

April 2021

**COMMUNITY CONCERNS****COVID RELATED**

**Covid Vaccination:** *The Silver Spring Civic building is now a vaccination site!* The Silver Spring Covid Community Committee is meeting every other week under the coordination and with the support of the Office of Community Partnership. The group of focusing on getting residents in our disenfranchised communities pre-registered to ensure everyone that wants to be vaccinated gets the shot(s). We are also beginning to focus on the how to provide trusted messages to community members that are hesitant to get vaccinated.

**Access to Covid testing:** The two principal sites in the Silver Spring Region that do Covid testing have plenty of capacity to do more testing. (These are the Silver Spring Civic Building and the (old) Adventist Hospital in Takoma Park.) It is imperative that we continue spreading the word that testing is critical. Through the SS CCC and other means, we are focusing the message on the younger population that seems to be where some of the new clusters of infections are happening.

**Food insecurity:** Working with key partners – including the Adventist Hospital - we have successfully identified space for three organizations to warehouse, sort, and distribute food south of the Beltway in Silver Spring and Takoma Park. Additionally, food distribution continues at key locations including Clifton Park Baptist Church Food Hub, in partnerships with other churches and local non-profits. The Hub serves about 1100-1200 households per week, also distributing diapers, baby formula, feminine products, clothing, and are currently working on covid-care kits for families who need some extra items while they quarantine and heal. In partnership with the County and other organizations, there are two staff who work on case management along with health screenings. Additionally, the Hub is getting ready to partner with Shepherd's Table to provide cooked meals and with Mary's Center to offer dental care and more health screenings. Other locations involved in food distribution include: St. Camillus, Jesus House, and Shepherds of Zion (at the Takoma Park Elementary school).

**Housing protection:** We continue working with the Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Health and Human Services, and various non-profits on aggressive efforts to inform renters of their rights, avoid evictions, and apply for grants. As of now, a moratorium on rental evictions still exists. New opportunities for more assistance is forthcoming and will be made available soon. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/get-help/housing-assistance.html>

**NON-COVID**

**Ambiance downtown:** With the coming of Spring and the increasing number of people using public spaces, we are faced with the inevitable challenges created by skateboarders, bicycles, unlicensed vending, homelessness, panhandling, busking, and noise pollution in our downtown, particularly at and around Veterans Plaza. We are working with the various agencies that have responsibilities in these areas – including the Urban District, Community Use of Public Facilities,

Permitting Services, Health and Human Services, Environmental Protection, Police - and the users of the public spaces to ensure safety while promoting a welcoming environment.

**Eateries:** Responding to the need to support our restaurants – and working with private sector partners and others - a series of spaces were created that serve as ‘eateries’. We have continued changing these to adjust to the evolving health regulations and economic realities, as follows: (a) Georgia Ave: Modified one side of this State Highway to serve a local brewery, and on the other side converted parking spaces to curb side pick-up, made Mayor Alley seating permanent, and expanded number of sidewalk cafes; (b) Ellsworth Drive: Maximized curb side pick-up and expanded existing capacity for sidewalk cafes; (c) Newell Street: Introduced picnic tables and are welcoming food truck at this closed 'Shared Street'; (d) Veterans Plaza: Added tent with seating; (e) Long Branch: Scattered colorful outdoor tables and chairs throughout this neighborhood Business District.

**Living under construction:** Pepco has yet to finish their work on Fenton Street. Other utility work for the various major developments under construction is evident throughout downtown. And, the Purple Line work is picking up throughout the Region. These necessary infrastructure projects create a constant sense of ‘living under construction’ which requires vigilant attention to disruption of vehicle and pedestrian flow. We are working closely with the utility companies, the Purple Line contractors, and local and State agencies to minimize these disruptions and through our community eNewsletter alert businesses and residents of the work underway.

**BID:** The proposed Business Improvement District (BID) for the downtown Silver Spring will host as series of public input sessions in the weeks and months to come. The proposal will then go back to County Council for further consideration.

**Jazz Festival and Thanksgiving Parade:** We are exploring holding the Thanksgiving Parade this year at its regularly scheduled date, the Saturday before Thanksgiving. We are not doing the Jazz Festival in August. Rather, we are including the festival as part of a Jazz Week in the Spring of 2022, to most help the local economy while providing for safe entertainment.

**Long Branch Efforts:** The Long Branch Business League is leading efforts to improve business conditions among the small businesses in the area. Pre Covid they would hold regular meetings, invite appropriate business speakers; have jointly sponsored public art in the community; and, do large number of outdoor events and festivals. During Covid they have adjusted their efforts, doing marketing, pursuing Mainstreet designation, being active on social media, and creating special events like The Pledge to Preserve campaign, which asks the public to commit to dining at, or ordering out from, a local Long Branch restaurant at least three times a month. Additionally, the League was instrumental in making the tables and chairs that will serve as a spread-out eatery.

**Taste the World in Fenton Village:** Led by the Fenton Village, Inc., with the collaboration of volunteers and partners, the TTWFFV event will happen this year for a full week in May. For a second year in a row, the event will adjust to the pandemic. It will invite people that visit Fenton Village restaurants to participate in a raffle and share their stories. (Stay tuned for more on this event.)

## ADVISORY GROUPS

### **Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board:**

The SSCAB regular full board meeting in March focused on conversations with Councilmember At-Large Gabe Albornoz; and, (b) 3rd Police Precinct Commander Francke. In April, the SSCAB focus will be a conversation on Vision Zero with its coordinator Wade Holland. The SSCAB has also been busy crafting letters of advice on the Silver Spring Business Improvement District, Beltway Expansion, Speeding, and Transportation & Infrastructure Projects.

The SSCAB Committees remain very active, meeting every 4th Monday of the month. In March the Transportation, Environment, and Energy Committee (TREE) and Commercial Economic Development Committee (CED) met simultaneously, with their separate agendas. TREE discussed the specifics of a letter on Silver Spring Regional Transportation & Infrastructure; and CED spoke with Kelly Groff of Visit Montgomery.

The SSCAB, functioning as part of the Silver Spring Covid Community Committee, took part in a meeting that discussed the Latino Health Initiative, available volunteering opportunities, as well as emphasizing the necessity of getting people pre-registered for the vaccine.

### **Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee:**

At the March meeting the Committee had a conversation with Maricela Cordova regarding the status of the Purple Line. The Committee also discussed the current composition of membership, recruitment, and the need for existing members to reapply.

At the April meeting the Committee is scheduled to discuss their advice letter regarding the issue of re-imagining the Police; an update on operations and vacancies; and an update by Pepco on their work on Fenton St.

The Silver Spring Urban District Operations continues to support the eateries throughout downtown and support the new Civic Building operations for Covid testing and vaccination. The hiring process for the new Silver Spring Urban District Manager and Program Manager should be complete by the end of April, with a projected start in May.

### **Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District Working Group:**

Silver Spring Art & Entertainment District has been working towards the installation of a public art piece on the asphalt at the corner of Fenton & Ellsworth. This placemaking opportunity was originally conceived of by the Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District in order to make creative statements that strongly encourage walkability and pedestrian safety. This project is a collaborative effort with MNCPPC's program "Creative Placemaking Initiative Mural" and involves the County's Department of Transportation. There remain challenges to make the project happen, but we are confident we will overcome them to realize this much needed affirmation of art in Silver Spring.

The County recently expanded to 25% capacity for the arts organizations and venues in the district. While many of the organizations are planning a combination of virtual and

in-person programming for camp offerings and classes, 25% capacity doesn't cover the operating costs of staffing and opening many venues. The district is in discussion about the roll out timeline of their Safe in Silver Spring marketing campaign, as we would like to coincide this campaign with a timeline that is most beneficial to the arts organizations.

Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District has embarked on the process of seeking redesignation as an Arts & Entertainment District by the State of Maryland. This designation was granted to Silver Spring in 2002, was redesignated in 2012, and the current redesignation is due in the fall. This month our Arts Consultant began the planning process for the rigorous requirements for redesignation.

#### **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 (focusing on commuter options)
- Long Branch Partners (focusing on emergency management)
- Chamber of Commerce Security Calls (focusing on homelessness)
- Food Council Coordinating Calls (focusing on coordinating and delivering meals)
- Purple Line Coordination
- Retail & Restaurant Recovery Work Group