



## SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

March 12, 2009

Mr. Isiah Leggett  
County Executive  
Executive Office Building  
101 Monroe Street 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Mr. Phil Andrews  
Council President  
Stella B. Werner Council Office Building  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Messrs. Leggett and Andrews:

The construction of a new library is one of the most important projects in downtown Silver Spring and we appreciate your continued support for this critical endeavor. The new library is not only an essential replacement for the existing Silver Spring Library, which is undersized and unable to meet the communities needs, but will also serve as a vital lynchpin from the core development and provide a gateway to Fenton Village. As such, we hope that you will reconsider your proposal to build an elevated pedestrian walkway between the Wayne Avenue Parking Garage and the new library.

Many pedestrian skywalks were built in the 1960's and 1970's, principally to better connect structures and people. Unfortunately, skywalks in urban environments have generally not accomplished their goals, and many communities have spent millions of dollars to dismantle them in order to restore much needed vibrancy to city streets and "amend" the architectural miscues of that era. If downtown Silver Spring, and the Fenton Village neighborhood in particular, is going to thrive, we need to do our best to create a lively and urban environment that will be safe for current residents of the downtown Silver Spring area and inviting to visitors. Building a pedestrian skywalk over Wayne Avenue will likely do exactly the opposite – keeping people off the streets and limiting pedestrian traffic in and around Fenton Village.

We appreciate concerns about access to the new library for elderly and disabled patrons and agree that ensuring their access to the library must be a high priority. However, we hope that every effort could be made to accommodate these needs without a skywalk. We suggest exploring other options, like the use of the public parking lot on Bonifant Street or the construction of a limited number of parking spaces for disabled patrons on the library site. or in an underground parking garage as part of the overall development of the site. We believe that a skywalk should be an option of last resort, not the first.

The need for a skywalk has largely been expressed because of the perceived safety concerns of any street-level pedestrian crossing on Wayne Avenue. Building a skywalk is not an acceptable way to address such apprehension. The decision to build a bridge to allay safety concerns for

**Regional Services/ Redevelopment Program**

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some residents is simply an admittance of failure for all pedestrians. What remedy will there be for those who do not drive to the library or who choose to combine their library trip with shopping or eating in downtown Silver Spring or Fenton Village? If the improvement of Wayne Avenue is to be made in advance of opening of the library – and improvements are definitely needed – then the results should be good enough for all residents to safely cross the street. If the public's safety cannot be insured by improving street access, then we question the decision to relocate the library to this location. However, assuming that the library is to be constructed at the currently designated location, assuring safe pedestrian access must be a top priority regardless of a skywalk.

The Silver Spring library project was designed to provide state of the art informational services to the residents of Silver Spring as well as further anchor the economic development within the central business district. As previously stated, we fully support these goals and know that the new library is much needed. But we believe that building a pedestrian bridge runs counter to the goals of economic development for the area, which is to create the sort of safe and vibrant urban environment that we all strive for, and neglects the primary problem of pedestrian safety and access.

We urge you to revisit your plans for a bridge and focus on creating a safe street-level crossing and look at alternative options for ensuring safe library access to elderly and disabled library patrons.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Darian Unger', written over a horizontal line.

Darian Unger  
Chair

cc:

Councilmember Valerie Ervin, Montgomery County Council