



SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board
Testimony before County Council
June 30, 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 gutting of the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan. We echo the community in **strongly opposing** amending the Silver Spring renewal plan to build a skybridge walkway. Our opinion is based on community sentiment. After many community meetings with residents, local businesses, library users, county staff and planners, a clear consensus has emerged.

Amending the urban renewal plan to allow a pedestrian bridge is a bad idea for several reasons:

1) Sustainability: the proposed bridge is the polar opposite of smart growth and sustainable development.

Champions of smart growth and thoughtful development oppose this pedestrian bridge. The existing prohibition against skywalks exists for an excellent reason. This is not the 1960's, and we are not in a cartoon episode of the Jetsons. Most pedestrian walkways are proven urban failures. They channel people like hamsters in tubes, inhibit street-level vitality, and encourage driving instead of walking or public transit. They are anathema to the kind of walkable, transit-and-pedestrian oriented communities that we are working to build near a metro station.

Voting to amend the urban renewal plan will undo a lot of good work. We are working towards a vibrant, open downtown, and have no wish to jam the brakes, reverse course and mimic Crystal City.

Further, this library will be over a Purple Line station and a block away from the Silver Spring Metro and Transit Center. The county chose years ago to move the library to this urban location and transit hub. One of the reasons the county decided to move it to an urban area in downtown Silver Spring was to make the library more accessible and to bring street vitality to the area. Whether you think that was a good idea or not, it would be foolish to now ignore the surroundings and build a bridge to, of all places, the upper story of a parking lot. The library will also link downtown Silver Spring to Fenton Village. A pedestrian bridge weakens that link, discourages walking, and encourages driving in a congested area. It is the exact opposite of smart development.

2) Safety and accessibility: the bridge would be unnecessary, and would do more harm than good

The Silver Spring library must be safely accessible to everyone. We will have a library conforming to ADA standards and already have a parking garage conforming to ADA standards. If the street-level crossing is made safe and easy, there will be no need for a bridge to circumvent it. Smooth, safe crosswalks with a safely-engineered intersection are the proper urban solution. This library can and should be safe and accessible without a bridge.

Although a pedestrian bridge would be helpful for the library and its driving patrons, it would be harmful to Silver Spring in general, the surrounding community, and pedestrians. By channeling people away from the

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street, the pedestrian bridge would in fact make the street less safe by depriving it of pedestrians and literally stealing resources from the creation of a safe, ground-level crossing. The bridge proposal essentially says "if it's hard to cross the street right now, let's build a bridge over it rather than actually solve the problem." Those who walk to the library, along with pedestrians and patrons from downtown Silver Spring, will have a more dangerous intersection to cross because of a bridge catering to drivers.

We have heard from many residents and parents with small children that crossing ordinary roads (with safely designed intersections) is a normal and healthy part of life. They want a safe street level crossing; not a bridge.

3) The bridge uses resources that – especially during these tight times – could really be better spent elsewhere.

Since Silver Spring would be safer and more accessible without a bridge, we think the funding would be better spent on other aspects of the Library Department's budget. We have argued for a larger library, better signage, and a safer, flatter, all-stop crosswalk for easier accessibility. There is no shortage of other worthy goals on which to spend these funds.

In conclusion, the proposed pedestrian bridge is a narrow solution to a particular and valid concern. However, but if you take the time to look more broadly for solutions to the joint problems of accessibility, safety, and thoughtful development, there are several solutions that honor the community desire to create a walkable downtown in which the library plays a central part.

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