



SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

November 15, 2018

Ike Leggett, County Executive
Montgomery County

[delivered via e-mail]

Advice from the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board re:
FY20 Operating Budget Considerations for the Silver Spring Regional Area

Dear County Executive Leggett:

It has been an honor to serve and advise you and your administration as well as the Council these past years. We recognize that your tenure is soon to be completed, and provide this advice with the hope and expectation that your influence and impact on FY 2020 will continue to be substantial through the day the County inaugurates new leadership.

Throughout this past year, the Board has engaged with residents of the Silver Spring Regional Area on issues of transportation, economic development, housing and homelessness, hate crimes, pedestrian safety and access as well as the environment. The budget priorities listed below were derived from public discussions with members of the Silver Spring and Takoma Park community and Montgomery County officials during Board meetings. Please note, that our budget priorities are not listed in order of importance, as we view all of these priorities as critical to our community.

In addition, we ask that you consider our advice on short-term specific projects which, while lesser in complexity and expense than other budget objectives, will have lasting social and economic impact on the Silver Spring community.

Finally, we ask that you to consider the budget items not only in terms of expense, but as an investment against future costs and even generating potential revenue. This perspective may not be immediately calculated in the current budget process, but may substantially affect the budget in the future should these investments not be made.

Ellsworth and Fenton Intersection Design

Increasingly, the downtown area of Silver Spring has become the center of community life for residents and visitors alike. Thousands congregate for community activities, dining and shopping, concerts, political and civic events in and around the cross roads of Fenton Street and Ellsworth Avenue. To that end, the SSCAB advises that:

- The intersection be designed as a center of such activity, providing ample crosswalk direction, to create a “box” that clears the intersection for pedestrians at appropriately signaled intervals, with waiting spaces on the corners to direct pedestrian traffic.

Note: We understand that this artistic “Barnes Dance” pedestrian box can most effectively be executed when PEPCO resurfaces Fenton Street, which may be well before FY20 begins.

We suggest that the design for the intersection go beyond its functional safety and traffic indicators and include design elements that raise the excitement and “community life centrality” the location has become.

Transit Center Attractiveness

We urge the County to consider several upgrades to the Silver Spring transit center (SSTC) that makes the construction more attractive and representative of the vibrant community it serves – even as implementation of the Purple Line station continues on the site. Please consider the following:

- The SSTC exterior could be decorated appropriately to make it less of a functional eye sore and more of a central transit destination that engenders welcome and inspire enthusiasm for community social and economic participation, and; We propose a design connection between the SSTC and downtown Silver Spring.

As with bike lanes, pedestrians should be able to identify clear and inviting pathways to the center of town to encourage pedestrian traffic to the economic and social center of Silver Spring for all.

Maintain or Increase Funding for Safe, Affordable and Secure Housing

We thank you for your devotion to ensuring that Silver Spring maintains a level of housing that is not only highly desirable, but also affordable to persons of a wide variety of economic means. Sustained concerns by County and Silver Spring residents in particular who rent their homes as well as stories of eviction, poor maintenance, landlord retaliation against renters pursuing their rights, student mobility and its academic impact, especially on poor and minority communities and renters, especially seniors, being priced out of long-term housing have highlighted the importance of the County’s role in advancing quality, affordable and secure rental housing.

- We strongly urge the County Executive and Council to increase funding, commensurate with the growing need, for renter outreach, education and organizing.

We are confident that such support will help reduce indirect costs of unstable communities, improving student achievement and senior welfare, while working to expand the health and prosperity for all our communities. We also believe that such efforts undergird county effort to prevent homelessness. In a recent SSCAB meeting, representatives of homeless service organizations reported a spike in

homelessness among seniors. We trust you will appreciate how this information might be indicative of a disturbing trend showing long-term residents on fixed incomes are increasingly at risk of losing their homes.

Funding for Traffic and Construction Noise Mitigation, Community Outreach and Coordination

Over the past year, the SSCAB has held a series of meeting with organizations impacting road and building construction in the district. They include PEPCO, WSSC, Departments of Permitting, Transportation and Environmental Protection, as well as the Purple Line management. We urge the count government to prioritize a public information platform that does the following:

- Identifies current and prospective construction projects that will substantially impact roads and communities.
- Provides contact information for each project,
- Maintains an accessible timeline to track project progress,
- Alerts residential and commercial communities to potential dangers, noise and traffic congestion, and
- Provide information for the public to submit complaints when project violate county law

While the SSCAB and community recognize that community development is impossible without inconvenience, we also believe that many of these projects lack fundamental coordination, public outreach and rigorous mitigation of noise and traffic congestion. For many residents living along and above such activity, the disruptions can cause serious sleep deprivation and other health issue affecting residents' work life as well as children's school performance among other negative impacts.

Funding for Hate Crime Outreach Efforts

The SSCAB Neighborhoods Committee has focused on outreach efforts that seek to address and prevent hate crimes. Montgomery County Police officials and County Attorney representatives provided an overview of current efforts and prosecutions. Notably, hate crimes and "hate motivated activity" appears to be level, however:

- We urge the county to invest in proactive efforts to maintain, if not reduce potential hate crime activity and crimes by supporting nonprofit efforts to provide outreach against bigotry including, but not limited to, anti-Semitism, racial, ethnic and religious bigotry, bigotry against immigrants and the homeless.

Funding county and nonprofit efforts might include support for interfaith community outreach, police outreach, school-based programming and outreach that supports periodic public dialogue on hate crimes, racism and bigotry. Given the national climate, we urge the county to invest appropriately in this area as a preventative measure.

Funding for Mental Health Professionals in MCPS

The SSCAB has maintained a periodic dialogue over the last two years with education officials to receive reports on issues affecting Silver Spring families. The Board was fortunate enough to host several principals of regional area public schools as well as teachers and school staff. While the age spectrum of students they serve was varied, the challenges that these principals noted were not. We recognized a

common theme – mental health. Today’s digital landscape and tumultuous political climate have put increased pressure on our students., Children of immigrant families are feeling pressure from the increasing toxicity of the national debate on immigration, and MCPS feels it too. We were informed that MCPS schools have one counselor per grade level, which equates to approximately one counselor per 250 students. These individuals visit the school only once per week and has a wide array of administrative responsibilities in addition to the most important, which is counseling students. Students’ mental health has a direct impact on academic achievement, among other critical education outcomes.

The SSCAB respectfully requests that your budget take into consideration the increased needs of our students and increase funding to hire more mental health professionals for MCPS.

Further, with respect to immigrant children, we also urge the County to adequately fund social and educational services that promote bilingual education, and cultural literacy to assist students and their families in becoming secure participants in the wider community.

More Funding to Combat Homelessness and to Support Homeless

We recognize and appreciate the County’s many efforts to work with the many agencies, non-profits and individuals that work with the homeless in the County. Yet, we believe more work must be done. Throughout this past year, it was brought to the Board’s attention that there have been an increasing number of homeless persons encampments in and around downtown Silver Spring. In addition, we have received reports from both residents and police of mental health outbursts in public areas, many traced to the homeless, that indicate a need for readily accessible mental health support services at publicly accessible spaces.

- We request that more funding be directed toward the establishment of employment assistance, outreach and rehabilitation facilities.

Maintain and Modernize Funding for Non-Profit Organizations

- We ask to expand support for non-profit organizations that make the Regional Area a welcoming and livable place.

Non-profit organizations are a large part of why our Regional Area continues to thrive and serve as inspiration for the nation. We advise more support for the County's efforts to direct scarce resources more effectively to programs shown to work. We are cognizant that outcome metrics may be an imprecise measurement of impact over time, thus supporting a more flexible, evidence-based grant approval process.

On behalf of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board,

Yours sincerely,

Matt Losak, Chair
Ed Levy, Vice Chair
Mark Mendez, Secretary
Lysette House, Parliamentarian

CC:

Current Councilmembers, County Executive-Elect, and Councilmembers-Elect
Reemberto Rodriguez, Silver Spring Regional Area Director