

SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD FY2016ANNUAL REPORT

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During FY 2016, the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board (SSCAB) continued its work to strengthen communications between the County Government and Silver Spring-area residents. The Board increased its efforts to hold offsite meetings, meeting in March at the Long Branch Community Recreation Center, and in June at the Takoma Park Community Center. The Board also hosted a Holiday Potluck Dinner in December, and participated in the County's Thanksgiving Parade in November.

Elected Officials and Staff

In February, we were joined by **County Council President Nancy Floreen**. She encouraged the Board to weigh in on budget talks, and suggested that sending emails is a convenient way to do so. She recommended that people not use Facebook or Twitter for contacting Councilmembers since most Members do not closely track these inputs.

She highlighted that the County is reviewing Airbnb, which rents non-hotel properties to travelers and is technically illegal in Montgomery. However, legislation is being developed to allow and regulate the practice.

The Councilmember said that Governor Hogan's budget is 'OK' for the county-providing five percent more than last year, with full funding for the Geographic Cost of Education Index. The County is still seeking more money from Annapolis for school construction.

District 5 County Councilmember Tom Hucker participated in the Board's March meeting. He anticipated that an RFP would soon be issued to determine disposition of the old Silver Spring Library building on Colesville Road. He believes that there should be renewed discussion of potential uses.

The Councilmember is pleased with support for the proposed bike lanes through Silver Spring.

He said the County's snow removal review gave a mixed grade of the County's performance after the large storm in January. The County's online information regarding progress of plowing operations was unreliable. Hucker suggested the County look at NYC's GIS real-time tracking system. The review offered kudos to the County for suspending parking garage restrictions to allow residents to get cars off the streets. In addition, sidewalks were cleared sooner than in the past.

There is an organized multi-agency group working to improve the 16th Street Circle at the DC border. DC will pay for initial engineering costs and will run all signals no matter where located.

On the Route 29 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route, Hucker believes that the new proposals to use the shoulders will be less costly and will be quicker to build.

Dave Asche of Mr. Hucker's staff frequently reported on council issues. Mr. Asche reported that Councilmember Hucker had supported the County Executive's proposed Independent Transit Authority, but saw that more public discussion was needed and supported the decision to delay its creation.

Mr. Asche also noted that the Council approved limits on predatory towing on private properties. He further reported that the Council is looking at legislation on abandoned and neglected properties. This is especially a problem in District 5.

We also heard from **Matt Verghese and Brian Anleu of Mr. Hucker's staff**. Verghese reported that the Levine School of Music will occupy the second floor of the new library building. Levine plans to spend a half-million dollars to modify the space. Mr. Anleu stated that the Silver Spring Restaurant Week organized by Mr.

Hucker was a big success, and also that County staff had met with the new owners of Hampshire Towers apartments requesting that they space out rent increases.

Debbie Spielberg of Councilmember Elrich's staff also provided much valuable information to the Board. She noted that Mr. Elrich was a key proponent of the BRT. He is watching for progress there.

Ms. Spielberg further reported that Councilmember Elrich notes that the County's existing sector plans already accommodate projected population growth so there is no need to alter these existing plans to allow more development.

County Agencies

Connie Latham, Director for County's Boards, Committees and Commissions, spoke to the Board on issues surrounding electronic communications.

Ms. Latham reported that Maryland's Open Meetings Act would apply if the Board is holding a scheduled meeting online and associated emails could be requested for documentation. Unscheduled 'back and forth' email communication is not regulated by the Open Meetings Act.

Ms. Latham advised members not to ask for or send emails that support a candidate for office, and Members should consider if a topic is partisan before raising for discussion.

In November, the Board hosted **Paul Bessel of the County's Charter Review Commission**. The County Council appoints an eleven-member, bipartisan Charter Review Commission every four years, and the Commission meets monthly.

The Board's November meeting focused on **several transportation topics**.

First, we heard from Joana Conklin of the County's Department of Transportation (DOT) who presented an overview of the BRT project. She stated that BRT is more cost effective than light rail. BRT offers flexibility of routing and reliability. The countywide Master Plan has proposed a 102-mile network along ten corridors and

the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT). There is state funding in place for planning, design, and purchase of right-of-way for the CCT on dedicated lanes. Funding is not yet in place for construction.

Next, we heard from Tamika Gauvin of the State's Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) who discussed the US 29 BRT. This line is expected to have 12 stations along its twelve-mile route between Downtown Silver Spring and Burtonsville. The County estimates increases of 13K residents, 17K households and 78K jobs in the Route 29 study area.

We were next briefed by the SSCAB's Praj Kasbekar who has participated in the Montgomery County Transit Task Force that has studied the route and its impact since 2012. The Task force has produced a 129-page overview that is now online along with a 15-page summary.

A final briefing was presented by Mike Madden of MTA who gave an overview of the Purple Line (PL) project. The PL will be built along a 16-mile route, with 21 stations (including nine in Silver Spring) that will connect Bethesda to New Carrollton. Trains are planned to run every 7.5 minutes at peak times, and every 10-15 minutes off-peak.

The PL offers slightly faster travel times than current bus options. The two Counties have committed funding requested by Governor Hogan, but Federal funds are uncertain. Montgomery County will offer support to 400 businesses along the construction route. MTA will 'own' the project and be the face of the PL throughout construction.

The board hosted a **panel to discuss 'Spaces for Education'** including Paul Mortenson, Senior Urban Designer from the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), Bruce Crispell, Director of Long Range Planning at MCPS, and Nicola Whiteman, Senior Vice President at the Apartment and Office Building Association of Metropolitan Washington (AOBA). Mr. Mortenson gave a presentation on cross agency work group findings for non-traditional school sites.

Urban Sites can be as small as half acres. Possible 'shared spaces' are where construction allows for school campuses to be partitioned off from the rest of the site. Examples of Adaptive Re-use are when schools take over former commercial or office space. MCPS believes that re-use scenarios are cost-prohibitive. AOBA is very pleased to be part of this ongoing conversation

The Board is fortunate to be briefed monthly by representatives of the **County Police and County Fire and Rescue Departments**. The briefings include month-to-month trends in public safety incidents, but also long-term advice to improve personal safety.

In January we learned that there are four fire stations in the Board's jurisdiction- #1-Georgia Ave in CBD, #2 –Takoma Park, #16 in Four Corners and #19 –Seminary Road. All stations experienced an increase in calls in 2015- from 5% for Station 19 to 11% for Stations 2 and 16, and 12% for Station 1 in Downtown Silver Spring. We also learned that half of all homes in the area do not have working smoke alarms, and that the County will provide new smoke detectors at no cost.

Non-profits, Citizen Input

In April, the Board hosted its second annual event to "Get to know Silver Spring Non-Profits." Fifteen non-profits participated including those working with entertainment, senior citizens, public health, a community festival, music education, theatre, and renter support.

Gus Bauman, former Chair of the MNCPPC, spoke about "The Silver Spring War and Rebirth: The Fall and Rise of an American Downtown." He described events that shaped Montgomery County and specifically Downtown Silver Spring from 1956 through 2010. In his recap, Bauman noted that Silver Spring has increased its political power as a result of these events, as proven through the make-up of the current County Council. He pointed out to the Board that downtown now has everything except a Post Office branch.

Peter Tan of Silver Spring Inc., discussed the use of marketing and social media to build our community. Through TweetUps and other social media, Pete wants to advocate for Silver Spring and bring people from the virtual to the real world.

Plans and Initiatives

Walt Petrie gave an update on ‘Ellsworth Place,’ the redevelopment of the City Place mall. The renovated mall opened on schedule in spring 2016. Two Jumbotrons were installed at Fenton and Ellsworth, and are offering five minutes each hour for community programming and local announcements.

SSCAB Committees

The Board’s three committees had a very active year. The Commercial and Economic Development Committee (CED) hosted Judy Stephenson, the County’s Small Business Navigator, and Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce CEO Jane Redicker in a meeting particularly well attended by residents. CED held its October meeting on the VanGo downtown shuttle. Its November meeting focused on youth (ages 15-24) workforce development. CED and the Neighborhoods Committee co-hosted a meeting on County policies regarding Airbnb operations.

The Neighborhoods committee spent significant time discussing school issues and the challenge of eliminating the achievement gap. The committee participated in a September offsite meeting in Lyttonsville Community meeting to review the proposed Greater Lyttonsville Sector plan and prepare a community response. Neighborhoods hosted a July meeting on proposed renter protection legislation.

The TREE committee concentrated on pedestrian and bike safety issues in Silver Spring. They also held a sustainability meeting with representatives of the County’s Department of Environmental Protection, and The City of Takoma Park.

We created an **ad-hoc committee to review the Board’s bylaws**. Issues discussed included definition of a quorum and when to accept proxy votes and define conflicts of interest. The revised bylaws also clarified procedures to allow Board members to suggest topics for discussion at Board meetings.