

Note: This is my last Monthly report as Silver Spring Region Director. I am retiring effective June 30th. Please accept my warm and heartfelt GRACIAS for having joined me in this journey in part or in whole over the last 12 years. It has been a true privilege serving the amazing Silver Spring in this role and working side by side with so many people inside and outside of government that care so deeply about our community. Thank you – and see you around Silver Spring!

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Covid Related: We continue working extensively with internal and external partners to help coordinate messaging and deliver vaccines, testing, food, and rent relief. While this has been the focus of the regular eNewsletter, we will now begin shifting to highlighting community gatherings and celebrations. The eNewsletter has become more of a ‘newspaper’ and a source for referrals. The eNewsletter is released to approximately 6,000 subscribers, then reposted in Facebook (> 1,000 followers), Tweeter (> 2,300 followers), and NextDoor (in the Silver Spring Region, with > 16,000 subscribers.) Many civics, non-profits, and apartment complexes also redistribute the eNewsletter to their networks.

Proposed Business Improvement District: The proponents of a Business Improvement District in downtown Silver Spring held a community meeting to gather broader input in the upcoming County Council deliberations about the BID. There has been considerably community response and chatter on this issue, particularly related to the proposed governance model, racial equity implications, and whose vision will prevail in downtown Silver Spring. An emerging alternative to the BID seems to be the two prone approach of (a) encouraging developers to form a marketing association that could accomplish some of what the proponents are seeking; and, (b) improving the operations of the Silver Spring Urban District to better address clean and safe issues.

NEIGHBORHOOD ACTION TEAMS

Quebec Terrace: At the request of the Department of Housing and Community Affairs Inspection Division we’ve held two meeting on-site at Quebec Terrace to address various intersecting inter-functional issues. The first meeting was internal to the Department of Transportation Traffic Division, The Department of Environmental Protection, and the Parks Department. Then we held a second meeting which included these departments plus the Police and some of the property owners. We’ve been in communications with community organizations active with area residents as well. (We originally walked the area with area residents some months back, pre-pandemic.) Key issues (re)surfacing include: maintenance of sidewalks; bulk trash; general safety; and code inspections.

Long Branch Rec Center, Library, and Surroundings: The community in the vicinity of the Long Branch Recreation Center and the Library have expressed concerns that the continued use of the Center as a men’s homeless shelter creates challenges for the area, particularly since now the pool is open. The Center is scheduled to be used as a shelter at least for the balance of this year. This means recreation programs will no longer be delivered there and users will be bused to other recreation center in the County – other than the Coffield Rec Center because it too is being used as a shelter. Community members and locally serving non-profits held a walk with Councilmember Glass recently. We followed up with a virtual meeting where

the Department Directors listened to community members about practical and immediate steps that are possible, including exploring doing rec services out of the Library and throughout the business community; and, thanks to the Parks Department, institute certain improvement at Flower Ave Park.

Veterans Plaza Multi-disciplinary issues: As we re-open fully to pre-pandemic times, quality of life issues are resurfacing that merit multi-disciplinary approach. On Veterans Plaza and vicinity, the number of skateboarders has dramatically increased; the presence of homelessness is pronounced; illegal vending is evident; complaints about busking being at times too loud are coming in; and, lewd behavior seems to be on the rise. We have been working extensively with various departments and agencies to address the intersection of all these issues and how they can be addressed. Progress is being made. Key initiatives include: (a) Signs: Thanks to Eric Rasch at CUPF the permanent signs indicating a positive code of conduct and highlighting what is not allowable on Veterans Plaza are going up soon. Any day now; (b) Education: Once the signs are up, the Street Outreach Network, Health and Human Services outreach staff and contractors, the Urban District Team, and others will be alerting the skateboarders and weed smokers that the signs are up and changes are coming; (c) Scale up engaging enforcement: After a couple of weeks of education, the Police will begin scaling up enforcement, focusing on the most dangerous activities related to drug sales; (d) Activate the Plaza: Again under the leadership of the Civic Building (Eric Rash, CUPF) we are working with the Arts & Entertainment District, SSTCi, and others reaching out to performers to activate the Plaza more intentionally with ambient performances in a more consistent basis; and, (e) Other: We will continue working with the Department of Permitting Services regarding illegal vending and noise; and the Department of Health and Human Services' new outreach contractor (PathwayDC) and recently hired outreach staff regarding homelessness.

Progress Place & Vicinity: Similarly as with Veterans Plaza, we are working with various department and agencies to continue improving the safety and security at Progress Place and vicinity. The security contract at Progress Place is now enhanced; and as mentioned above HHS has a new contractor and outreach staff working directly with the homeless. The decision to have four port-a-toilets installed during the pandemic given that the County facilities were closed is being re-examined and may be removed – or relocated - soon now that the County facilities are again operating.

ADVISORY GROUPS

Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board:

The SSCAB regular full board meeting in May focused on a conversation with the Planning Department on the Thrive Montgomery Plan with Khalid Afzal, Special Projects Manager, and Carrie McCarthy, Research Division Chief as well as a discussion on Renting with Aseem Nigam, Director of The Department of Housing and Community Affairs, and Matt Losak of the Renters Alliance. In June the SSCAB will host a conversation with representatives from the County Executive's office on the County's General Plan (Thrive 2050); and another conversation on the impact of COVID-19 on the elderly and disabled in Silver Spring, how communities are coping, and how needs have changed as our community continues to re-open.

The SSCAB Committees remain very active, meeting every 4th Monday of the month. In May the Transportation, Environment, and Energy Committee (TREE) and Neighborhoods Committee met simultaneously, with their separate agendas. TREE welcomed Matt Johnson from MCDOT to talk about the Fenton Street Cycletrack Project and Peter Gray from WABA to talk about other area bicycle projects. The

Neighborhoods Committee talked with members of the legal community about supporting rights of citizens in all issues, including rental issues.

(The SSCAB is also functioning as part of the Silver Spring Covid Community Committee, mentioned above.)

Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee:

At the May meeting the Committee heard from Eric Rasch, Silver Spring Civic Building and Veterans Plaza Facility Manager regarding the various multi-functional issues on the Plaza – see above for more. The Committee also heard from Dori Pastor, key volunteer resident that is spear-heading the Progress Place Neighborhood Action Team. They also talked through how the staff will be supporting the Taste The World in Fenton Village event. (The Event subsequently happened the following week and was a great success. It was a week-long promotion with a virtual raffle at the end.) At the next meeting the Committee will meet the incoming Silver Spring Urban District Chief of Operations, Carson Henry; and will receive an update regarding the proposed Business Improvement District from Dale Tibbits, County Executive Special Assistant.

Operationally, the Silver Spring Urban District Operations is assisting with the many events that are coming back to Veterans Plaza as the team continues to support the eateries throughout downtown and do routine maintenance of the streetscape as well as answer to constituent complaints.

Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District Work Group:

With the change in Montgomery County reopening guidelines to reflect the State of Maryland health direction, the Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment is adjusting our opening messaging:

- The Silver Spring website is encouraging the arts and entertainment organizations to post events and happening on the website, which is on our main page.
- At an appropriate time, the COVID messaging will be removed and the website moved into the “above the fold” position.
- We are also shifting our homepage images to include both masked and unmasked images.
- A promotional campaign of opening efforts of venues in Silver Spring will begin as of June 1, 2021. This will include photos of venues as they open and promotions about their programming efforts.
- AFI Silver is opening for shows on May 28, 2021
- The Fillmore has it’s first in person show of Small Town Murder on June 16, 2021.
- With the reopening of the County on May 28, the Silver Spring arts and entertainment organizations are completing the cycle of weekly meetings that have been in effect since March 2020 and moving into a monthly or bi-monthly format that is focused more on re-opening and redesignation of the district.

In non-Covid related activities:

- The Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District is submitting their intent to re-apply as an Arts & Entertainment District in July 2021. The reapplication process includes strategic planning efforts that require community involvement, but also importantly, will include the arts organizations and venues in shaping goals for the district.
- Peterson Companies has unveiled a new street artwork on their closed street that is colorful and eye-catching. Entitled Energy Wave, the piece is by Chalk Riot. They have also recently unveiled Blumen Lumen and a flower tower.

- The Blairs Mural festival, originally scheduled for a May debut, has not yet completed installation.
- Taste of the World in Fenton Village was successful, having garnered many, many more raffle entries for visiting restaurants than in past years.
- PIO has been working with Silver Spring to issue a press release about in-person summer camps or classes for the public to help Montgomery County parent's with childcare and to help students cultivate their creativity and emotional expression: Create Arts Center, Round House Theatre and Education Center, Akhmedova Ballet, Maryland Youth Ballet and virtual arts education organizations include: Ghandi Brigade, Docs in Progress, Arts on the Block, Create Arts Center, Round House Theatre and Education Center, Akhmedova Ballet, Maryland Youth Ballet, Levine. Virtual programs are not filling quickly, and the Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District is assisting in promoting these beneficial programs to the public through promotion on our website, a press release, and a cooperative marketing campaign

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
- Black Box Consortium Board of Directors
- Silver Spring Town Center, Inc., Board of Directors
- Retail & Restaurant Recovery Work Group