

**Amenity Fund Re-Direct to Jesup Blair House Full Restoration, PHED Committee, 4/7/22
SSDT & Adjacent Communities Plan, Testimony by George French**

I am astonished by the recent memorandum from Planning staff and Parks Dept. to the Mo Co Planning Board of moving \$845,848.70 from the Amenity development fund to transfer to Parks, but perplexed not to be used to restore Historic Jesup Blair House which has remained vacant for 14 years. Planning "Staff is recommending the Planning Board approve transfer of Amenity Fund contributions collected by the Planning Department for Silver Spring to the Parks Department for implementation of Park improvements in the Sector Plan Area." Recently \$400,000 to \$800,000 was bewilderingly removed from the JB House restoration budget. This needs to be restored and even increased to the JB House renovation budget before creating a new urban/local park.

The JB House meets requirements for the funding that states, "The majority of the fees collected were specific to the CBD zones and were to be used for park-related projects within the boundaries of the Silver Spring Central Business District." Funds are to be used for capital projects on park improvements.

I ask NOT to construct another park at this time, but rather fix up the JB House and lease it to a group to further activate the Park which some people consider "underutilized." There is an organization ready and able to lease and activate the Historic Mansion/House. They have had meetings with state and local government officials, the Parks Dept architects, interested arts organizations and concerned individuals who would be willing to lease and program the House.

I am opposed to the Parks Dept. proposal to spend \$8 million to construct a one-acre interim park at 1110 East West Hwy. A fraction of that amount could be used to restore/renovate the Jesup Blair House. Then Park's plan is to spend millions more in the future, to expand the interim park by a half acre more and make it permanent.** This is only 4 blocks from the Jesup Blair House and 3 blocks from JB Park, a Park perceived by many officials as underutilized! This begs the question of why have competing parks if you believe the established park is sparsely used. Please complete the Mansion first before potentially constructing the interim park. Restore the Mansion first, and then potentially revisit the proposed new park later.

To increase use of Jesup Blair Park by residents of South Silver Spring, Montgomery County needs to improve pedestrian access by setting up more Cross Walks and Enhanced Cross Walks on Blair Rd. and Georgia Ave, especially at Jesup Blair Drive. This connectivity was recommended as early as 2018, a facet of "Energized Public Parks." Mo Co also needs to help Jesup Blair Park fulfill its potential as a regional attraction by restoring the Mansion and leasing it for use (with its parkland) as a center for visual and performing arts and diverse cultures; opening it to the public, historically again; the Jesup Blair Community House! Mansion and Park are on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation, and National Register eligible, significant at National, State, County, and Local levels!

**Here is the cost of the proposed Urban/Local Park at 1110 East West Highway: \$7,500,000 to acquire the 1 acre piece of land (from the Parks land acquisition fund) for the property. Then \$500,000 to demolish and land fill the NTB building, a useful business and the former Coca Cola Bottling Plant, and set up an Interim park. Then spend around \$3,000,000 to \$4,000,000 (this is unspecified) for the half acre adjacent church property to expand the interim park to 1.5 acres. Other yearly costs associated with this endeavor: \$2,500 OBI (Operating Budget Impacts), initially for Interim park, expanding to \$5,000/yr for the completed park. Figures are from the Montgomery County announcement.

George French
510 Albany Ave., Takoma Park, MD 20912