**Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District Advisory Committee**

**Letter of Support for Redesignating the Silver Spring Arts and Entertainment District**

I write on behalf of the Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District Advisory Committee to express our strong support for the re-designation of the Silver Spring Arts and Entertainment District.

The Silver Spring Arts and Entertainment District was created to assist with the economic redevelopment of downtown Silver Spring. Silver Spring’s renaissance since the area’s designation as an Arts and Entertainment District is a testament to the success of that strategy. Since the designation, the district has attracted a number of prominent arts organizations that make downtown their base of operations. These organizations include:

* Discovery Communications,
* American Film Institute,
* Round House Theatre,
* Maryland Youth Ballet,
* Pyramid Atlantic Art Center and.
* the new Fillmore Silver Spring music hall.

We have also seen other smaller organizations drawn to the district and established organizations grow. Smaller organizations include:

* Lumina Theater, Contradiction Dance and the Forum Theater, all of which now perform regularly at the Round House Theatre‘s Black Box Space,
* Docs in Progress which nurtures emerging documentary filmmakers,
* Gandhi Brigade which provides youth with video and graphic design training,
* Urban Nation which provides youth performing arts instruction,
* Class Acts Arts which brings performers & artists to schools and the correctional system,
* Bonifant Theatre which produces the work of African American writers and performers, and
* Fenton Street Market which operates a weekend artist market out on Veteran’s Plaza.

Montgomery College, which has long called Silver Spring home, recently has built a new cultural center and performance space that includes a state of the art concert hall, an experimental theatre space, two galleries and many rooms for rehearsal space.

All of the groups mentioned above have helped establish Silver Spring’s growing reputation as a destination for people who value and seek out high quality art and entertainment. Visitors to performances, exhibitions, classes and other arts activities contribute to the economic growth of Silver Spring. According to the Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County, visitors spent more than $52 million in the county in 2009 on admissions, transportation, food, lodging and souvenirs, all of which boost our local economy.

Furthermore, major events such as the Silver Spring Jazz Festival, AFI’s & Discovery’s SilverDocs Festival, Silver Spring Blues Festival, Silver Spring Swings concert series, the County’s Thanksgiving Parade, and the countless number of festivals produced by Downtown Silver Spring/Peterson’s Management Group on Ellsworth Drive bring thousands of people to the area, which helps support our restaurants and other businesses. As the retail industry struggles in this sluggish economy, the shops on Ellsworth Drive are all full and there is a waiting list for space. That is no small feat in a very difficult economic climate.

At the same time, the district’s successes with arts and entertainment have led smaller businesses to realize they can create their own cultural events to assist them with attracting additional customers. Two examples are Vicino’s Restaurant’s Monday night jazz performances and Kefa Café’s dedication of significant space for exhibits by local artists. And, thanks to the efforts of the Silver Spring Town Center Inc., there is programming in the Veterans Plaza several nights a week that showcases local talent, draws more people into the district, creates a sense of community and thereby enhances the quality of life for our residents.

In the last 10 years, we have seen that there are hundreds of creative people living in and around downtown Silver Spring who welcome the State’s and County’s support for the arts. As a committee, we want to ensure that residents continue to enjoy a thriving arts community in Silver Spring, and we recognize the importance of the district’s tax incentives for artists and businesses. Those incentives make a difference and have helped Silver Spring become a smart business decision for many of the arts and entertainment groups that call the area home.

While the local businesses can testify about where their customers are coming from, an anecdote about one of our efforts will help to illustrate the ongoing growth of the district. We recently created a Facebook page where anyone who “likes” the page can learn about events in downtown Silver Spring. We have seen the growth in the page’s audience and the pages of our fans tell us where they live. Happily, we are seeing more and more fans that live in the District of Columbia, northern Virginia, Howard County and other communities outside the immediate area. This is an indication of the growing reputation of Silver Spring as a regional destination. That is exactly what was envisioned by the original legislation and designation.

This committee strongly believes that there is more to be done. Currently unused or underutilized spaces in the downtown and south Silver Spring demonstrate the need to continue to support Silver Spring’s ongoing revitalization process. Re-designation will be a critical part of continuing efforts to grow Silver Spring. We urge you to re-designate the district to help the community fully realize its vision for Silver Spring as a regional hub for arts and entertainment.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael E. Diegel

Chair

Silver Spring Art & Entertainment District Advisory Committee