

Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board
Testimony before County Council
April 15, 2009

Hello, my name is Darian Unger, and I am the Chair of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board. Our Board appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed FY10 operating budget. We recognize the difficulty of this budget year, and so we are presenting a focused list of requests and community priorities.

General operating budget items:

Police/public safety: Silver Spring is still a developing area, and our community is deeply concerned about increased crime rates, which affect our safety and quality of life. Silver Spring is in particular need of police funding because of our population density, lower income rate, and higher crime levels. Increasing crime rates and the elimination of substations in our area could curtail our development at a critical time of population and commercial growth.

Preserve youth programs: We want to focus on crime prevention as well as enforcement. Youth programs and community centers need adequate funding and pay social dividends in development and reduced crime.

Maintain the Urban District budget: The Silver Spring Urban District facilitates safety, cleanup, and many other aspects of Silver Spring that make the commercial area attractive to families, a social hub, and a commercial success.

Fund the pedestrian safety initiative with special attention to high-incidence areas:

Our area has a disproportionate number of high-incident and dangerous pedestrian areas, and several speed cameras that reduce speeding and generate revenue. We urge that a large share of the speed-camera revenue be used for pedestrian safety improvements locally to prevent needless deaths.

Policy issues that can affect the budget:

Do not impose fees on fire/rescue services. As a fundamental public good, emergency medical services should continue to be provided free of charge and based on tax revenue. Emergency services are part of our most basic safety net and should remain a government service during these most vulnerable times. Council has thankfully not agreed to such a fee, and it should not be included in the budget. The ambulance fee proposal is unpopular in our community because of its hidden costs, including its chilling effect on 911 calls, its harm to public safety, and the serious confusion and fear around the issue that not even a massive public education campaign could alleviate.

Nonprofit programming of the Town Center. Our community is eager to begin using Silver Spring Civic Building and Veterans Plaza once construction is complete. Please do not delay any hiring necessary for immediate operation. Our Board also supports the Silver Spring Town Center, the nonprofit organization that the community created to assist in programming the civic building and plaza. We believe this type of non-profit can enhance the county's investment and insure that this space is used as effectively as possible to involve and engage the community to create a vibrant public use space.

Eliminate reimbursements for library parking. Preserving library hours and programs are more important than free parking. Parking reimbursement favors drivers over pedestrians and cars over public transit, and are therefore inherently unfair. They also encourage driving over other forms of transportation, and are a less necessary expense than other library operations.

On behalf of the Board, I'd like to express our appreciation for your consideration of community requests. Thank you very much.

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