

SILVER SPRING REGION Monthly Report (for August 2020)

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FRAMING OUR WORK

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Silver Spring Regional Center and Silver Spring Urban District have developed a strategic approach that focuses our efforts emphasizing four immediate and near-term areas for action:

- Food insecurity <> Access to services <> Housing protection <> Economic survival

These actions address the four general areas of hyper-local concerns:

- Impacted neighbors <> Racial equity and social justice <> Info flow <> Local economy

We are addressing these concerns by working hyper-locally through:

- Connecting <> Affirming <> Sparking <> Informing

We do this work with partners and collaborators, including:

- Advisory groups, civics, and ethnic organizations
- Non-profits, arts and faith communities
- Local, State, and Federal governments
- Businesses, chambers, and philanthropy

(See attached presentation for more details.)

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

COVID FOCUSED

Food insecurity: We continue exploring possibilities for a food distribution hub in Silver Spring, south of the Beltway. The process is paying dividends even before it is complete. The robust network of Silver Spring, Takoma Park, and Long Branch non-profits have all indicated strong willingness to collaborate in this effort wherever the hub end up. Already, many of these non-profits, augmented by the vibrant faith communities do food pantries, distribution, and augment social service delivery. Many have done food 'grab-and-go' where hundreds are provided box of food on a regular basis. Thanks to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Montgomery County Food Council, these efforts are increasingly coordinated.

Access to services: Working with the Department of General Services and the Community Use of Public Facilities, the Silver Spring Civic Building is once again serving as a COVID testing site - now on Mondays and Thursdays. COVID testing has also been done at pop up sites, including some faith communities and the City of Takoma Park. Many of the non-profits are also reaching deep into the community to bring the awareness of available services – particularly in zip codes most affected by COVID-19.

Housing protection: 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. The established shelters in downtown, Long Branch, and Lyttonsville, are nearing capacity. 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: Working with the County's Economic Development Team, we have helped reach deep into the community to ensure small, independent business owners and entrepreneurs know about, apply for, and receive resources from the many opportunities for assistance. We also created an innovative streeteatery on Georgia Avenue serving over 10 restaurants, most minority owned or operated. The eatery is so successful it has expanded north and south, and around Bonifant Street. We have also added seating to Veterans Plaza to serve as a communal place for eating and picnicking – ensuring social distancing, of course. We are looking to do the same at the future Purple Line station under the Library. Lastly, we are in conversation with community members and Peterson Companies exploring alternatives to how to best temporarily repurpose Ellsworth Drive as an eatery as well.

NON COVID

Purple Line: With the coming of Fall, is it expected that the Community Advisory Teams will – virtually – meet again. There has been brisk progress to the Purple Line as construction took advantage of the slower general traffic in the area. However, major traffic flow disruption – particularly on University Avenue – may need to revert back to limited hours given the increasing traffic during rush hours as businesses slow re-open. Operations at the Transit Station has returned to normal with the construction of the overpass over Colesville Road completed, alleviated traffic flow in the area. However, the pending closure of the Spring St. will again cause major disruption requiring extensive re-routing of traffic in the area. For more updates on other station area, visit <https://www.purplelinemd.com/construction/construction-updates>

Development Activity: While return to robust economic activity may be months away, given its long-range nature, real estate development continues at a brisk pace. The ArtSpace project on the old police station is nearing completion and has begun its resident/artists selection process. An older office building downtown has just announced it will convert to condominium. At least four restaurants have announced their plans to begin construction soon. However, it is unfortunately expected that the pandemic will cause the inevitable closure of many storefronts throughout the Country 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: 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 have undertaken a series of activities to get all people that live in the Silver Spring Regional Area be counted for the 2020 Census. These efforts have included extensive distribution of materials to apartment complexes in zip codes where lowest return rates are evident, installing banners and yard signs throughout the Area, accompanying food distribution with Census information, and even doing car caravans with home painted signs throughout major population concentrations – i.e.: apartment complexes and commercial areas. We will be doing a final Census September Blitz, culminating with a Census Weekend of Events late September since the deadline for Census response is September 30th. In October we will shift these efforts to a final push to 'get out the vote'.

ADVISORY GROUPS

Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board: The SSCAB completed its Board Retreat in August. The Board is now set to begin its new year of meetings Monday, September 14th. On the Agenda: COVID-19 Update, and Elections. All three SSCAB Committees will have a combined meeting Monday, September 28th to discuss the MNPCC's plan for downtown and adjoining neighborhoods. The Board will also be engaged with the forum on the Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Plan scheduled for later in September and October.

Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee: The SSUDAC also completed its retreat in August. It will also begin its new year of meeting this month, Thursday, September 17th. On the Agenda: A presentation on the status of the Purple Line. The Committee will also be engaged with the forum on the Operation Budget and Capital Improvement Plan scheduled for later in September and October. Various SSCAB members are active on some of the County task groups addressing the re-opening efforts.

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; i.e.: summer camps, videos, and more. On the Agenda: 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