparent materials. An active street would be perceived to be safer than an isolated bridge. Splitting pedestrian travel between the bridge and the sidewalk puts fewer people in both places and in that way makes both places less safe.

Avoiding pedestrian incidents with motor vehicles is another aspect of safety. Planning Staff recommends an exclusive pedestrian phase signaling (Barnes Dance).⁸ Even though the at-grade pedestrian safety improvements are welcome, the intersection of Wayne Avenue and Fenton Street is not hazardous. In the past 5 years, there have been 4 pedestrian/vehicle incidents.⁹ That is 4 too many incidents, but it is not rated as a high-incidence intersection by the Pedestrian Safety Coordinator, even before the improvements recommended by the Executive.

3) Disabled Persons

Pro-bridge

The Silver Spring library includes a collection of books and materials of benefit to people with disabilities. The facility should make it as easy as possible for people with disabilities to get to the library. Handicapped parking on the bridge level in the parking lot would reduce the distance, from that parking lot to the library, to 180 feet from the mid-point of the handicapped parking space. This is much shorter than the 563-foot travel path that would be necessary if people using the handicapped spaces had to start in the middle of the Wayne Avenue garage and proceed along the street.

⁸ Memorandum, July 16, 2009 supported by 2 published evaluations of such phasing.

⁹ The 4 incidents may include some mid-block incidents. At the intersection of Wayne and Georgia Avenue there were an additional 8 incidents. The most dangerous intersection in the County is Piney Branch and University, where 32 incidents occurred in the past 5 years.

Pro-street

The first floor of the garage is the only floor with enough vertical clearance for an ADA van. One of every 8 spaces, but not less than 1 space, must have 114 inches of vertical clearance.¹⁰ People using those spaces would have to use the sidewalk and crosswalk to get to the library. The level of the garage that is proposed to connect to the bridge has vertical clearance of 98 inches.¹¹ If appropriate ADA spaces cannot all be accommodated on the pedestrian bridge level, it would be less complicated to direct handicapped parking to a single on-site area.

Handicapped parking on the site of the library would be closer than parking across a bridge. The distance for people going from the handicapped spaces in the garage to the library is overstated. There is an elevator in the corner of the garage closest to the intersection of Wayne and Fenton. The absence of a bridge would make walking on the sidewalk about 230 feet longer than taking a bridge.

ADA compliance does not require a bridge, even if parking was not provided on the library site. If a bridge is not provided for able-bodied library users, it need not be provided for disabled library users. ADA guidelines for an accessible route state the following:

At least one accessible route within the boundary of the site shall be provided from public transportation stops, accessible parking, and accessible passenger loading zones, and public streets or sidewalks to the accessible building entrance they serve. *The accessible route shall, to the maximum extent feasible, coincide with the route for the general public.* [emphases added]

Any accessible route must meet standards, including maximum slope and minimum width; if it is longer than 200 feet and narrower than 60 inches (5 feet), the following provision applies:

If an accessible route has less than 60 [inches] clear width, then passing spaces at least 60 [inches] by 60 [inches] shall be located at reasonable intervals not to exceed 200 [feet]. A T-intersection of two corridors or walks is an acceptable passing place.

Before July 21, 2009, Department of General Service Staff stated the distance from the furthest handicapped parking space to the library as 233 feet. If the walkway distance is 233 feet, it must provide a route wider than 60 inches clear or provide acceptable passing places on either side of the bridge.¹² The sidewalks along Wayne Avenue are 15 feet wide. Every place along the sidewalk is an acceptable passing place. The Wayne Avenue garage and the sidewalk both satisfy ADA standards.

The property to the north of the library is owned by the County. Temporarily using the land for handicapped parking, and then purchasing parking spaces in the ultimate building, would add to convenience by reducing the distance to the library for disabled persons.

¹⁰ Department of Justice, ADA Standards for Accessible Design, Revised as of July 1, 1994:

4.6.5* Vertical Clearance. Provide minimum vertical clearance of 114 in (2895 mm) at accessible passenger loading zones and along at least one vehicle access route to such areas from site entrance(s) and exit(s). At parking spaces complying with 4.1.2(5)(b), provide minimum vertical clearance of 98 in (2490 mm) at the parking space and along at least one vehicle access route to such spaces from site entrance(s) and exit(s).

¹¹ See ©26.

¹² Material submitted by the Department of General Services on July 21, 2009 indicated the distance from the mid-point of handicapped parking to the library at 180 feet.

4) Sustainability¹³

Pro-bridge

A bridge saves the use of materials that would otherwise be used for new parking spaces on the library site.

Pro-street

The bridge has a number of unsustainable attributes. It encourages driving to the library by making driving more convenient. It requires energy for lights, ventilation, and security cameras. It requires maintenance to sustain its structural integrity.¹⁴ The interior space of the bridge requires daily cosmetic maintenance. The energy use from all of these activities would challenge the claim of sustainability.

Comparing the bridge to unneeded parking on the library site is a false choice. Additional parking spaces beyond those available in the Wayne Avenue garage are not required. The most sustainable option, no bridge and no additional parking, may not meet the goal for accessibility. If 7 handicapped spaces are provided on the library side of Wayne Avenue, the material and maintenance required for those spaces would need to be compared to the material and maintenance required for the bridge in order to assess relative sustainability.

5) Cost: Bridge vs. On-Site Parking

Pro-bridge

Providing a bridge is the most cost-effective means to provide for people with disabilities:

<u>Option</u>	<u>Cost Estimate</u>
Pedestrian Bridge	\$745,228 to \$1,000,000
5 handicapped parking spaces at grade	\$3,557.824
7 handicapped parking spaces and 22 other below grade parking spaces	\$5,938,328
7 handicapped parking spaces and 20 short term spaces (Planning Staff Alternative)	\$1.1 to \$1.6 mil.

The bridge makes every parking space in the garage closer to the library. It helps the elderly, parents with small children, and disabled persons at no additional cost.

The option of doing nothing for handicapped library patrons is unacceptable. An accessible library should not require a disabled person to cross Wayne Avenue at street level. The cost of on-site handicapped parking developed by the Department of General Services is higher than that of the bridge.

¹³ There are many definitions of sustainability. One widely used definition is from the World Commission on Environment and Development: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Webster's dictionary defines it as "using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged."

¹⁴ Gravity is a sustainable force that will act on the bridge for its lifetime. Poorly maintained bridges collapse over time from their own weight. Bridges have also been found to be unsustainable after being hit by trucks.

The proposed options retain on-street parking for neighboring businesses. The options can also be accomplished without interfering with future construction on the adjoining County-owned site.

The alternatives recommended by the Planning Board would all require high costs for temporary parking (retaining walls, stormwater management, and an ADA-compliant path) that would be demolished in the course of constructing the County’s housing project. Planning Staff has also suggested unsafe head-in parking off of Bonifant Street. These spaces would require cars leaving the spaces to back into a travel lane. Even if such spaces were safe, they would require disabled persons to travel across the future purple line in order to get to the library.

Pro-street

The bridge’s cost estimate does not include the costs to assure a common floor elevation between the library and the garage.

Planning Staff compiled known bridge costs from recent projects.¹⁵ The Department of General Services’ cost estimate for the bridge is low in comparison to these numbers.

Pedestrian Bridge Cost Comparison

	Silver Spring Library	United Therapeutics	Montgomery College Bridge
Construction Date	-	Pending	2006
Total Cost	\$749,000 - \$1,000,000	\$1.5 - 3,300,000	\$3,000,000
2009 Cost*	-	-	\$3,174,214
Bridge span	85 feet	90 feet	250 feet**
Cost per Linear Foot	\$8,812-\$11,765	\$16,666 - \$36,666	\$12,000
Enclosed	Enclosed	Enclosed	Enclosed
Air Conditioned	Pending	Heating and cooling	Ventilated - no heating and cooling

* Based on consumer price index (CPI) using the US Bureau of Labor Statistics inflation calculator

** Span and price per linear square foot does not include the length of access ramps

The alternatives developed by the Department of General Services were limited; they did not include parking on Bonifant Street or taking advantage of the County-owned site to the north. Planning Staff estimated that it would cost \$420,000 to provide 7 spaces of handicapped parking on the neighboring County-owned site in a future garage. There is adequate space in the Wayne Avenue garage for all other parking.

The lowest cost alternative is no bridge and no on-site parking at the library. This would be ADA compliant but it may not meet the Executive’s accessibility goal. The easy alternative that could

¹⁵ Memorandum, January 26, 2011, included 2 other bridges that are open air and do not use the supports of other buildings (River Road Capital Crescent Trail and Viers Mill Road Trail).

temporarily accommodate the needs of disabled persons until the County's adjoining housing project could be constructed would be to dedicate parking next to the library building for the disabled.

The housing project adjacent to the library would have on-site parking when it is constructed. Some of the housing project's parking could replace the on-street parking or purple line parking.

6) Master Plan Conformance

Pro-bridge

The Executive requested a minor amendment to the Urban Renewal Plan; it would allow 1 bridge under unique circumstances. The amendment does not harm the general prohibition against bridges.

Pro-street

Since the City Place pedestrian bridge was completed, there has been a consistent policy to invest in Silver Spring sidewalks and not in bridges. The Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan states:

This plan encourages the development of active streets and sidewalks, busy with people walking to shop, commute, or for pleasure. They will become downtown's defining feature, and will support activity, creating the setting for community.

The feel of a community is created on its streets and paths, and Silver Spring's sidewalks should be bustling and active. An urban area's greatest economic asset and strongest physical definition comes from its pedestrian environment. Sidewalks and streets scaled to walkers create active environments where people can shop, commute, recreate, and socialize. Communities where people can walk are communities where people will spend time and money.¹⁶

This proposed amendment to the Urban Renewal Plan runs counter to a policy of emphasizing sidewalks.

Conclusion

The Council disapproved (7-1; Councilmember Leventhal opposed-Councilmember Navarro absent) the proposed amendment to the Urban Renewal Plan in 2009. The strongest argument for the bridge is its convenience to library users. This convenience would make the new library less of an asset to the street vitality of Silver Spring. Disabled parking can be accommodated on the same side of Wayne Avenue as the library, if not on the same site. Safety does not warrant approval of the bridge; if the sidewalk and crosswalk are not deemed safe enough, they should be made so. A pedestrian bridge, in contradiction to the Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan, would detract from the County's current investment in sidewalks.

¹⁶ Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan, February 2000, page 24.

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Resolution No.: _____
Introduced: December 14, 2010
Adopted: _____

**COUNTY COUNCIL FOR
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND**

By: County Council

SUBJECT: Amendment to the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan

Background

1. Under Chapter 56, Article III of the County Code, the County Council is authorized to implement urban renewal projects.
2. On March 11, 1997, by Resolution No. 13-816, the County Council approved the Amended Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan.
3. On November 16, 1999, by Resolution No. 14-346, the County Council amended the Amended Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan.
4. On February 19, 2009, the County Executive transmitted to the County Council a proposed amendment to the Amended Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan that would permit the construction of a pedestrian bridge over Wayne Avenue, connecting the Wayne Avenue Garage to the Silver Spring Library to be built on the south side of Wayne Avenue.
5. On July 28, 2009, the Council disapproved the proposed amendment.
6. On December 14, 2010, Councilmember Ervin introduced an amendment to the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan to allow the construction of an elevated pedestrian walkway over Wayne Avenue, connecting the Wayne Avenue Garage to the Silver Spring Library to be built on the south side of Wayne Avenue.

Action

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland approves the following resolution to amend the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan, dated November 16, 1999:

Amend the first paragraph on p. III-21 under the heading "Performance Guidelines for Compatibility" by adding the underlined text:

Pedestrian bridges and structures that cross existing rights-of-way will not be permitted over Georgia Avenue, Colesville Road, Cedar Street, or Wayne Avenue with the following exception: An elevated walkway, which complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards for accessible design, is permitted over Wayne Avenue, connecting the Wayne Avenue Garage with a County facility that includes a public library, located on the opposite side of Wayne Avenue outside of the Urban Renewal Area. Elsewhere in the Urban Renewal Area, pedestrian connections could form an arch, gateway, or covering, and utilize transparent construction materials. Such connections must provide for attractive and active pedestrian environments underneath them.

This is a correct copy of Council action:

Linda M. Lauer, Clerk of the Council

**County Executive Isiah Leggett Testimony
In Support of the Amendment to the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan
March 8, 2011**

Good evening Council President Ervin and council members. My name is David Dise and I thank the Council for this opportunity to provide the County Executive's testimony in support of modifying the 1999 Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan to allow a bridge to be constructed across Wayne Avenue from the existing Wayne Avenue Garage to the new Silver Spring Library.

County Executive Leggett strongly supports this amendment to allow for the pedestrian bridge that will enable safe, easy access to the new library. The County Executive was disappointed when the proposed amendment was not adopted two years ago and is very pleased that the Council has decided to reconsider the bridge. Council President Ervin's introduction of the amendment reflects a very positive response to the compelling public outcry for a bridge to provide safe and convenient access to the new Silver Spring Library.

The new library will be a destination as a busy urban library serving a broad cross-section of the County including the community with disabilities, families, and seniors. The library site is in the heart of Silver Spring and is on the locally preferred route for the Purple Line.

At the beginning of this project there were several important considerations the County Executive tasked the design team to consider including:

1. Elderly and disabled patrons, as well as patrons with young children, must have a reasonable, safe and fair access, allowing use of the library and other building services to the fullest extent. This is even more important given the urban environment and the fact that library patrons enter and leave the library laden with books and media.
2. The solution must take full advantage of the County's already built infrastructure, particularly the Wayne Avenue Garage, demonstrating good fiscal stewardship and environmental sustainability.

3. In keeping with the County's efforts to promote mass transit, walking, and cycling and reducing the overall carbon footprint of the new facility, no new parking spaces will be constructed.
4. The parking and access solution must be available from the day the Library opens and cannot depend on future actions of other parties, future construction funding or efforts.

Several of these objectives have been satisfied with parking for the library being in the Wayne Avenue Garage and with the garage directly across the street from the new library there is no onsite requirement for handicap parking spaces. However, without the bridge between the library and the garage, reasonable, safe and fair access to the library *for all patrons* has not been fully addressed as it needs to be. The pedestrian access skyway will significantly benefit the disabled and mobility challenged population, the senior population and parents with young children, as well as other library patrons.

There has been a lot of public discussion about the bridge, both pro and con. And, in response to the Council declining to amend the Urban Renewal Plan when it was last considered, there has been a significant and resounding public outcry for the bridge.

The primary concerns expressed in the public dialogue about the bridge have been:

1. The Bridge is expensive. Will the construction of a bridge redirect funds that should be spent on intersection improvement, as everyone needs a safe grade level crossing?
 - No, intersection and other pedestrian safety improvements are still part of the library project and will be accomplished whether or not the bridge is constructed.
 - Using the existing Wayne Avenue Garage is a significant cost savings. The image of persons with mobility challenges, and parents or caregivers with children and bags of books walking through rain, wind, or other elements to a busy intersection, crossing the street, and then walking back down to a street level library entrance is a significant barrier to library usage, especially when there is another way to address this issue – the bridge.

2. We need to maintain street-level vitality. Will the public use of the bridge to access the library reduce the number of “feet on the street” who would otherwise patronize the local businesses?

We respectfully disagree with assertions that a pedestrian bridge for library patrons would pull people off the streets, thereby adversely affecting any vibrant street level atmosphere. In fact it could *increase* shopping visits to Silver Spring by making it easy for patrons to access the Library, who might then go out to lunch or shop.

3. Cars should not be given preference over pedestrians.

The bridge does not emphasize the use of cars over other forms of transportation. In fact, utilizing existing parking and incorporating future mass transit into the site design emphasize a commitment to public transit and reducing automotive traffic. However the reality is that some visitors *will* drive. The disabled, seniors, and families with young children certainly fall into that category. The proposed bridge, utilizing existing parking, significantly reduces a material accessibility barrier to the new library.

Municipalities such as Portland, Oregon, that are recognized for successful public transportation and pedestrian friendly planning have effectively incorporated pedestrian bridges into their planning. While some urban environments known for densely packed towering office buildings may be removing bridges, there is no direct correlation to the specific purpose of this particular pedestrian access way to a public library.

Further, the bridge will be designed to be attractive and to contribute to the urban environment, and not to detract from it. It will comply with ADA design standards, provide protection from the weather and utilize transparent construction materials to enhance security.

The County Executive again urges the Council to amend the 1999 Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan to permit a pedestrian bridge over Wayne Avenue to provide safe and fair access to the new library.

Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities
Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan
Before the Montgomery County Council
March 10, 2011
Cindy Buddington, Commissioner

My name is Cindy Buddington, and I am here on behalf of the Commission on People with Disabilities.

Back in 2009, I testified on behalf of the Commission to recommend that the Council take action to amend the Silver Spring Central Business District (CBD) Urban Renewal Plan to enable the County to build a bridge from the parking garage to the library, and include user friendly design that will accommodate as well as improve street access so that our entire community can use and enjoy this new library.

Tonight, I am pleased to be here to offer the Commission's strong support of President Valerie Ervin's amendment to the Silver Spring CBD that would allow for a pedestrian bridge if it complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards for accessible design, is permitted over Wayne Avenue, connecting the Wayne Avenue Garage with a County facility that includes a public library, located on the opposite side of Wayne Avenue outside of the Urban Renewal Area.

With respect to the walkway and elevators to be used in accessing the library, for persons who are blind or who have visual impairments we continue to be concerned about the level of accessible signage and way finding. Those with vision issues will need to find and understand the existence of the walkway, the elevators, and how to travel to the library and knowing where to go once inside. In short, a combination of large print, braille, and audible instructions would be helpful to those who do not see the route. Once inside the building, persons who are blind should be able to locate the elevators to go to the library and have large print, braille, and audible information available to them in finding the library. We also suggest that an audio recorded guide to the area be done by the library in order to give patrons who are blind the opportunity to better understand and utilize the environment surrounding them. This early introduction to the area would help with understanding what is happening around them as exemplified by the Purple Line.

In addition we recommend that all restroom doors be automated and that braille signage be placed on the wall next to the restroom door. Automated doors are not a requirement of the ADA, but makes restrooms more accessible for people with mobility impairments.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our recommendations with you regarding access issues in the Silver Spring Renewal. Please support the proposed changes to the Silver Spring Central Business District (CBD) Urban Renewal Plan, and allow this bridge access to the Silver Spring Library from the Wayne Avenue Garage.

Kathlin Smith
742 Silver Spring Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910

Testimony

Resolution to amend the Amended Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan
Elevated Pedestrian Walkway

March 8, 2011

I am testifying as Chair of the Silver Spring Library Advisory Committee, and with the endorsement of the Montgomery County Library Board.

I want to thank the Council for reconsidering its earlier vote on this issue, and Councilmember Ervin for reintroducing it. I also want to thank Council for its support of the new Silver Spring Library.

When Council considered the bridge issue in 2009, it was voted down on an assumption that there were other options for parking and access, whether onsite or immediately adjacent. Since then, no viable alternatives have been identified. Ground has been broken for our new library. Plans have been finalized. And the reality is that, because of the cost, no onsite parking will be built, not even for handicapped patrons. Anyone who arrives by car will park in the Wayne Avenue Garage across the street.

Throughout the planning process, library patrons have identified parking as critical. At all points, the public was assured that parking or access accommodations would be made for families with small children, the elderly, and individuals with handicaps. Even now, after months of publicity, most library users are surprised to learn that the bridge is not an approved part of the plan.

The new library must be as accessible as possible to all patrons, regardless of their physical condition or how they get to the library.

The library will house one of the county's two Disabilities Resource Centers. Without a bridge, the travel distance from parking to the library is about 350 feet. (The inability to travel more than 200 feet without resting qualifies one for a handicapped-parking placard.) A pedestrian bridge would cut travel distance in half to about 180 feet, and provide sheltered access in bad weather.¹

The bridge has broad citizen support. More than 1,000 individuals and many citizens' associations—including East Silver Spring, Park Hills, Seven Oaks-Evanswood, South Four Corners, Woodside Park, and North Woodside Montgomery Hills—have endorsed the bridge and/or asked Council to reconsider its vote. Nearly 50 local businesses have signed a petition in support of the bridge. The National Capital Area Chapter of the American Council of the Blind of Maryland, and the Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities have also recommended an exception allowing the bridge.

¹ Figures supplied by General Services.

Doing nothing for accessibility is the least-cost option. But the next least-cost option is to link the existing parking facilities with the library entrance. The cost of the bridge is equivalent to just over 1% of the total construction budget, and the return on this small incremental investment will likely be high, over time, in serving current patrons. The library is being built to accommodate the pedestrian bridge at some point in the future. We ask Council to support a one-time exception to the Urban Renewal Plan now, to permit bridge construction once funding is available.

In our country libraries are, and always have been, about removing barriers and supporting information access for all. We hope you will ensure that Silver Spring's new library meets this public expectation.

Thank you.

Marilyn Wisoff
 8811 Colesville Rd., Apt. 1117
 Silver Spring, MD 20910

Testimony
 Representing the Friends of the Library, Silver Spring Chapter

I am Marilyn Wisoff, Co-Chair of the Friends of the Library, Silver Spring Chapter.
 I live in Colesville Towers Apartments.

The new library must be as accessible as possible to all patrons, regardless of their physical condition, or how they get to the library. This means that the intersection should be safe AND that there should be direct access from parking to the library.

We look forward to seeing many new patrons at the new library. The number of users for the new library is expected to exceed one million, up from the current footprint of 849,653.

But, how can we build a new library without considering the full range of needs of our current patrons? Many of the people who will need the bridge for access to the library are people with disabilities, parents/caregivers with strollers, customers carrying large numbers of library materials, the elderly and others with limited walking ability.

Our most recent survey of our patrons was in February 2010 on Love Your Library Day. We asked how people arrived at the library. The responses were:

Arrived by car: 53% Walked: 41% Arrived by other means: 6%

We also asked people who will drive to the new library if they would find a pedestrian bridge from the parking garage to the library necessary or convenient. The responses were:

Yes: 79% No: 8% Don't know: 13%

Patrons living more than 2 miles from the library accounted for nearly one-third of circulation traffic. (Source: 2008 Demographic Update for the New Silver Spring Community Library)

Access to the new library will be complicated by the fact that the library will occupy the third, fourth and fifth floors of the building. An arts center with studios, community meeting rooms, county offices, and most likely a coffee shop will also occupy this building.

We ask that the Council seriously consider all the information we have presented and approve a one-time Urban Renewal Plan exception introduced by Council President Valerie Ervin allowing a bridge from the Wayne Avenue Garage to the library.

Without the bridge, a large group of patrons will not be able to use the new Silver Spring Library.

Thank you for your consideration.

TESTIMONY AT PUBLIC HEARING MARCH 8, 2011, ON REVISING THE SILVER SPRING URBAN RENEWAL PLAN

Jean Dunnington, chair, Disability Resource Center Library Advisory Committee

The pedestrian access bridge across Wayne Avenue, which requires revising the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan, is necessary only because the County Council authorized the Purple Line passing through the site of the new Silver Spring Library. With the Purple Line, it has no onsite parking and a confusing route to the dropoff/pickup point. Without the pedestrian access bridge, which was added to the site plan along with the Purple Line, it has a route between building and parking that is unacceptably long and complicated. These features will discourage the very users that the Disability Resource Center computer lab is designed to serve.

The Disability Resource Center Library Advisory Committee has insisted on the necessity for this bridge since the Purple Line was added to the site. This position is also supported by the Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities, the National Capital Area chapter of the American Council of the Blind, and the Sligo Creek chapter of the National Federation of the Blind.

The Wayne Avenue parking garage was always planned to be the main parking for the library. When the County Council approved the Purple Line use of this site, the on-site parking was eliminated and the dropoff point had to be on the one-way service alley behind the building entered from Bonifant Ave. for a Wayne Ave. address. The library system, staff and patrons were told that the building would have a bridge between an upper level of the parking garage and the building lobby at the 3rd floor, where the library entrance will be located. We agreed that this bridge would make the revised site plan acceptable if less satisfactory. We did not realize that the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan denied a bridge across Wayne Ave. If we had, we would have insisted on revising the Urban Plan before agreeing to the new site plan and would probably have moved to cancel the library move without the revision.

The majority of people with disabilities will travel by car, and will need parking. The trip is easier with the bridge.

With the bridge, parking in the Wayne Ave. garage means that they:

- Probably take a garage elevator to the bridge level
- Cross the distance of Wayne Ave. but without traffic
- Cross the 3rd floor lobby to the library entrance

Without the bridge, parking in the Wayne Ave. garage means that they:

- Probably take a garage elevator to the street level
- * Go half a block to the corner of Wayne Ave. and Fenton St.
- Cross Wayne Ave. and 5 lanes of traffic
- * Go to the building entrance on Wayne Ave. (a short distance)
- * Take an elevator from the street lobby to the 3rd floor lobby
- Cross the 3rd floor lobby to the library entrance

A place's design can encourage or discourage people to use it. A business with child care attracts and retains working parents; a store's background music alerts passing teens not to bother coming in. People with disabilities are very alert to whether our presence is encouraged, accepted or quietly discouraged. We deal with ramps that lengthen the distance we have to cover and elevators that are away from the main traffic path. We accept this when a building has been retrofitted, but are very aware when a new building's design has distances and routes that could have been shortened and simplified.

Many people with disabilities who used the computer lab at Special Needs Library have decided that Rockville Memorial Library and its computer lab are not worth the effort of getting there. Access was especially difficult at its opening, with surrounding construction, and it gained a negative reputation in the disabled community. This next time, when a new library has a DRC computer lab, it is vital that accessibility go beyond the letter of the ADA and WELCOME those of us who often feel ignored but who do vote. Since the County Council created this accessibility problem by putting the Purple Line through the site, the Council must authorize at least the possibility of a bridge that will help solve it.

PLEASE APPROVE A ONE-TIME REVISION OF THE SILVER SPRING URBAN RENEWAL PLAN and ALLOW THIS UNIQUE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE AGAINST PEDESTRIAN BRIDGES!!

Samuel L. Statland
C/O Statland & Katz, Ltd.
8811 Colesville Rd., Suite Two
Silver Spring, MD 20910
(301) 587-6050

Testimony presented to the Montgomery County Council on March 7, 2011.

Re: Your support to approve construction of a pedestrian bridge linking the Wayne Avenue Parking Garage 60 to the third floor of the new Silver Spring Library.

Dear Council Persons,

In 2006, I served as the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce's representative on the Silver Spring Library Planning Committee.

Our goal was to have a new library built in the Silver Spring Commercial Business District that would enhance and supplement the educational opportunities of our students, provide an educational meeting place for our citizens, and act as a catalyst for business development south of Wayne Avenue, Fenton Village.

With the incorporation of the Purple Line into the building footprint of the library, I believe the construction of the pedestrian bridge is the last component necessary to economically accomplish our goal for the following reasons:

- 1) No additional parking places would be needed since the existing garage has adequate handicapped parking.
- 2) No additional spaces would have to be provided for expectant mothers, and mothers or fathers with small children.
- 3) Pedestrian safety is enhanced because people would not have to cross a busy street which will include light rail vehicles.
- 4) Better parking with easier access to the library will encourage people to come to Silver Spring versus other libraries.
- 5) Increased library patrons will increase foot traffic in the Central Business District.
- 6) Increased foot traffic will increase business sales across the breadth of local businesses.
- 7) Better access across Wayne Avenue will increase business within Fenton Village.
- 8) Including the bridge does not set a precedent since one is being built crossing Cameron Street, at the corner of Spring Street, connecting the two new United Technology buildings.

For these reasons, I ask you to approve construction of the pedestrian footbridge connecting garage 60 and the library.

Sincerely,



Samuel L. Statland

Be careful what you wish for...

As a resident of downtown Silver Spring for more than 30 years I wanted a vibrant, varied community, appealing to all not just an amorphous middle class, a place to better oneself not just spend money. What I got was a sundry collection of apartments, small retail and restaurants-- Civic Center and Library almost an afterthought. With only commercial and no communal destinations, there's no there there.

As a former director of a large research library in Washington, I wanted a metropolitan library as the frontispiece to downtown Silver Spring. I visualized a dedicated arts section underscoring an arts community What I got was the Library without special collections, supporting only the AFI and a moribund theater, built last, squeezed into increasingly small and insignificant space without adequate access and parking.

As an historian, I have watched the new library issue from the inside for the past 16 years. Despite constant advocacy I have seen the concept of the new library whittled away combined with apartment, then office space, Pyramid Atlantic a coffee bar. Surrounding land for expansion and parking was given to the developers, even to the recent project that will further dwarf the building when height restrictions are removed.

As the daughter of an architect who practiced in the area for 65 years and herself studied architectural aesthetics at Harvard and still follows the literature; I deplore the insignificance of the structure, the cramped site, the lack of a designated entrance and above all, the continued failure to authorize a bridge necessary for access. All these arguments on aesthetic and people moving grounds are specious according to most unbiased authorities. With ever increasing density and traffic, ground level movement of people becomes less and less feasible.

As I pol who was Administrative Assistant ~~to~~ to a Congressman and who served for a long time as chief judge in my electoral district, I know the way things work. Delay and delay, force the other side to accept impossible options (no underground and offsite parking even no bridge). The ultimate rewards go to the least condescending last man standing. I intend to be that last man

As a disabled person for the last 35 years whose mobility is further challenged in old age, in legal and humanitarian terms, I am owed --yes owed - access to my community library, the one place in Silver Spring vital to my wellbeing. Despite my degrees, I am essentially an autodidact. I need the books, the literary festivals, the author lectures, the LAC and Friends meetings, socializing and planning for community betterment with like minded people.

As the Trustee of a cemetery, I am cognizant of time passing and hope to see the Silver Spring Library , complete with bridge access for disabled, seniors and mothers with young children (the future of our community) built before I and others exposed to the danger of crossing Wayne Avenue (even before the Purple Line) Are injured or die. I charge you to complete the library, build the bridge and bring some quality to our community and consideration to Silver Spring citizens.

Audrey Schlesinger 1925 Rosemary Hills Drive Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

My name is Gail Viechnicki. I want to thank the Council for the opportunity to speak. I have lived in close-in Silver Spring since 2003, and tonight I want to speak in support of making the new Silver Spring library as accessible as possible – which should include building the library bridge.

I would like to tell you a little bit about myself, so you can understand why the bridge is so important. I have 4 young children (ages 1, 3, 5, and 8) and we visit the Silver Spring library at least once a week, sometimes twice. Typically, when we go, we will return between 30-50 books and get out that many new ones. My husband and I usually have a book on hold that we're picking up for ourselves, and each of my children gets their own books, according to his or her interests and reading ability.

I have never lived within walking distance of the library, so I must drive, and I will have to continue to drive to the new library location. When I go, once out of the car, I typically am carrying a diaper bag and 3 large (heavy!) tote bags full of books. I push a stroller while holding my toddler's hand, and monitoring my older children to help them stay safe around cars. It's no easy feat in a regular parking lot, let me tell you, but it would be impossible at the new library location should the pedestrian bridge not be built.

Without the pedestrian bridge, my four young children and I, with our heavy bags of books, would have to take an elevator down to the street, walk down half a block, cross a busy road – with cars and multiple trains – and then go up another elevator. The lack of a dedicated parking facility – which is really a shame in itself – and the lack of a pedestrian bridge into the library would mean simply that my family *could not go* to the library.

I would love to live within walking distance of the library, but we don't. Buses are not a realistic option for me, since we would have to take 2 different ones to reach the library from our home, adding time and expense to our trip, to say nothing of the added burden of juggling a baby, a toddler and two other children, a stroller, and bags on public transportation. The sad truth is that realistically if decent access isn't provided, we will probably just have to stop going to this library.

That would mean that I would not frequent other downtown Silver Spring merchants, such as Strosniders and Whole Foods, either before or after a library trip, as I do now. I would spend my money elsewhere.

But I don't want to! My family loves the Silver Spring library! The library is really my family's "third space" – as urban planners put it – we get our books there, but it also feels like an extension of our living space: We like to go there on hot summer days to cool off, and on rainy days for a cozy afternoon. We know our librarians, and they know us.

Access is thus extremely important to me as a heavy library user, and mother of young children. I will be really disappointed in my elected officials if short-sighted funding decisions limit my and my children's access to *our* library. Therefore I ask you tonight to please consider allowing for the zoning of the pedestrian bridge, and for its funding.

Johanna Misesy Boyer
702 Twin Holly Lane
Silver Spring, MD 20910-4665
301-589-5436 ♦ johanna@jmb-arts.com

March 8, 2011

Montgomery County Council Members
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Council Members:

I am writing today in strong support of opening the urban plan to amendment and in strong support of the bridge to connect the Wayne Avenue parking garage with the new Silver Spring library. Please include this letter in the record of the hearing on March 8, 2011.

A downtown Silver Spring resident for 19 years, I can walk to restaurants, the gym, the dry cleaner, the grocery store, and the current Silver Spring library. However, I usually drive to complete these tasks, often stopping three or four places en route to another part of Montgomery County. This routine is efficient and cost effective for me given my busy life, which is not too different from any other resident of the greater DC area. Because efficiency is important to me, the library bridge is a necessity. If the bridge is not built and I am already in my car, then it will be easier to zip over to the Wheaton library.

More important than my personal needs is the value of the library bridge to people with disabilities. My understanding is that the parking for people with a "handicap" permit will be in the Wayne Avenue garage. They will then need to exit the garage and cross Wayne Avenue to get to the library. While the distance, slope of the sidewalk, and elevators are likely in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this route of access to the new library is not welcoming. I want the county in which I live and in which I grew up to be a state and national model of inclusivity for people with disabilities. Building the library bridge is what an exemplary county government would do.

The bridge is also a necessity for older adults. The current route of access on the street is fraught with hazards for people whose balance may not be good or who may be a bit unsteady on their feet. Crossing Wayne Avenue may be nerve wracking; the aural din of the cars and purple line trains may be confusing, as well. I want the county in which I live and in which I grew up to be a state and national model of inclusivity for the rapidly growing older adult population. Building the library bridge is what an exemplary county government would do.

In addition, the bridge is a necessity for mothers with toddlers and kids in strollers. Just visualize a Mom with a 6 year old child, a baby in a stroller, and a bag of books trying to maneuver out of the parking garage, up to the corner, across a busy street, into the library building, and up an

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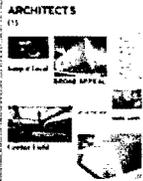
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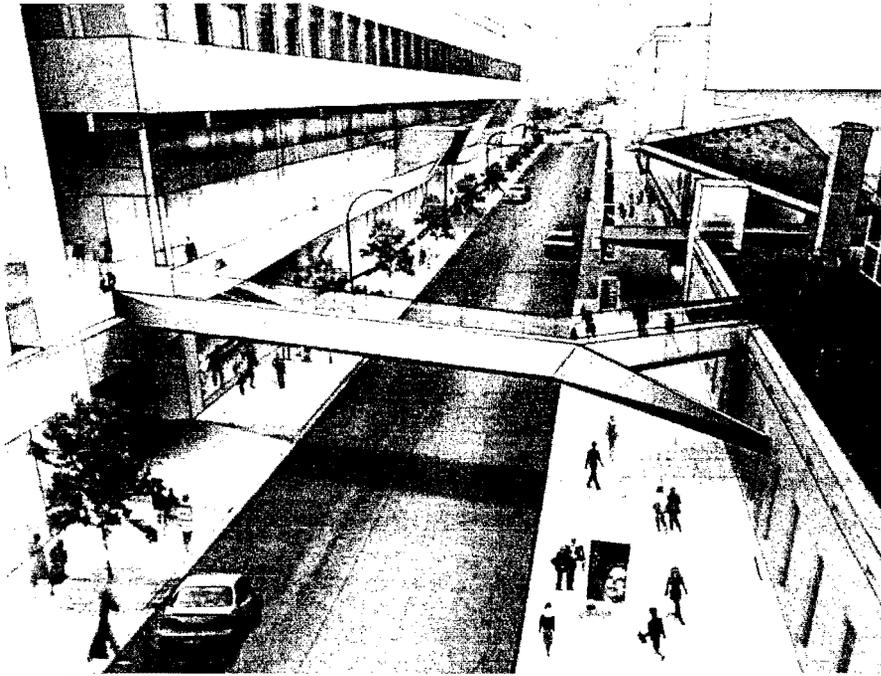


NEWS

02.15.2011

Lincoln Center's Catwalk for Culture

Diller Scofidio + Renfro uses a structural skin on new pedestrian bridge over 65th Street



LOOKING EAST ON 65TH STREET. COURTESY DS+R

Lincoln Center now hosts New York's semi-annual Fashion Week, but this spring a different kind of catwalk will unfold at the culture hub. A slightly skewed pedestrian bridge designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R) will span across 65th Street, linking the main campus to the Rose Building and Juilliard. The bridge represents the last component of the Center's renovation project. After an extensive effort to remove the bulky Milstein Plaza, which loomed over 65th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue, the street finally saw daylight for the first time in decades. But foot traffic between Juilliard, the Rose building, and the main campus remains heavy. It's a major concern for the dancers from the School of American Ballet, some as young as seven, who must now navigate the busy city street.

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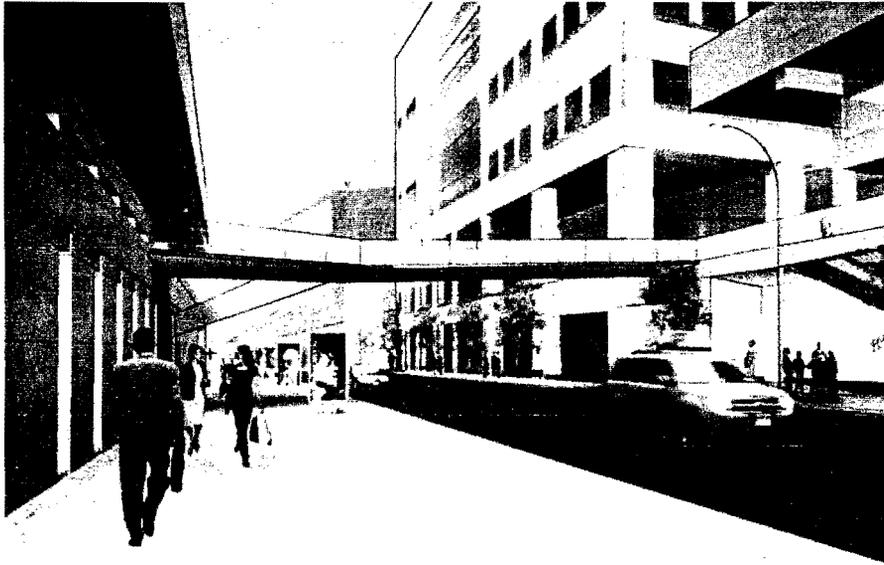
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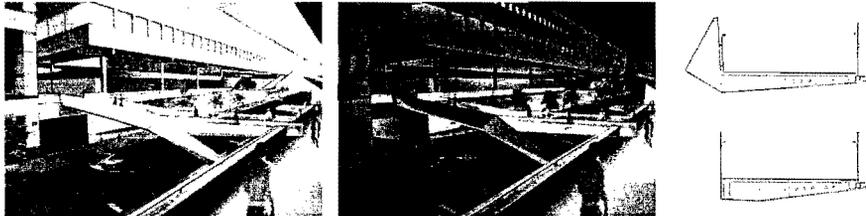
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LOOKING WEST FROM BROADWAY.

Kevin Rice, DS+R's director for public spaces, said the bridge proposal turned out to be the most contentious element in the renovation of the complex. "City Planning has a goal to have lively streets, and bridges take that away," said Rice, "It's a valid concern." As there are so few open pedestrian bridges in New York, Rice said that clear construction guidelines did not exist when the project started. But as DS+R simultaneously worked downtown on the High Line—itsself one big pedestrian bridge—they helped the city establish new protocols for bridges, which ultimately found their way into the 65th Street project.

The bridge applies much of the same surgical implementation seen throughout the redesign, visually slicing through Modernist elements while maintaining much of the old pedestrian flow. The bridge will direct the traffic from the Rose and Juilliard buildings toward the north plaza, which was originally designed by Dan Kiley. As the two areas are on an angle from each other, a simple perpendicular design wouldn't do. Also, the street rises from Amsterdam to Broadway, so the bridge needed to pitch up as well. For this reason, the design got its distinctive lower case "y" shape, with the short line of the letter anchoring itself onto lower level sidewalk. This helps raise the entire structure up above the traffic and creates a bend in the footpath three quarters of the way through.



LEFT TO RIGHT: A DAY AND NIGHT TIME VIEW OF THE CATWALK AND BRIDGE SECTIONS. [CLICK TO ENLARGE.]

"It's basically a series of flat steel plates that have been welded together," said project architect Michael Hundsnurscher. "But the main thing carrying the load is the stressed skin structure." The metallic bulk also forms the guardrail on the east side, while the thinner west side utilizes a glass guard. Hundsnurscher worked with structural engineer Dewhurst Macfarlane and Partners to create an effect that makes the bridge appear very light when viewed from Broadway and almost sculptural when viewed from Amsterdam Avenue.

Tom Stoelker

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At the March 8th (2011) hearing before the County Council, Alyce Ortuzar submitted this letter from the Pedestrian Traffic Safety Advisory Committee (PTSAC) sent to County Executive Leggett, opposing the proposed handicapped access bridge connecting the new Silver Spring Library to a parking garage.

At our July 2010 meeting, after considerable discussion, the Pedestrian Traffic Safety Advisory Committee (PTSAC) voted to affirm the position it took in February 2010 in opposition to the handicapped-parking access bridge for the new library in downtown Silver Spring.

The Committee is mindful and respectful of the needs of the elderly and disabled and agrees that *all* library patrons, those with mobility limitations and those able-bodied, should have reasonable, safe and fair access to the library. The PTSAC feels strongly that handicapped-accessible parking and drop off location(s) must be provided in close proximity to the new library building at street level and that the library's street entrances be convenient and comfortable for handicapped access. There are many examples of popular and welcoming public facilities in similar locales across the country that provide safe and convenient access along and across roadways for those with mobility limitations. A pedestrian bridge, which *assumes* that all with mobility limitations will be driving to the library, is likely to do just the opposite; allow for more and higher speed traffic while degrading the streetscape and increasing safety hazards for those traveling along Wayne Avenue regardless of the mode of transportation.

We believe that, in this densely populated, transit-oriented urban location, a handicapped-parking access bridge is not the best solution.

We believe that the safety of all library patrons, as well as area pedestrians, cyclists and transit users, will be better assured with roadway improvements to calm traffic and by implementing best practice crossing treatments. A pedestrian bridge is likely to encourage rather than discourage driving to the new library, creating a host of other safety, environmental and security issues. We also believe that library patrons approaching the library on foot at street level are more likely to patronize area merchants than those arriving by car, who are more likely to simply travel across the enclosed bridge to the library and back across to their cars, bypassing the neighborhood's stores, restaurants, and cafes.

The site design for the library has focused on providing access to motorists and orienting the building to the Wayne Avenue garage. We ask that the County give full consideration to redesigning the roadway and re-orienting the library entrance to the signalized intersection to help to encourage safer pedestrian crossings. Reconfiguration of the road, with restriping or road dieting to slow traffic, would shorten crossing distances and accommodate bicycles and should be given appropriate consideration. The County should not miss this opportunity to reconsider the operation and configuration of Wayne Avenue and at the same time prepare for the arrival of the planned Purple Line with a key stop at this very location. We believe we can create a more complete street, with slow-moving vehicles, safety for pedestrians and cyclists, and a true transit destination.

In sum, we think a pedestrian bridge is not the best solution as it brings with it a host of negative impacts: increasing the Library's carbon footprint, degrading the streetscape, creating an automobile-oriented street environment and facility design, and missing the opportunity to create a model multi-modal street with dedicated bike access, calm traffic, and an environment welcoming to all members of the community.

Additional concerns raised in the PTSAC discussions:

There was a comment that if only 7 spaces are reserved for handicapped persons, the cost to serve those spaces is out of proportion to the value received.

Many cities have realized that "bridges" are not always in the best interest of the public and are actually removing them for better alternatives. There are a lot of examples of cities taking down their bridges; one example is copied below.

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/1,5143,695266415,00.html?pg=1>

<http://www.utahstories.com/graphics/Preserving%20Life%20on%20the%20Street%5B1%5D.pdf>

DENVER--For years, six concrete bridges have spanned the streets of downtown Denver, the legacy of an ill-conceived 1960s urban-renewal project aimed at taking pedestrians off the sidewalk. Now the little-used "skybridges" are starting to come down, closing a chapter on one of downtown's more bizarre redevelopment efforts.

Downtown's small network of skybridges is a legacy of the Denver Urban Renewal Authority's Skyline project of the 1960s and early 1970s. As part of downtown's brave new world, officials decided they would try to create a pedestrian zone above the street. The idea called for public plazas at the second level of the new high-rise district, all of them linked by skybridges. In theory, visitors to downtown would park in a garage, take an elevator to the "plaza level," then dine and shop without ever setting foot on the street.

But pedestrians avoided the skybridges, and the public plazas soon turned into barren, windswept spaces that felt dangerous after dark. The idea of giving up on street life was soon abandoned, but the half-dozen bridges remained. City officials and downtown boosters now readily concede that the skybridge idea was a mistake, but finding the money to get rid of the bridges hasn't been easy. Even though they were conceived by DURA, that agency hasn't been willing to pay to have them removed, leaving the problem in the hands of property owners.

Two of the bridges were demolished last month, including one at 16th and Larimer streets and another at 17th and Larimer. The disappearance of the skybridges marks a turning point for downtown Denver.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

February 10, 2011

Valerie Ervin, Council President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Subject: Amendment to the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan
Pedestrian Bridge

Dear Councilmember Ervin:

The County Council has requested a recommendation from the Planning Board regarding a proposed Amendment to the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan that would permit construction of a pedestrian bridge across Wayne Avenue, from an existing parking garage to the new Silver Spring Library. The bridge is intended, in particular, to provide access to parking spaces in the garage that would be designated for handicapped use. The Planning Board hereby transmits the recommendations regarding the pedestrian bridge that it issued on two other occasions: a 2:2 vote in opposition to the bridge on May 6, 2009, and a unanimous vote to recommend approval of the library without the bridge following mandatory referral review on June 18, 2010.

Planning for the Silver Spring CBD for the last three decades has focused on activating the existing sidewalks and avoiding pedestrian bridges. The extensive sidewalk improvements by the public and private sectors have included special lighting, street trees and street furniture to emphasize the safety and security of all pedestrians.

The Planning Board has recognized the difficulty in providing adequate access for all to the Silver Spring Library. Options for handicapped access include the following:

- **Proposed Bridge with parking for the handicapped on the upper floors of the nearby garage:**
 - Required space for a large van not provided
 - Access located a long distance from the library
 - Costly construction of a pedestrian bridge required in addition to improving the sidewalks in the area.

- **Alternative developed by Planning Board staff for your consideration:**
 - Parking for the handicapped located on-site as shown in the attached drawing

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Council President Valerie Ervin

February 10, 2011

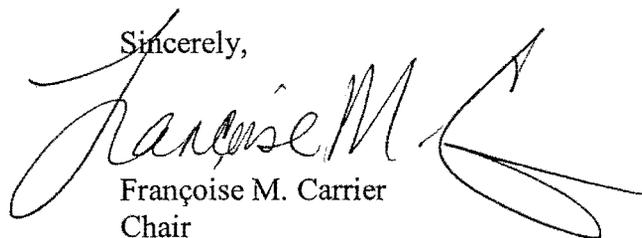
Page Two

- Access for all handicapped patrons provided in close proximity to a primary access to the library that avoids the cost of a bridge.
- Other patrons to the library would use the sidewalks to access the library and activate the streets, as intended in the Silver Spring Sector Plan and the original Urban Renewal Plan.

In addition to the Planning Board's two past recommendations regarding the bridge, I have enclosed a new staff report that addresses the presently proposed Amendment in more detail. This report continues to recommend that a pedestrian bridge is not the best solution to activate the sidewalks in the Silver Spring CBD, and is not the best way to provide access for the handicapped to the new library.

The Planning Board appreciates the opportunity to assist the Council in finding an appropriate solution to this difficult issue.

Sincerely,



Françoise M. Carrier
Chair

G:\SS Bridge 2

Enclosures:

- Diagram of parking on-site
- Staff Report



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

January 26, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board
VIA: Rose Krasnow, Chief, Area 1 *RK*
Bill Barron, Team Leader, Area 1 *WRS*
FROM: John Marcolin, ASLA, Planner Coordinator, Area 1 (301/495-4547) *JM*
SUBJECT: Amendment to the Silver Spring CBD Urban Renewal Plan:
Pedestrian Bridge, CBD-1, 2000 Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan

RECOMMENDATION

Approval to transmit the following comments to the County Council:

1. Pedestrian bridges and structures that cross existing rights of way are explicitly excluded in the 1999 Silver Spring CBD Urban Renewal Plan, and a new pedestrian bridge across Wayne Avenue to serve the library should be discouraged in downtown Silver Spring
2. Safe and convenient access to the future library could be provided for the handicapped and others on-site.

SUMMARY OF THE AMENDMENT

The Montgomery Planning Board received a draft amendment to the Silver Spring CBD Urban Renewal Plan from the County Council on December 14, 2010. The existing Urban Renewal Plan prohibits the use of pedestrian bridges across Wayne Avenue, Georgia Avenue, Colesville Road, and Cedar Street. The draft amendment seeks to amend the Renewal Plan, on page III-21, as follows:

“Pedestrian bridges and structures that cross existing rights-of-way will not be permitted over Georgia Avenue, Colesville Road, Cedar Street, or Wayne Avenue with the following exception: An elevated walkway, which complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards for accessible design, is permitted over Wayne Avenue, connecting the Wayne Avenue Garage with a County facility that includes a public library, located on the opposite side of Wayne Avenue outside of the Urban Renewal Area. Elsewhere in the Urban Renewal Area, pedestrian connections could form an arch, gateway, or covering, and utilize transparent

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construction materials. Such connections must provide for attractive and active pedestrian environments underneath them.

The purpose of the amendment is to provide a pedestrian bridge to serve the future public library. The new Silver Spring Library will have special collections and services for the disabled.

ANALYSIS

Conformance with the Urban Renewal Plan

The use of pedestrian bridges is not in conformance with the specific text in the Urban Renewal Plan. An amendment to the Urban Renewal Plan is required to establish conformance.

The Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan was amended by the County Council in 1999 to increase the speed and flexibility of redevelopment in the Urban Renewal Area, and to "make the redevelopment of the core of downtown part of a comprehensive revitalization strategy for all of downtown," (pg. I-1). Recognizing that "revitalization of downtown Silver Spring is a process, not a project," (pg. II-46) the amended plan was refined to incorporate lessons from previous redevelopment attempts. One refinement was the prohibition of pedestrian bridges across specific streets within the Silver Spring CBD, including Wayne Avenue. This clause resulted from community dissatisfaction with a development proposal that connected two large-tenant retailers via a pedestrian bridge across Georgia Avenue. Community members rejected the proposal and the use of pedestrian bridges on the basis that they were harmful to the overall pedestrian environment within the CBD. The pedestrian bridge on Fenton Street connecting the City Place Mall to the Fenton Street Garage precedes the Urban Renewal Plan, and is not a desirable model to follow.

The Urban Renewal Plan specifically names the streets prohibited from constructing pedestrian bridges. All streets that border the Urban Renewal Area - Cedar Street, Colesville Road, and Wayne Avenue - are not permitted to construct bridges or structures that cross the existing rights-of-way. The purpose of this provision is to connect the downtown with adjacent neighborhoods and "foster an active street life by promoting pedestrian movement on public sidewalks," (pg. I-3). The proposed library bridge does not serve any of these functions.

Conformance with the Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan

The Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan encourages the development of active streets and sidewalks, busy with people walking to shop, commute, or for pleasure (page 24). This plan places an emphasis on concentrating pedestrian traffic on sidewalks instead of diverting pedestrian traffic away from sidewalks to pedestrian bridges.

Jurisdictions and cities around the country such as Rosslyn in Arlington County, Baltimore, Denver, Cincinnati and Minneapolis have found that pedestrian bridges divert foot traffic away from the street level and present a security risk to users. These jurisdictions have also found that their streets become undesirable places if the pedestrian traffic is diverted to bridges (See

attachment 3). The library will not serve as a catalyst for existing and proposed retail in the area if the pedestrian traffic is diverted directly to an upper level.

A pedestrian-friendly downtown is one of the central tenets of the Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan. The Plan notes that “pedestrian traffic in Fenton Village has declined due to a variety of real and perceived problems including the lack of demand for the goods and service offered in Fenton Village, inadequate pedestrian circulation, concerns about security, the ability to attract office workers from the nearby Core, and the area’s deteriorating visual image,” (pg. 61). Pedestrian surveys indicate that much of the vibrant pedestrian activity occurring in the retail heart of Silver Spring at Fenton and Ellsworth Street does not spillover across Wayne Avenue into Fenton Village.

The Sector Plan envisions Fenton Street as “a local neighborhood retail center, recharged with the energy of multi-cultural restaurants and businesses. Fenton Street will be Fenton Village’s main street, lined with low-scale buildings and refitted as a pleasant walkable street with sidewalks shaded by trees and opening into the occasional small plaza (pg. 14). Urban design guidelines for redevelopment projects also call for the incorporation of “crime prevention principles through environmental design by integrating visibility, pedestrian activity, and programming into project layouts,” (pg. 73).

Improvement to the intersection of Fenton Street and Wayne Avenue, as well as concentrating pedestrian activity at the street level would provide a safe and vibrant pedestrian environment.

The Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan notes:

“An urban area’s greatest economic asset and strongest physical definition comes from its pedestrian environment. Communities where people can walk are communities where people will spend time and money,” (pg. 24).

There is currently a lack of retail near the library site. The plan envisions Fenton Village, and Fenton Street in particular, as a center for neighborhood retail. The plan seeks to “revitalize Fenton Village by positioning it to benefit from redevelopment on the Urban Renewal site, facilitate housing that will upgrade the physical environment and bring in new residents, and provide a pedestrian-friendly environment that encourages people to stroll and stay,” (pg. 61).

A pedestrian bridge will not benefit local retailers. Impulse buying and the purchase of non-necessity items are facilitated by exposing potential consumers to retail products. Library patrons will have to make a conscious decision to leave the library and visit these uses. This is not an ideal retail environment.

Additional retail opportunities have been identified on Fenton Street across from the proposed library on a site currently occupied by the First Baptist Church of Silver Spring. The site is being considered for a mixed-use development with street level retail (see attachment 2), which could benefit from additional pedestrian traffic traveling to and from the Silver Spring Library.

Accessibility

The pedestrian bridge is intended to serve the handicapped by avoiding a crossing of Wayne Avenue and connecting the library to an existing parking garage, thus avoiding the construction of parking on site.

ADA Requirements

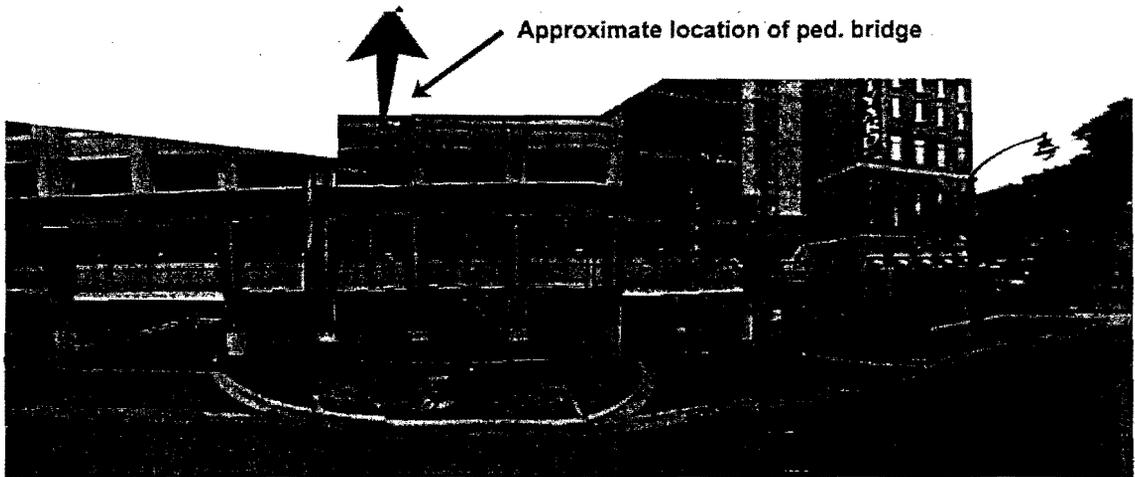
Section 4.6.2 of the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) states:

“Accessible parking spaces serving a particular building shall be located on the shortest accessible route of travel from adjacent parking to an accessible entrance. In parking facilities that do not serve a particular building, accessible parking shall be located on the shortest accessible route of travel to an accessible pedestrian entrance of the parking facility. In buildings with multiple accessible entrances with adjacent parking, accessible parking spaces shall be dispersed and located closest to the accessible entrances.”

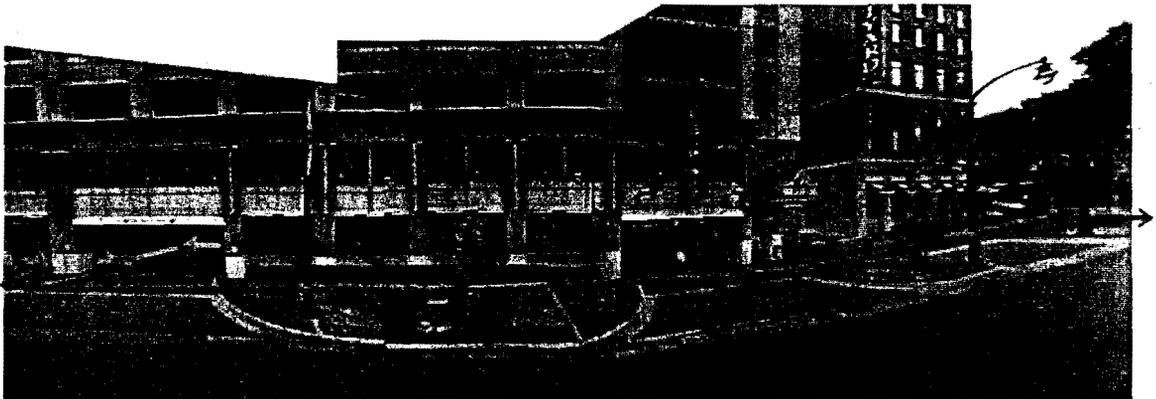
Under Maryland State Law, drivers may qualify for a Special Parking placard if they are unable to walk 200 feet without stopping to rest. The estimated distance from handicap parking spaces located in the Wayne Avenue garage to the library is 230 feet.

The number of ADA accessible parking spaces necessary for the library is a function of the total number of parking spaces provided for library employees and visitors. Using the existing parking capacity in the Wayne Avenue Garage does not require additional accessible parking spaces so long as the spaces are located on the shortest accessible route to the library. If a pedestrian bridge is constructed, it should be served by at least six ADA handicapped parking spaces.

Additionally, one in every eight accessible spaces, but not less than one, must be served by an access aisle a minimum of 96 inches wide and shall be designated as "van accessible." According to ADAAG 4.6.5, ADA accessible areas must provide a minimum vertical clearance of 114 inches (9'6") at accessible passenger loading zones and along at least one vehicle access route to such areas from site entrances and exits. **The Wayne Avenue Garage above the first floor has a maximum clearance of 8 feet 2 inches, and is too low to accommodate the high-top vans equipped with wheelchair lifts on the third floor near the proposed bridge connection.** Van accessible parking can only be accommodated on the first floor. Of the van accessible parking spots two are located near the Wayne Avenue entrance and exit. However, the accessible route of travel (to the proposed pedestrian bridge) requires one to exit onto the sidewalk on Wayne Avenue, proceed east to the corner of the garage and re-enter the building at the elevator/stairs before taking the elevator up to the third floor and proceeding to the pedestrian bridge. The simpler alternative is to exit the building and proceed directly to the corner of Wayne and Fenton Street where Wayne Avenue can be crossed via a safe crosswalk before entering the library on ground level. (Figure 1).



Route from Handicap Van Accessible spaces (at 1st floor in Garage) to pedestrian bridge entry on 3rd floor

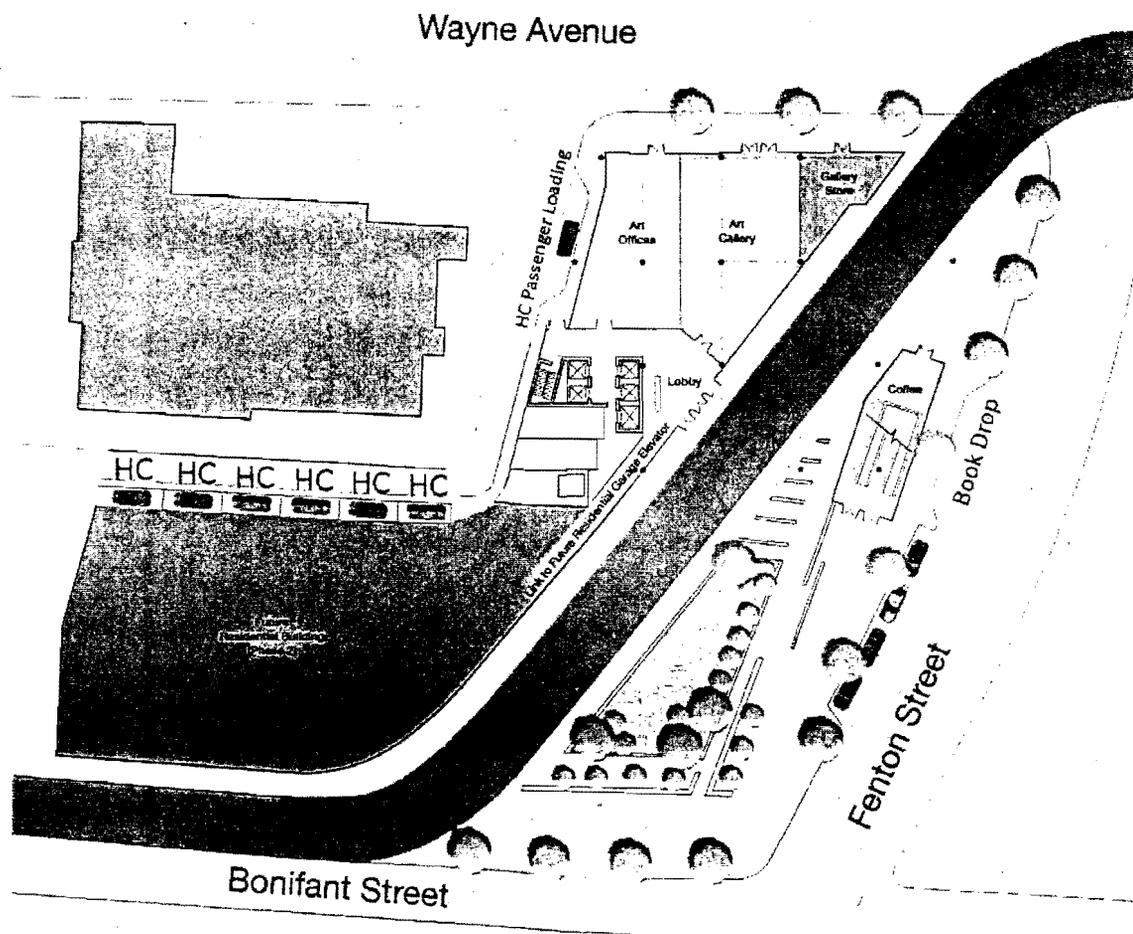


Route from handicap van accessible spaces (on 1st floor in Garage) to Library across Wayne Avenue

Figure 1

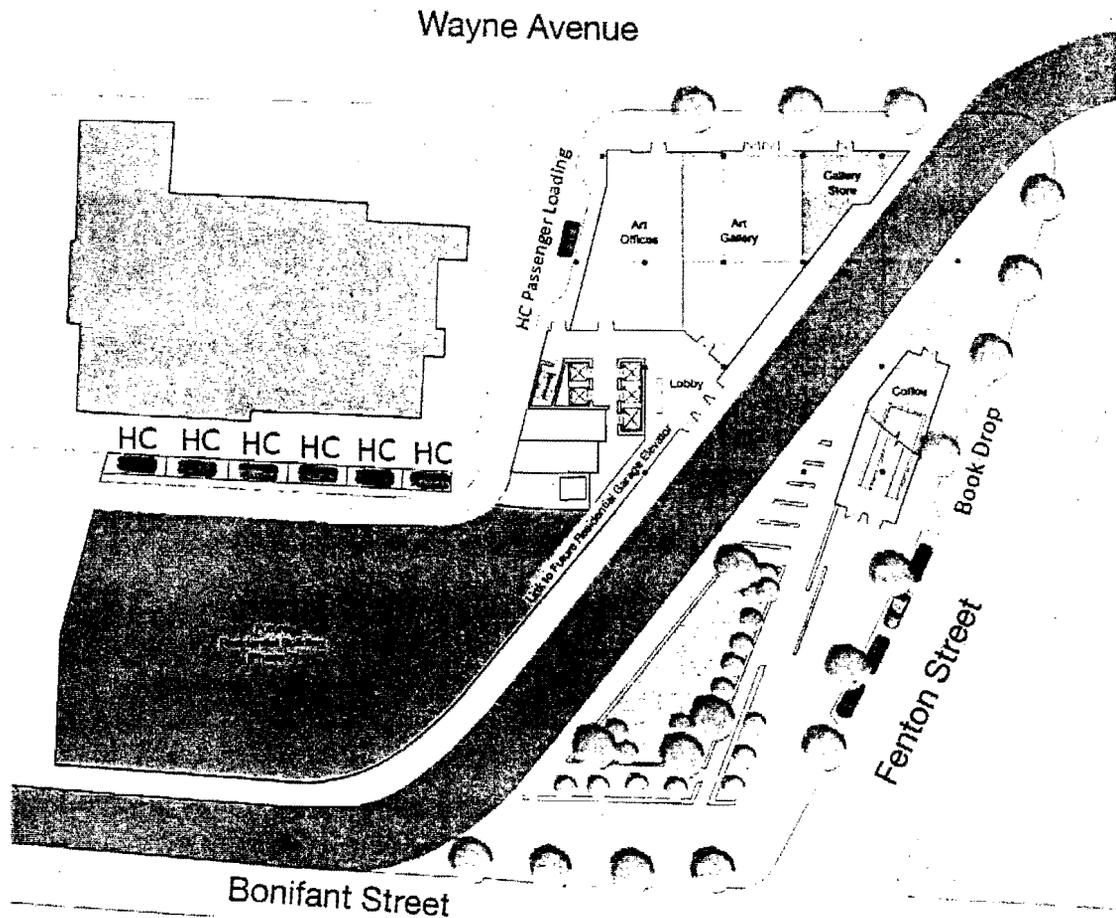
Other concerns persist about the safety of handicapped persons traveling through the Wayne Avenue Garage. The access point on the third floor for the proposed pedestrian bridge is located adjacent to the primary path of vehicle circulation through the garage (see attachment 1). Roll stops, cut corners, and wide swinging cars are common as drivers navigate the semi-blind U-turns from the ramp onto the next floor. Library patrons must walk in the drive-aisle, as opposed to a pedestrian curb away from traffic, in order to reach the bridge. The auto-dominated nature of the garage environment places disabled library patrons at an unnecessary risk when alternatives are available.

On-site parking can locate handicap accessible parking spaces closer to the library entrance, and eliminate complications presented by the constraints of the Wayne Avenue garage. Six on-site handicap parking spots (figures 2&3) can be accommodated along the same access drive that will be used for handicapped passenger loading (facing The Crescent) which will be designed to accommodate the Metro Access buses because they cannot access the third floor due to the clearance issues noted above.



On-site handicap parking with parallel parking on south side of alley

Figure 2



On-site handicap parking with parallel parking on north side of alley

Figure 3

Costs

The Urban Renewal Plan states that all projects should “maximize the return on the public investment in the Urban Renewal Area by requiring any proposed project be part of a comprehensive redevelopment approach to the Urban Renewal Area,” (pg I-4). The costs to improve the sidewalk and crosswalk would be substantially less than cost for the bridge. The Planning Department remains concerned that the proposed costs have been underestimated in comparison to similar completed and proposed projects in the county. Pedestrian bridges often suffer from low usage rates, and the potential return on investment may not justify the allocation of funds. The following table provides a cost comparison of pedestrian bridges built or proposed in Montgomery County.

Pedestrian Bridge Cost Comparison

	Silver Spring Library	United Therapeutics	Montgomery College Bridge	River Road Capital Crescent Trail	Viers Mill Road
Construction Date	-	Pending	2006	1993	Pending
Total Cost	\$749,000	\$1.5 - 3,300,000	\$3,000,000	\$1,100,000	\$6,000,000
2009 Cost*	-	-	\$3,174,214	\$1,722,202	-
Bridge span	85 feet	90 feet	250 feet**	280 feet**	620 feet**
Cost per Linear Foot	\$8,812	\$16,666 - \$36,666	\$12,000	\$3,929	\$9,677
Enclosed	Enclosed	Enclosed	Enclosed	Open air	Open air
Air Conditioned	Pending	Heating and cooling	Ventilated. No heating and cooling.	None	None

* Based on consumer price index (CPI) using the US Bureau of Labor Statistics inflation calculator.

** Span and price per linear square foot does not include the length of access ramps

Pedestrian bridge use depends largely on convenience and walking distances when compared to alternative crossing locations. Pedestrians will not use an overpass if they can cross at street level in about the same amount of time¹. Once at street level, pedestrians will only opt to use elevated walkways when delays, generally longer than 1 minute and 50 seconds, slow crossings at intersections². Familiarity with an area also factors into bridge use. The more a pedestrian visits an area, the less likely they will be to use a pedestrian bridge³. This evidence suggests that pedestrians at street-level are highly unlikely to use the bridge as an alternative to crossing at the intersection of Fenton Street and Wayne Avenue. Library patrons using the Wayne Avenue garage may also opt to link a series of trips to several destinations within the CBD. Their arrival to the library will likely be from other retail venues at ground level.

Providing improvements to the intersection of Wayne Avenue and Fenton Street is a significantly less expensive solution for providing safe access to the library. While a bridge would cater to a select portion of library patrons, improving the intersection makes an investment to the community as a whole.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS

On February 19, 2009 the County Executive transmitted to the County Council a proposed amendment to the Amended Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan that would permit the construction of a pedestrian bridge over Wayne Avenue, connecting the Wayne Avenue Garage to the Silver Spring Library to be built on the south side of Wayne Avenue. On July 28, 2009, the Council disapproved the proposed amendment by a vote of 8-1.

¹ Moore, R.L., Older, S.J., 1965. Pedestrians and Motors are Compatible in Today's World. Traffic Engineering, Institute of Transportation Engineers, Washington, DC (September).

² Ribbens, H., 1996. Pedestrian facilities in South Africa: research and practice. Transport. Res. Rec. 1538, 10-18.

³ Räsänen, M., Lajunen, T., Alticafarbay, F., Aydin, C., 2007. Pedestrian self-reports of factors influencing the use of pedestrian bridge. Accident Analysis & Prevention. 39 (5), 969-973.

CONCLUSION

The staff recommends against a bridge and against amending the Silver Spring urban renewal plan. Providing access at street level will provide an active, safe and attractive sidewalk. Eliminating a bridge will also reduce the cost of the project. Providing a limited amount of on-site parking in combination with the sidewalk improvements could address access concerns and meet the ADA requirements.

Attachments:

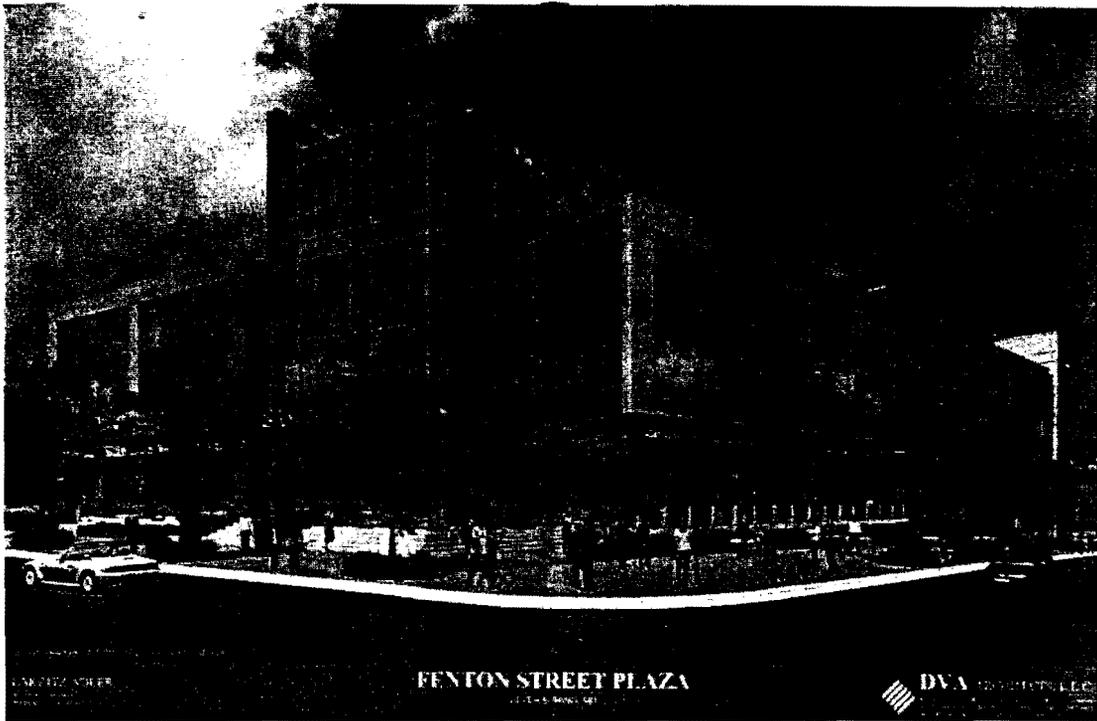
1. Handicap Access routes from Van accessible parking
2. Annotated photo parking garage at third floor location of proposed bridge
3. Diagram of on-site handicap parking on south side of alley
4. Diagram of on-site handicap parking on north side of alley
5. Re-prints of articles from around the country concerning elevated pedestrian bridges

M: Marcolin/Urban Renewal Plan Ped Bridges

Attachment 1



Attachment 2



Rendering of potential development on Fenton Street (across street from library)

Decades old, skywalk idea doesn't seem to fly anymore

By Patrick O'Gilfoil Healy

The New York Times

August 2005



Like many failed ideas, the skywalks in Cincinnati were built with the best intentions. They were dreamed up in a fit of 1960s urban renewal, a development guru's idea for making downtown Cincinnati easier to navigate and enjoy. The city erected a small network of second-story bridges that spanned the streets and linked offices and hotels, allowing people to stroll through downtown without stepping onto the sidewalk.

Two dozen cities across the country pursued similar plans over the last 30 years, building skywalks and underground retail catacombs to keep businesses and stores from fleeing to shopping malls. They ensconced shoppers and office workers in climate-controlled environments and insulated them from crime, cold and urban blight. In Salt Lake City, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is contemplating a skywalk between its two downtown malls as part of a rebuilding project.

Yet, many cities are gripped with builders' remorse. They say the skyways and tunnels have choked off pedestrian traffic, hurt street-level retailers and limited development in the city core. "The skywalks were not the best-developed scheme in recent history and have not served us all that well," said Jim Tarbell, a Cincinnati councilman. As cities try to draw residents downtown with loft conversions and tax incentives, several are trying to divert pedestrians back to the street and do away with the walkways, which critics say are antiseptic and have transformed cities into places to pass through, not live in.

"If I could take a cement mixer and pour cement in and clog up the tunnels, I would do it today," said Laura Miller, the mayor of Dallas. "It was the worst urban planning decision that Dallas has ever made. They thought it was hip and groovy to create an underground community, but it was a death knell." This attitude shift shows that city planners and officials now see the pulse of their downtown not in its office towers and 9-to-5 workers, but in street cafes and restaurants, sidewalks and pedestrian traffic during the day, after work and on weekends.

"At the time they were built, they were seen as a way of competing with the suburbs," said Dave Feehan, director of the International Downtown Association, a collection of city-center groups. "Remember the fear of crime people had 20 years ago? Downtowns were seen as unsafe places and places people didn't want to be." But now? "People are saying, if we had it to do all over again, we wouldn't do it," Feehan said.

Dallas has considered offering retailers \$2.5 million in incentives if they relocate from the tunnels to the street. Des Moines has limited the expansion of its skywalks. Cincinnati has gone the furthest and approved a plan to tear down pieces of its 30-year-old skywalk system. Still, skywalks and tunnels have

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become crucial arteries of city life in cold-weather places like Fargo, N.D., and Minneapolis, St. Paul and Rochester in Minnesota.

Other cities that have soured on their skywalks have no choice but to live with them. Many were built with a mix of public and private money and are now owned, maintained and guarded by the office towers through which they run. In Hartford, Conn., plans to demolish the Asylum Street sky bridge, widely ridiculed as a civic embarrassment, stalled last year over objections from the tenants and leaseholder in the office building on one end of the bridge. Developers who are building a huge residential tower across Asylum Street still hope to tear down the skywalk, but legal disputes could keep it intact for another two years.

Not so in Cincinnati. In the 1960s, the city asked its director of development, Peter Kory, to build sky bridges that would join commercial towers to hotels to a convention center downtown. Tarbell, the councilman, said the city modeled its skywalks after those in Minneapolis. The skywalks loom over Fountain Square, Cincinnati's central civic plaza, cutting off views and strangling retailers and restaurants on the ground floor. One office building on Vine Street with a skywalk link does not even have a lobby on the street level.

"The skywalk - it's ugly, and the space underneath it is dark and yucky," said Charlie Luken, the mayor of Cincinnati. "The whole area is dead too much of the day." The skywalks deteriorated over the years and were used mostly by office workers looking for cigarette breaks, city officials said.

The city paid to build the skywalks and now pays to maintain them. And so, the City Council in June approved a \$42 million plan to renovate Fountain Square, which would finance destruction of several pieces of the skywalk, keeping one leg that connects to the Cincinnati Convention Center. Demolition is set to start in August, but not everyone is happy. "It's a very controversial issue because people are used to the thing," Luken said. "When it rains or snows, they're used to using it."

But for what? The businesses that fill skywalks and tunnels mainly serve office workers on lunch breaks, small-bore shoppers and residents seeking relief from the heat, cold or rain. There are copy centers, office-suppliers, diners and coffee shops and a smattering of salons and gift stores, but few high-end restaurants or retailers.

"If you come here, people would think we have no retail at all," said Cheryl Myers, a senior vice president of Charlotte Center City Planners in North Carolina. In the 1970s, the city began building its Overstreet Mall, a series of retail shops on the second floor of office buildings, connected by skywalks. Today, the skywalks connect 30 downtown blocks, Myers said. "Everyone knows it's a mistake," she said.

Des Moines began building its three miles of skywalks in 1982, arguing that the \$10 million program would save the city. Twenty-three years later, city officials blame the skywalks for the ghostly sidewalks and ground-floor vacancy rates of 60 percent. There are no plans to rip down its skywalks, but the City Council has passed resolutions limiting them to a central Skywalk District downtown.

Inside the Dallas Underground, a two-mile tunnel system that supports 90 businesses, the corridors are sometimes bustling, but sometimes deserted. Despite the mayor's desire to plug the tunnels and lure businesses away, owners say they are happy to be down below, ready to serve thousands of people who work above.

Greater Greater Washington

The Washington, DC area is great. But it could be **greater**.

PEDESTRIANS

Skybridges don't make the connection

by [David Alpert](#) • February 28, 2008 10:51 am

It sounds simple and appealing. Your city has a major road with a lot of traffic, but city planners and citizens want to make it more pedestrian-friendly, encouraging more walkable stores in place of purely big box strip development. How about pedestrian overpasses? With a walkway, people can cross in complete safety and not interfere with the existing traffic. You can even build new stores with entrances on the second level, so that people can walk directly from stores on one side of the street to the other. What could be wrong with that?

A lot, actually. This was a topic of discussion and disagreement at Wednesday's [Rockville Pike community meeting](#). One member of our table, a former urban planner, felt very strongly that new development should not impede the existing traffic, and heavily used at-grade crosswalks would indeed slow down traffic. The solution, he argued, was a system of pedestrian overpasses.

But skybridges connecting retail above the street simply don't work, and many cities are actually removing the ones they built in the 1970s. Elevated walkways as an urban design (or even suburban design) element are one of those 1960s ideas that, like ubiquitous freeways criss-crossing the city center and single-use zoning, we now realize to be [detrimental to a well-functioning city](#). In fact, elevated sidewalks were one of the centerpieces of the "[To New Horizons](#)" film by General Motors at the 1939 World's Fair that inspired a generation of Americans toward a shiny future that ended up destroying their cities. (Fast forward to about 20 minutes in to hear about the skybridges.)



Vision of the future from GM's "To New Horizons" exhibit at the 1939 World's Fair.

Freeways, skybridges follow a similar principle: we should separate uses. "[Put the people with the people. Put the business with the business. Put the industry with the industry.](#)" Separate the cars from the people so the cars can go fast and the people stay safe. But as we now know thanks to Jane Jacobs and others, separation is dangerous. Separation means there are fewer "eyes on the street" in any one place. Pedestrian overpasses in Minneapolis [make the sidewalks more dangerous](#). Overpasses themselves can be dangerous, keeping people enclosed in a small space that may be empty much of the day and an appealing spot for crime.

Skybridges also foster less public investment in the street. After all, if people are supposed to cross upstairs, we don't need those crosswalks any more. Maybe we can get rid of this light. How about an extra turn lane in front of this new complex? Wouldn't traffic move better with a flyover ramp in addition to the walkway? And before you know it, the street that was formerly a suburban arterial has practically turned into a freeway—the exact opposite of the boulevard citizens want. Once you take away pedestrians, there's no reason to engineer what remains for pedestrians, and the cycle of auto dependency gets deeper.

That's particularly bad because people often don't use skybridges even when they are there. Pedestrians generally don't want to climb two flights of stairs on each end just to cross a street; they will take the shortest path. When leaving the meeting, I crossed the Pike at [Bouic Avenue](#), where there is no crosswalk, instead of trekking a whole (long) block north, out of my way, to Halpine Road which is farther from the Metro. After all, I only had to cross three lanes, then wait at the island, and cross three more.

A 1960s city planner would say that means we need a fence to keep pedestrians off the street. A 21st century city planner would say that means we need a crosswalk, a traffic light, and a better pedestrian refuge in the median. People will walk across the street whether there are elevated walkways or not. The best thing we can do is design the street for it, balancing the pedestrians with the traffic so neither is unduly inconvenienced.

Right now, Salt Lake City is [grappling with a proposed skybridge across Main Street](#). Denver's are [almost completely deserted](#) and many are neglected. Des Moines' Skywalk has caused [60 percent ground-floor retail vacancy rates](#). As Rockville tries to make its Pike into a low-density urban environment, similar to the density of some of the mid-size Midwestern and Mountain West cities, it should turn away from GM's 1939 vision and toward true new horizons without skybridges.

[11 comments](#) — [Share](#) — tags: Maryland, pedestrians, Rockville, skybridges, traffic

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Bridges to Nowhere

Emblems of a bulldozing era, downtown's skybridges become a sore point.

By Stuart Steers Thursday, Mar 14 1996

Comments (0) [A A A]

A half-dozen concrete bridges span the streets of downtown Denver, eerily lacking the one thing they were designed for: pedestrians. The bridges are the legacy of a 1960s urban renewal project that came up with the bizarre goal of getting pedestrians off the streets, but almost no one uses them, and some have even started to crumble. Several of the bridges are actually fenced off and impossible to cross. Many downtown residents want to see the bridges come down, but getting rid of them promises to be harder than putting them up ever was.

The bridges connect buildings that were part of the Skyline Urban Renewal Project. That undertaking was hatched in the mid-1960s by Denver's civic leaders, who leveled a huge chunk of historic Denver to make way for the faceless high-rises that line 17th and 18th streets. Linking all these projects with pedestrian bridges became an integral part of downtown's brave new world.

"It was a nutty idea," says Z.L. Pearson, president of the Larimer Place Condominium Owners Association. "They're as useless as tits on a boar."

Pearson and his fellow Larimer Place residents have to look at one of the bridges that joins their high-rise with Writer Square across Larimer Street. And look is all they can do: That bridge is gated and inaccessible.

"It's basically unused and an eyesore," says Pearson. "It impairs the view down Larimer Street. I'm sure most of the residents want it taken down."

Many of the major Skyline projects have bridges: Two stretch across Larimer and 19th streets from Sakura Square; another links the 17th Street Plaza office tower to the Bank One building at 18th and Lawrence; a bridge spans 17th to join the US West tower to Independence Plaza; and a crumbling bridge at 17th and Larimer links the Barclay tower to the Windsor condominiums.

About half the bridges are blocked off to the public; the one linking the Barclay and the Windsor is in the worst shape. Steve Guillaume, manager and building engineer for the Windsor condominiums, says a lack of expansion joints has caused the bridge to begin crumbling.

"That's why there's fencing underneath it, to hold the concrete that's fallen off," he says. The residents of both buildings want the bridge removed, he adds, but haven't been able to come up with \$25,000 to take it down. They're now hoping to find someone--perhaps a golf course owner--

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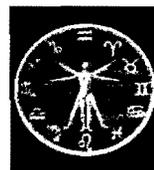
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who might need a bridge and would be willing to help pay for its removal.

"We even have somebody here who owns a crane company that would donate the crane," Guillaume adds.

A few years ago the residents approached the City of Denver for help in removing the bridge, but the city wasn't interested. "I think the city should get involved," Guillaume says. "It would make downtown better to get rid of them. They required us to put them up, so I don't see why they couldn't help us get rid of them."

The sky bridges are a highly visible reminder of an era that reshaped downtown Denver. The Skyline project razed scores of historic buildings to make way for Denver's 1970s high-rise boom, but bitter feelings over the project still haunt the city.

When the Skyline project was conceived in the mid-1960s, Larimer Street had a national reputation as one of the most colorful skid rows in the United States. While this delighted Jack Kerouac, who wrote about lower downtown in his classic novel *On the Road*, it horrified Denver's elite, who were embarrassed to have a row of notorious bars (including one nicknamed "Bucket of Blood") right on the doorstep of the 17th Street financial district.

The Denver Urban Renewal Authority inaugurated the Skyline project in 1968, eventually demolishing 27 square blocks of old Denver, an area roughly the size of today's lower downtown. Authorities leveled five blocks of Larimer, the oldest commercial street in Denver, sparing only the block that became Larimer Square.

Most of the buildings that took the place of the nineteenth-century brick and stone buildings have all the character of military bunkers. They have few retail storefronts, instead replacing those with bare walls and entrances to parking garages. Pedestrians avoid these projects, which accounts for the sterility of long stretches of 18th Street and several blocks of Larimer.

Pedestrians never found their way to the bridges, either. Originally the Skyline project envisioned a series of above-ground plazas and shopping centers linked by the bridges. The handful of plazas that were built under Skyline guidelines are mostly windswept and deserted, and few pedestrians are even aware they exist. Marvin Hatami, a Denver architect who helped plan the skywalks in the 1960s, says the concept of creating a second-level city for pedestrians was never followed through.

"It was a bastardization of an idea," he says. "The idea got watered down to just connecting the buildings with bridges."

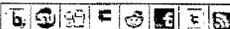
City policy now discourages construction of bridges over the street, says Denver planning director Jennifer Moulton. "The skybridges were an early-Seventies idea that time has shown was not a particularly good one," she adds. Some cold-weather cities like Minneapolis have linked major downtown buildings with enclosed skywalks, but Moulton says that's not a good idea for Denver. "The concept was to separate cars from pedestrians. Minneapolis did this, but we don't have that type of weather."

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A THOUGHTFUL APPROACH TO NEWS

Urban designers critique Minneapolis and offer this idea: Tear down all those horrible skyways



Photo by Steve DateTwo prominent urban designers argue that Minneapolis skyways take the life out of the city by moving people off the streets.

By Steve Berg

Thursday, Nov. 15, 2007

When two of the world's top urban designers drop in for a visit and come away with the impression that your city — in this case Minneapolis — is a relic of the 1970s, ill-equipped to thrive and compete in a new century, and that its only hope is to tear down its skyways, well, that gets your attention.

"I feel sorry for Minneapolis," said Jan Gehl, the celebrated Danish architect whose work around the world has linked the rising importance of good public spaces to a city's success.

Thirty years ago, Minneapolis was thought to be a leader among winter cities. But taking people off the streets and putting them upstairs, "under glass," hasn't worked in Minneapolis or anywhere else, Gehl said, to the point that Minneapolis is no longer "up to the beat of the world-class cities of the 21st century."

Gil Penalosa, a noted public parks developer in both Latin America and Canada, said that the skyways lend a defensive, pessimistic air to the downtown core when, in reality, they are needed for only a few weeks of the year. "They suck the public life out of the city," he said.

Given the fat chance that Minneapolis will remove its eight miles of skyways, both men agreed that finding a solution poses one of the toughest design challenges faced by any city in the world: creating vitality at street level when most foot traffic has been shifted to the second story.

The biggest problem, both said, is that people in Minneapolis don't realize that great cities — even cold cities — are now defined by the vitality of their street life. "People here don't see a crisis," said Gehl. "They don't yet see themselves as behind the times."



Timely critique

Both men spoke last month at a "Vital Winter Cities" conference sponsored by the Urban Land Institute's Twin Cities chapter. Then, after two days of meetings and tours, they shared their impressions with MinnPost.com over lunch on the Nicollet Mall.

Their critique is timely. The city's political, business and design leaders are studying ways to better integrate working, living and shopping in the downtown district, all with less reliance on cars. All agree that skyways pose an almost unique challenge. "They are both the best and worst things that ever happened to Minneapolis," said Mayor R.T. Rybak. They saved downtown from "folding up" in the 1970s, he said, but they don't offer what people expect in cities today.

The problem, Gehl explained, is that skyways violate the first law of successful city-building: keeping people together in a critical mass. Minneapolis' skyways — as with similar pedestrian bridge or tunnel systems in Calgary, Toronto and elsewhere — disperse people over different levels at different times. On weekdays, skyways bustle and shops flourish for a few hours a day. But at night and on weekends, people are thrown out onto barren and neglected public sidewalks. A social hierarchy develops: the wealthier classes in private spaces on weekdays; poorer people out in public spaces at all hours. That's not a winning formula, Gehl said. It's bad for retail business, bad for culture, bad for civic life.

The impression given, said Penalosa, is of a fearful city crouching inward against a hostile climate and a hostile world. That's not the kind of optimistic city that most people — especially young people — are looking for, he said. Repeating the phrases of economist Richard Florida, Penalosa said that if a city doesn't present itself as vital at street level, then talented people won't choose to live there, especially when they can live in Chicago or Seattle or anywhere they like. And if talent isn't attracted or drifts away, then the quality of a city suffers.

What has placed skyway-bound Minneapolis out of step, said Gehl, is a broad cultural shift around the world in the way people use urban spaces. No longer do people just pass through city centers while traveling between work and home. City centers have become places to pause and enjoy life away from work and away from home, he said.

The utilitarian nature of cities is being altered by "Mediterranean influences," made possible by rising affluence and the changing nature of work. People are using cities to hang around and enjoy one another. The rising number of nontraditional workers — consultants and independent contractors — has abetted this transformation, he said. Even cold cities (Copenhagen's average temperature is only two degrees warmer than

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Minneapolis') have developed an impressive sidewalk culture for 10 months of the year — thanks, in part, to gas heaters. The trend is, perhaps, best summarized by the title of one of Gehl's books: "Life Between Buildings."

'We do have parks'

Local reaction to the Gehl-Penalosa critique varied. Judith Martin, professor of geography and urban studies at the University of Minnesota, said that viewing Minneapolis through a European lens misses the point. U.S. city life consists of far more than sitting around drinking cappuccino, she said. Besides, the tax structure here doesn't allow the rebuilding of cities on the European model. As long as there are other needs (education, police, etc.), nice streetscapes won't be a priority. "Maybe we don't have an interesting downtown," she said, "but that's not our defining feature; we do have parks."

Tom Fisher, dean of the university's School of Design, said he thinks that downtown is important and that skyways pose an "extreme challenge" for Minneapolis, but one that should be turned into an opportunity. He's involved in the [Walking Minneapolis](#) initiative, a public-private effort to revive street-level activity. One suggestion is to spread the city's best asset — parks — onto some downtown sidewalks in order to connect condos to jobs and shopping, and to create a pleasant, more walkable atmosphere at street level.

For Sam Grabarski, president of the Downtown Council, the skyway question is complex: They are very bad for retail, very good for office towers, he said. He favors a moratorium on new skyways, better signs to de-mystify the system and far more exterior connections between street and skyway levels. The council is studying how to refocus retail in view of changing tastes in shopping and the city's two-level problem.

Midge McCauley, a Philadelphia retail consultant who has studied Minneapolis and wishes its skyways could be demolished, said: "Skyways take vitality off the streets, and retail gets its energy from the streets. So it makes no sense to take people off the streets for 10 months of the year — including the best shopping months." Minneapolis would have far better retail if it weren't for skyways, she said.

Some suggestions

Gehl said he knows of no city in the world (outside of ultra-crowded Japan) that succeeds on two levels. Nonetheless, Minneapolis has little choice but to try, he said.

"There's a lot of potential at ground level," Gehl said. "The key is to celebrate the wonderful possibility of good-weather days rather than focusing on the bad days and feeling sorry for yourself, which is the impression one gets."

He offered four suggestions: an urban square to provide an outdoor focal point that the city now lacks; more use of water features downtown to reflect a city-of-lakes theme; the blocking of skyways every two or three blocks to lure people — and retail — to the street, and working to attract the region's tens of thousands of college students to the city's core.

There's a paradox to downtown's problem. It has undergone a housing boom and a cultural revival, and the office market is holding its own. But retail and street-level vitality isn't what it should be. Transforming barren streets is a daunting task for a financially strapped city. Penalosa claims, however, that the costs are comparatively small. "It's all a matter of priority," he said. "There's always enough money to accommodate cars, but I don't know of any city, when there's a pothole in the street,

[someone suggests that they] need to go to a private foundation to get it fixed."

Minneapolis is still reaping huge benefits from its decision in the 1880s to preserve its lake shores as public parks, Penalosa said. A similar payoff would come if the city revitalized its outdoor spaces downtown. It's happening around the world, he said, in New York, in Portland, Ore., in Vancouver, B.C., and in Aarhus, Denmark, Melbourne, Australia and Lyon, France, to name a few cities. Even with the disadvantage of skyways, he said, it's worth a try here.

Steve Berg, a former Washington Bureau reporter, national correspondent and editorial writer for the Star Tribune, reports on urban design, transportation and national politics. He can be reached at sberg [at] minnpost [dot] com.

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