

SILVER SPRING: BRIGADIER GENERAL CHARLES E. MCGEE LIBRARY
LAC AGENDA

Monday, November 17, 2025 Via Zoom @ 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM

- **Attendees:** *Dana Anderson, Sean Conlan (ex officio MCPL Board Liaison), Jennifer Diamond, Paulette Dickerson, Regina Germain, Hira Girglani, Martha Kyrillidou (Acting Secretary).*
- **MCPL Staff:** *Anina Ertel (Branch Manager)*
- **Guest:** *H. Garcia Melendez*

The Silver Spring Library Advisory Committee (LAC) met to review branch operations, facilities, collections, programming, outreach, statistics, and advocacy priorities, with a particular focus on the building's ongoing challenges, the scope of services being delivered, and preparations for upcoming community engagement activities.

Minutes approved: October minutes were reviewed and approved (Paulette moved first and Dana seconded).

Building, Facilities, and Accessibility

A significant facilities milestone was reported: the elevator on the Fenton Street side of the building has finally been repaired after a prolonged outage. This repair resolves a long-standing accessibility issue that had caused frustration and confusion for patrons, particularly those relying on elevators to reach the library floors. Members noted that while elevator reliability has improved overall in recent years, outages still occur and can have serious implications for accessibility and operations.

The Silver Spring library building relies heavily on custom ("bespoke") architectural components. As a result, repairs often require specialized parts that must be ordered, significantly extending repair timelines. This has affected multiple building systems, including doors and elevators. At present, the café door does not close properly and replacement parts are on order; members expressed concern about this issue becoming more problematic during colder weather.

The group discussed how the building technically remains ADA accessible as long as at least one public elevator per side is functioning. However, when multiple elevators are out of service, wait times increase, wayfinding becomes difficult, and staff must sometimes escort patrons through freight elevators or restricted areas. In rare cases, full or partial closure has been necessary. While recent improvements are welcome, the LAC emphasized that these challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive renovation.

The café space on the first floor remains closed, with no clear timeline for reopening. A new café tenant briefly operated during the summer but has not returned since late August. Because the café is a county-managed tenancy, branch staff have limited information or control over the situation. Members stressed that a functioning café is important not only as an amenity, but as part of the library's overall visibility, vibrancy, and public perception—especially given that the library occupies upper floors that are not always obvious to passersby. Subtle exterior signage and the vertical layout continue to make it difficult for some community members to realize that the library is located in the building.

Collections and Library Services

Updates on collections and services highlighted several positive changes. The library has transitioned to a new vendor, McNaughton, for the “Lucky Day” collection. Service levels remain consistent, with popular, no-holds copies available to patrons. The most noticeable change for users is cosmetic: Lucky Day materials now feature green labels instead of red.

Countywide changes to children’s collections were also discussed. Early readers have been reorganized to create a distinct “early chapter books” section that bridges the gap between basic readers and full juvenile fiction. This change responds directly to frequent patron requests and makes it easier for emerging readers to browse independently within an age-appropriate range.

In addition, the library now offers video games in PlayStation and Nintendo Switch formats. This is a systemwide initiative, meaning games are available across all MCPL branches, including Silver Spring.

Programs and Community Services

Programming continues to be a major strength of the Silver Spring branch, with offerings spanning children, teens, adults, and specialized community needs. Inclusive Storytimes are held monthly and feature diverse books, including LGBTQ+ titles. A Pokémon Card Trading Club has launched and is now offered monthly due to high demand. Teen programming includes regular study halls, designated Safe and Affirming teen spaces, and special initiatives such as Teen Mental Health Week, which provided calming activities, wellness information, and a yoga session.

Adult and intergenerational programs have also seen strong participation. A recent clothing swap was highly successful, with excess items donated to Progress Place. A new “mouse practice” class has been added to the computer skills curriculum to support adults who never had early exposure to computers. The branch has developed a partnership with Siena School to host daytime programming for autistic and neurodiverse students, further expanding inclusive services.

Looking ahead, the branch is preparing for several upcoming programs, including AARP Tax Aid (returning in January), an Earth Day Repair Café focused on sustainability, and a Name-Change Clinic scheduled for January 18. The Name-Change Clinic, which provides free legal assistance, had been paused due to county risk-management concerns and is now approved to resume. Additional seasonal and literary programs include Cocoa and a Craft on December 17 and One Maryland One Book teen events on December 10.

The library also continues its outreach to unhoused patrons, with plans for Christmas Eve gift bags assembled by teens earning service hours. Staff emphasized the importance of coordinating donations carefully to ensure equitable distribution.

Statistics and Impact

The LAC reviewed branch statistics and agreed on several refinements to how data is presented. Members expressed a strong preference for systemwide figures—rather than branch-specific counts—when reporting on library cardholders and electronic resource use, as these metrics are more meaningful at scale.

Discussion of program attendance emphasized that Silver Spring offers a very high volume of programs, comparable to other large branches. Average attendance per program is often smaller because many offerings are intentionally designed as one-on-one or small-group services, such as job help, computer assistance, and legal or benefits support. The LAC affirmed that this individualized service model is essential for meeting the complex needs of downtown Silver Spring and surrounding communities. Members also noted the importance of documenting these statistics in advance of any future branch closure for renovation, to demonstrate the full scope of services that would be disrupted or need relocation.

Renovation, Advocacy, and System Context

There remains strong and sustained interest in the planned Silver Spring Library renovation. While some interim improvements have been made—such as furniture replacement, window treatments, and elevator repairs—significant needs persist. The LAC chair has been in communication with Library Director Graham, who has expressed interest in engaging with the group once the budget picture is clearer and scenario planning can be more concrete.

Members were reminded that county budget forums are currently underway and were encouraged to attend or participate virtually to advocate for library funding and facility needs. Long-time members emphasized that sustained advocacy over several years has already resulted in incremental improvements and remains essential.

The Library Board liaison, Sean, introduced himself and shared system-level updates, including preparations for MCPL's 75th anniversary, upcoming author events, Winter Reading initiatives, and early planning for Summer Reading. Sean expressed interest in learning more about the Silver Spring renovation and discussed the possibility of a future walkthrough with LAC members to better understand the building's challenges.

Outreach, Parade Participation, and LAC Business

Preparations are underway for participation in the Silver Spring Thanksgiving Parade. MCPL's outreach van will be part of the event, offering on-the-spot library card sign-ups and materials. Volunteers will march wearing orange, and a new Silver Spring banner has been ordered to replace one that could not be located. The group discussed logistics, accessibility considerations, and potential future enhancements, such as post-parade engagement with families.

Recruitment remains a priority for the LAC. Current membership stands at seven, which is functional but leaves little flexibility for rotating leadership roles. Outreach efforts through flyers, digital signage, and the library newsletter have already yielded interest from at least one visitor who attended the meeting and is considering applying to join. The group reaffirmed its three standing goals for 2025–26: advocating for the renovation, strengthening communication and outreach, and recruiting new members. The committee also agreed to revisit meeting format and logistics at the December meeting, with a strong preference for maintaining virtual or hybrid access.