OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

April 20, 2012

Kathy Stevens, Chair
Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board
One Veterans Place
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Dear Ms. Stevens:

Thank you for you March 20, 2012 letter offering specific suggestions to facilitate safe street-level access to the new Silver Spring Library and enhance pedestrian mobility in the surrounding area. I strongly support these objectives and have asked the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Department of General Services (DGS) to consider your suggestions and determine which ones can be implemented.

As you are aware, during the planning and design process DGS commissioned a Pedestrian Impact Statement (PIS) to identify the anticipated changes in traffic operations associated with the construction of the new library and their potential impact on pedestrian mobility and safety. Based on this review of existing and proposed conditions, the PIS identified numerous potential improvements that relate specifically to the library site. Since publishing the report, DGS has been working with DOT to evaluate the feasibility and constructability of these suggestions and identify opportunities for implementation. In many instances, these potential improvements correspond to the suggestions in your letter. In other cases they do not. With respect to your specific suggestions, I would like to address both the areas where we agree and where we have identified differing courses of action:

- Crosswalks, width and visibility - One of the primary areas of focus of the PIS was crosswalks at the intersection of Fenton Street and Wayne Avenue with particular attention given to the crosswalk on the west leg of the intersection. The PIS identified this leg of the intersection as not only having the highest existing volume of pedestrians, but also as the primary pathway to the proposed library entrance. Therefore, DGS will install a very wide, angled high-visibility crosswalk with ladder bar striping across this leg. All of the other legs of the intersection will get high-visibility crosswalks that are wider than standard dimensions. The width and configuration of these crosswalks, accompanied with other elements (i.e., traffic signal, street lighting) is anticipated to address any concerns regarding crosswalk visibility.

- Crosswalks, raised - The possibility of raised crosswalks was considered; however, the classification of Wayne Avenue and Fenton Street as arterial roadways and the proposed alignment of the Purple Line through the intersection make this location inappropriate for raised crosswalks.

- Crosswalks, stamped and attractive – Stamped asphalt and other decorative treatments for crosswalks were also considered. DOT had piloted the use of decorative crosswalks, including locations in Silver Spring, and has concluded to not install them. There is no conclusive research that shows that decorative crosswalks provide enhanced safety benefits when compared to the high-visibility crosswalks. In fact, decorative crosswalks have less retro-reflective material, therefore making them less visible to motorists at night and during inclement weather. The proposed high-visibility crosswalk application, which consists of white ladder bar striping applied to the paved roadway, provides facilities that are highly visible and sustainable. This application promotes ease of implementation and maintenance, while serving the mobility and safety needs of crossing pedestrians.

- Signalization, turn arrows - DOT has evaluated your suggestions for traffic signal phasing and timing changes at the intersection of Fenton Street and Wayne Avenue. DOT has just completed a signal phasing study and has concluded that a left turn signal should be added for northbound Fenton Street, based on future traffic volumes. The addition of the turn arrow, albeit not an exclusive turn-only arrow, will reduce conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians on the west leg. This is the primary crossing which will be used between the garage and the library.

- Signalization, pedestrian crossing times – DOT is in the midst of a multi-year program to modify the pedestrian clearance intervals at all traffic signals in the county to reflect a slower assumed walking speed. The timing changes have not yet been completed in the Silver Spring CBD. We will ensure that the changes will be in place prior to the opening of the library.

- Signalization, lead pedestrian timings – Montgomery County is developing a policy for the use of Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPI) at signalized locations where there is a demonstrated high incidence of conflicts between turning vehicles and pedestrians. The policy will provide a consistent implementation approach for the application of LPI throughout the county, including intersections owned by the State and by the County. To that effect, we are working on a draft of the policy with specific criteria, and will be coordinating with the Maryland State Highway Administration (MDSHA) to finalize and achieve their concurrence.

- Signalization, dedicated pedestrian crossings – DOT is not considering implementation of all-way stop (i.e., Barnes Dance) pedestrian signal phasing. Barnes Dance phases generally increase overall pedestrian delays and reduce the amount of time for pedestrians to cross within the signal cycle. With the use of an exclusive pedestrian phase, pedestrians must wait through two or more vehicle phases. Although Barnes Dance operation does have the potential to reduce pedestrian-vehicle conflicts, many pedestrians simply choose to ignore the signal and cross if and when there is a gap in traffic, negating the potential safety benefits of an exclusive signal.

- Uncontrolled mid-block crossings and treatments - The PIS did identify the potential for uncontrolled mid-block crossings along Wayne Avenue from Georgia Avenue to Fenton Street. To address the Silver Spring Library project, a planted buffer is being incorporated along the majority of its frontage to help prevent uncontrolled mid-block crossings. Additionally, DGS will be installing a designated mid-block crosswalk with a pedestrian refuge area, warning signage, and high-visibility crosswalk markings to provide an additional crossing opportunity at the western exit of the parking garage to address existing and future demand.

- Vehicular traffic restrictions – The Silver Spring CBD was planned and developed with the intent to accommodate vehicular traffic, transit and pedestrians on its roadways. In particular, Fenton Street and Wayne Avenue are designated as arterial roadways, and were planned and designed to serve both through traffic and local circulation. Our goal is to make the area more pedestrian-friendly while balancing the competing transportation needs for how the area was planned and developed in keeping with the master plan.

- Signage and lighting - The library project will be installing enhanced pedestrian lighting along the library's frontage in keeping with current CBD standards. Overall lighting levels in the area were examined and determined to be appropriate. Also, DOT will be reviewing the existing signing and ensuring that it is properly located and maintained.

I am proud of the work that both DGS and DOT have done in collaboration with the community and advocates for pedestrian safety and mobility as part of bringing this new library to Silver Spring. I remain confident that as we continue to work together the result will be a project that is a model for other communities. It is important to stress that the proposed Purple Line project will necessitate further changes to the geometry and operations of the intersection of Fenton Street and Wayne Avenue, and DOT is working with the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) to assess the impacts and continue to safely accommodate pedestrians.

Thank you for taking the time to write to share you concerns and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

cc: Tom Street, ACAO
Parker Hamilton, Director/MPL
Art Holmes, Director/DOT
Parker Hamilton, Director/MPL

bcc: CECC 1453-12
CE Read
Mike Subin, OCE
Connie Latham, OCE/Special Assistant
Jeff Dunckel, Pedestrian Safety/DOT
Reemberto Rodriguez, Director/SSRSC