

SILVER SPRING REGION Monthly Report (for September 2020)

Reemberto Rodriguez, Director

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

COVID FOCUSED

Food insecurity: Clifton Road Baptist Church on Piney Branch Road is the first food hub south of the Beltway in Silver Spring. Thanks to the efforts of the Health and Human Services Department and the collaboration of the area's non-profit network, this Hub will be serving one of the highest need communities in the County, Long Branch. The Hub is in the middle of a high concentration of apartment communities and is also easily accessible to the broader Silver Spring and Takoma Park. Thanks to the Montgomery Food Council, we continue helping get the word out on the many other opportunities for providing food. Some of these have recently included the Salvadoran Consulate, Jesus House DC, and Adventist Social Services.

Access to Covid testing: In collaboration with HHS and the Latino Health Initiatives, we are helping get the word out and at times helping with logistics for Covid testing sites. Some of these have included the Salvadoran Consulate (in partnership with the Mary Center), and the City of Takoma Park. (The Silver Spring Civic Building is temporarily not being used for testing because it is a early voting and election day voting site.)

Housing protection: (A continuation of last month's reporting) In collaboration with DHCA and partners like the Renters Alliance, there's been broad distribution of information regarding eviction moratorium and available assistance for renters. While we've focused on zip codes of most need, the Town Hall virtual sessions have brought in renters from throughout the County. We have also identified the "naturally occurring affordable housing" (NOAHs) particularly in zip code 20910 where we have concentrated the message signs and delivered flyers. When resources became available for undocumented renters, we reached out to trusted non-profit partners to help deliver the message. We also continue working with Health and Human Services to avert the possibility of increased homelessness.

Homelessness: The established shelters in downtown, Long Branch, and Lyttonsville, are nearing capacity. HHS continues their street outreach activities to the homeless offering services and options for housing when available. Nonetheless, evidence of homelessness is more apparent, particularly in downtown areas where there are much less people walking around because of the absence of workers, thus increasing the visibility of the homeless.

Economic survival: We continue supporting the various street eateries in downtown Silver Spring. We recently added new tables with built in seating on Veterans Plaza to provide a comfortable place to eat outdoors with food from the many nearby restaurants. We also worked with various establishments to enhance their capacity to do business outdoors. Lastly, we are supporting Fenton Village, Inc., innovative month long (October) event, Taste the World in Fenton Village. FVI is raffling a scooter with entry to anyone that eat in or orders from any restaurant in Fenton Village.

Support for Shared Streets: In support of the Department of Transportation Shared Street Program, we are encouraging communities to take activities outdoors. A recent example is the pilot temporary closure of Newell St. at East West Highway which expand Acorn Park and has become a 'playstreet'.

NON COVID

Purple Line: The work to build the Purple Line has stopped because the primary private partner has left the project. Governor Hogan is committed to re-starting construction. However, this is at best months away. In the meantime, the construction sites throughout the route are patched temporarily, leaving many spots of concern. Recently in collaboration with Councilmember Glass and Hucker some of these specific spots of concern were identified in a walk with State officials, the County's Department of Transportation, and community members.

Development Activity: While a return to robust economic activity may be months away, given its long-range nature, real estate development continues at a brisk pace. Construction of the Children Hospital Headquarters (the old Discovery Communications building) is moving forward. The ArtSpace project (at the location of old police station on Sligo) is nearing completion and has begun its resident/artists selection process. Various older office buildings are being considered to be retrofitted for housing. And, while some restaurants are closing, others are opening. However – as mentioned last month - it is unfortunately expected that the pandemic will cause the inevitable closure of many storefronts throughout the County and the Silver Spring Regional Area will not be spared. We are beginning to explore possibilities to address this pending evidence of perceived blight.

Downtown and Countywide Plans: (As stated last month.) The Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission is undertaking a series of planning efforts that impact Silver Spring directly. Among these are: Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan, Thrive Montgomery (Countywide), and Corridor Forward Plan (1-270). We remain engaged in these efforts, routinely bringing them to the Advisory Groups and others in the community.

Census: Working under the leadership of the Office of Community Partnership and the volunteer efforts of the Silver Spring Census Complete Count Committee, we did a September Census Blitz. Silver Spring Complete Census Count Committee, which includes the members of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board, held three simultaneous events on a Saturday. Census information was distributed at a food 'grab-and-go' at Jesus House DC; posters were distributed throughout downtown Silver Spring in collaboration with the Renter's Alliance; and, a Census Caravan drove through various apartment complexes and small commercial areas. Now that the Census response time is extended to the end of October, we continue information dissemination, particularly at Farmers Markets, food distribution sites, and some faith communities.

Murals: There are various efforts to continue creating murals in Silver Spring. (a) Arts on the Block continues its efforts to redo The Turning Point at the intersection of Piney Branch and New Hampshire Ave. (b) A community led effort continues holding meetings to explore how to create a mural highlighting African American contributions in Silver Spring. (c) The Blairs will be installing a series of murals in their development. (d) The Arts & Humanities will be doing temporary murals to promote voting.

ADVISORY GROUPS

Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board:

The SSCAB has selected its new leadership. This new leadership – Board Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Parliamentarian – are all women. This is a first of any Citizens Advisory Board in the County's history – as best we can determine. At its September meeting the Board listened to a COVID-19 Update, and information regarding the elections. Later in September all three SSCAB Committees had a combined meeting Monday, September 28th to discuss the MNPCC's plan for downtown and adjoining neighborhoods. At the October full Board meeting, the Board will discuss the pending eviction crisis. Later in the month (Wednesday, October 28th) the Board will host the County Executive's Capital Improvement Program Budget Forum. Various SSCAB members are also active on some of the County task groups addressing the re-opening efforts.

Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee:

The SSUDAC held a briefing with the County's Department of Transportation regarding the Purple Line. Three of the stations are in downtown Silver Spring, or its immediate vicinity: Transit Station; Library Station; and 16th St. Station. The Committee also sent a letter of advice to the County Executive expressing concerns regarding the installation and operations of the new bicycle and scooters corrals in downtown. At the October meeting, the Committee will have a conversation with Councilmember Hucker regarding Progress Place.

Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District Working Group:

The group continues to meet weekly bringing together some of the key art groups in the District to share their experience during the pandemic and explore possibilities of working together in various projects. They are focusing on maximizing opportunities for re-opening, pending the County's framework with the guidelines provided by the State.

County's Retail & Restaurant Re-Opening Work Group:

In collaboration with the other work groups engaged in the re-opening efforts, the Director for the Silver Spring Region is leading the Retail & Restaurant Work Group. The group meets every other week, bringing together small businesses, the various chambers, and County officials to address the current issues regarding re-opening safely.

Other Advisory Groups and Efforts:

There are many other internal and external efforts in which the SSRSC and the SSUD are involved, providing input and establishing collaboration. Some of these include:

- Silver Spring Transportation Management District
- Long Branch Partners
- Chamber of Commerce Security Calls
- Food Council Coordinating Calls