

WHERE ARE WE NOW? September 2009

Ten years ago, when the Silver Spring revitalization was occurring during the Administration of County Executive Douglas Duncan, a new library for Silver Spring appeared in County long-range planning documents. Many current members of the Silver Spring Library Advisory Committee and Friends of the Library came together at that time to form a Planning Committee and survey the community to find out what kind of a library was needed.

Public hearings and surveys done in 2000 found that 97% of library patrons wanted a new library. A site selection committee was formed, and in 2001 the group recommended the new library be constructed on the corner of Wayne Avenue and Fenton Street. A program of requirements was drafted by the Library Department detailing the kind of library needed in Silver Spring. This document was revised in 2003, 2005, and again in 2009. The 2009 revised Program of Requirements is currently being circulated for signature in designated Montgomery County Departments and will be used to guide the architects in planning the new facility.

Final land acquisition at the site was completed in 2008, and demolition of existing structures is to be completed in 2009. Funding for the design phase of the project began in 1999 and was supplemented in 2000, 2004, 2006, and 2008.

Fourteen public meetings were held in 2008 and 2009 to discuss changes to the Program of Requirements, site design and development options, and exterior design for the multi-use building project. These meetings resulted in an increase in the size and scope of the new library to 65,000 gross square feet and a recommendation to orient the library on the Wayne Avenue and Fenton Street corner of the property, utilizing the Wayne Avenue Garage for library parking. The Program of Requirements, site development, and exterior design meetings were widely publicized, with various meeting sites chosen to give residents a chance to participate.

As a part of the recommendation made to the County Executive on the location of the library on the site, the Public Libraries asked that a pedestrian bridge be included in the plans. The pedestrian access bridge was recommended to facilitate access for customers who drove to the library and who needed a more direct route, including individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and parents and caregivers of young children. That type of bridge across Wayne Avenue is currently prohibited under the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan.

On March 12, 2009, the HHS Committee of the County Council recommended that the County Executive initiate the process of amending the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan to permit the proposed pedestrian bridge. On March 19, the County Executive made the official request that the Urban Renewal Plan be amended. The Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Board considered the amendment at its May 14, 2009 meeting, and voted 2 in favor, 2 opposed, effectively sending a “no

recommendation” response to the County Council. The Council held a public hearing on the amendment to the Urban Renewal plan on June 30. Eight representatives testified, five of whom were in favor of the amendment and three opposed. The Health and Human Services (HHS) and Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committees of Council met on July 21, 2009, to vote on the proposed amendment to the urban renewal plan. Committee members voted to NOT approve the amendment. The full Council met to vote on the amendment on July 28 and also voted 7-1 against approving the amendment.

The County Executive reacted on July 30, 2009, with a public statement indicating that he was

“...very disappointed that this week the Council defeated an amendment to the Silver Spring Urban Renewal Plan that would have allowed a pedestrian bridge to be built connecting the Wayne Avenue garage to the new Silver Spring Library. I will continue to work with the Silver Spring community, library and pedestrian safety advocates, seniors, and the disabilities community to reverse this unfortunate decision. I thank Councilmember George Leventhal for his unwavering support of the pedestrian bridge. He has supported our view of the bridge from the beginning. The Silver Spring community wants and deserves a new library, fully accessible to all. This is no time to cut corners on safety and access.”

The County Executive has asked that the Department of General Services staff work with the project architects to provide a design for the building that could accommodate a pedestrian bridge in the future.

Today, the architects (The Lukmire Partnership) as well as County planners are working to finalize exterior design features of the new building and to start planning the interior layout of the three library floors. Groundbreaking is scheduled to begin in Summer of 2010.