



SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

March 15, 2013

The Honorable
Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

Council President
Nancy Navarro
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave
Rockville, MD 20850

5th District Councilmember
Valerie Ervin
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave
Rockville, MD 20850

SUBJECT:

SSCAB's ADVICE RE OPEN/GREEN SPACE IN DOWNTOWN SILVER SPRING

To County Executive Leggett, Council President Navarro and Councilmember Valerie Ervin:

Thousands of new residents have moved into Silver Spring since the area's master plan was approved in 2000. These residents chose to live here for many reasons, including the close proximity to transit and our diverse array of shopping, dining and entertainment options.

Over the last few months the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board has held a series of meetings to examine the past, present and future of downtown Silver Spring. During our conversations with over 75 residents, one concern was expressed more than any other: the lack of adequate open green space in the central business district (CBD). While many public and semi-public spaces exist in the area, there remains a concern about these spaces, especially with the anticipated amount of new construction to occur over the next decade. This letter attempts to summarize residential concerns regarding open space while offering recommendations to remedy the problems.

Recommendations

- Consider repositioning existing County-owned property as public green space. This may include the reconsideration of some streets, particularly Ellsworth Drive (adjacent to Veterans Plaza); trading County-owned property for privately owned property that might be better suited for open space; and maximizing use of Jesup Blair Park.
- Increase incentives or create mandates for new development to contribute to the existing amenity fund and use these funds to improve existing and near-term green spaces within the Silver Spring CBD.

- A new master plan or zoning text amendment (ZTA) should re-examine the linkages that connect new amenities and development nodes, and the gateways into the CBD to ensure they reflect the new realities and changes that have occurred in the last decade.
- Consideration should be given to dedicated staff whose sole responsibility is ensuring that County, State and Federal agencies coordinate efforts within the CBD to ensure maximum efficient use of resources, more expedient results and the realization of the stated vision in a new master plan or ZTA.

Background

Montgomery County is currently using guidelines from Downtown Silver Spring's master plan – last approved in 2000 – to set the course for the area's redevelopment. The impetus for the 2000 plan was to encourage the creation of more pedestrian and mixed-use development within the CBD and to guard against ill-conceived plans for redevelopment in the area, such as the proposed "American Dream" mega mall that was allowed under the master plan approved in 1993.

Currently, much of the growth that has occurred is with residential properties building via the optional method of development. That method mandates that 20% of the property is available for open space within the CBD (although that may be diminished to 10% if the proposed changes in the zoning rewrite are approved). Regulations require that any new development provide such open space or donate money to an amenity fund, which the County will then use in a manner and location of its choosing. The problem with this approach is that the CBD is quickly becoming littered with unused mini-parks (also known as "pocket parks") and few developers are paying into the amenity fund.

A better way of securing the type of public spaces that the community could better utilize would be to waive the requirement for open space (maintaining lot coverage maximums) in favor of incentivizing contributions to the amenity fund, whereby money could be collected to create larger and more thoughtfully located green spaces that would truly be public.

The blueprint for more green space has already been provided in the Silver Spring Central Business District Green Space Guidelines of 2010, which identifies ideal locations and sizes of open green spaces throughout the CBD designed to ensure the best quality of life for all residents. Such spaces would not only benefit residents and visitors but also the landowners; studies have shown that good public spaces increase the value of adjacent properties.

One impediment to pulling together the public space plan is the multi-jurisdictional nature of the CBD, whereby various regulating agencies are not coordinating their mandates in a way that creates an integrated community within the area. This is especially problematic when one agency is tasked with moving vehicular traffic through the CBD while another is concerned with pedestrian safety and connectivity. We strongly support ongoing efforts to streamline this process.

One of the best opportunities to create new public spaces within the CBD is for the County to repurpose some of the properties it already owns or make strategic land swaps for

property in more desirable locations. Decisions are already underway about what to do with various parcels of County owned land, which includes the current Silver Spring library, the current 3rd District Police Station and the Department of Health and Human Services building.

As the economy picks up and new construction projects move through the planning process, the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board will continue our dialogue with the community, expressing the concerns of residents and helping provide constructive solutions to the County. We hope these recommendations provide the County with enough support to begin remedying this problem, which we encourage you to do before all the land has been redeveloped.

Sincerely,



Evan Glass
Chair, Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board

cc: County Council
Francoise Carrier, Chair, M-NCPPC
Mary Bradford, Director, Department of Parks