



Silver Spring Downtown Plan, Plan Boundary Study

Atara Margolies, Planner Coordinator, Area 1, Atara.Margolies@montgomeryplanning.org, 301.495.4558

Leslye Howerton, Master Plan Supervisor, Area 1, Leslye.Howerton@montgomeryplanning.org, 301.495.4566

Elza Hisel-McCoy, Chief, Area 1, Elza.Hisel-McCoy@montgomeryplanning.org, 301.495.2115

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Description

Study of Plan Boundary options for the Silver Spring Downtown Plan, as a result of the Planning Board meeting on March 26, 2020.

Staff Recommendation

The staff recommends the boundary for the Silver Spring Downtown Plan as presented on March 26, 2020. The staff also supports the goal of providing more affordable housing as well as a diverse mix of housing types in Montgomery County and recommends a more holistic approach to “missing middle” housing as presented in the *Missing Middle Housing Study* completed in 2018.

Summary

On March 26, 2020, staff presented the draft Scope of Work for the Silver Spring Downtown Plan to the Planning Board. Staff recommended that the new plan boundary follow the plan boundary from the 2000 *Silver Spring Central Business District Sector Plan*, with the addition of 4 parcels adjacent to that boundary on the south side of Wayne Ave that are currently owned by St. Michael’s church.

A portion of the discussion on March 26 focused on the potential expansion of the plan boundary into the surrounding neighborhoods of East, North and West Silver Spring. The staff was asked to study boundary expansion options and to return to the Board to present the options. This staff report summarizes the options studied by the planning team.

Since March, our world has changed drastically due to the COVID19 pandemic. At the March 26 presentation, the pandemic had just hit Maryland, and the implications were not yet fully understood. At this point, there is plenty we still do not know, but we do know that we will all be operating in a world of social distancing measures for some time. We also are now in a time of great economic uncertainty. With this return to the Board for the Silver Spring plan, the team felt it was imperative to revise the Scope of Work to reflect our new reality and describe how we will approach a planning effort in this climate. The revised Scope of Work is an attachment to this Boundary Options memo. Once the plan boundary is decided, the staff will revise the Scope to include the updated plan boundary information.

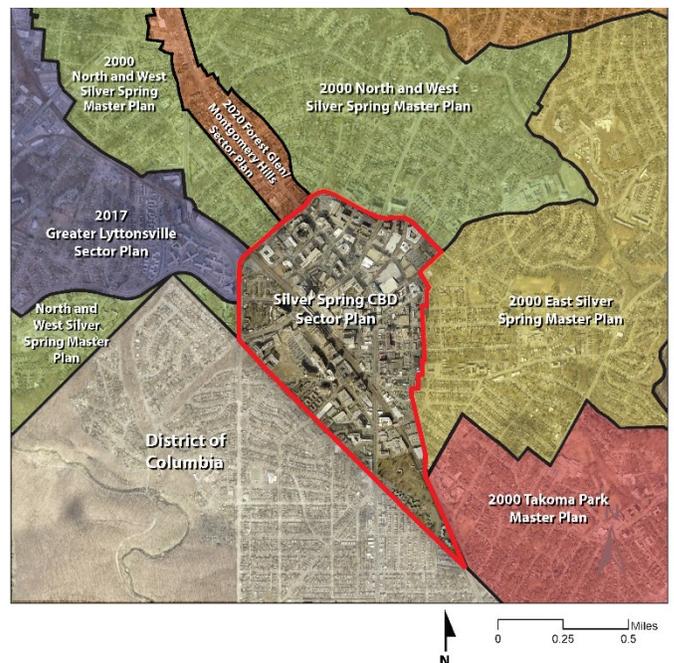
As a brief note on terminology, the 2000 plan referred to the “downtown” area of Silver Spring as a “Central Business District” or CBD. In the 1980s and 1990s, CBDs were established to identify discrete areas as financial and commercial centers, often associated with development incentives or financial programs. In Montgomery County, there were specific zones that could only be used within CBD boundaries, defined in the Zoning Code. However, with the 2014 rewrite of the zoning ordinance, the CBD zones were abolished, the descriptions of the limits of the CBD areas removed from the code. The Commercial-Residential “CR” zones have since been used to allow the mixed-use development previously limited to the CBD and similar zones and can be applied without regard to any previous CBD boundary. Thus staff believes “Central Business District” is obsolete as a term to describe Downtown Silver Spring and will no longer use that terminology when referring to the retail and commercial core.

Methodology:

As discussed with the Planning Board, the staff was asked to explore expanded plan boundary options. The goal of boundary expansion would be to re-examine parts of the predominantly single-family-home neighborhoods just outside of the downtown area to determine how new and diverse housing types not presently allowed could be permitted in certain areas. The goal is NOT to expand the downtown commercial core.

In order to arrive at boundary expansion options, the planning team studied the zoning and land use of the surrounding blocks, and the half-mile/ten-minute pedestrian walksheds from transit, specifically from the WMATA Transit Center and the forthcoming Purple Line station at the Silver Spring Library. Staff also studied the area within a one-mile radius of the Transit Center, or the “micro-mobility shed,” to understand the greater context of downtown Silver Spring. At the Board’s request, staff also studied the Washington D.C. neighborhoods that are located to the southeast of Silver Spring, as well as the adjacent neighborhoods and Planning Areas in Montgomery County. There are five distinct Planning Areas that are adjacent to the 2000 plan boundary:

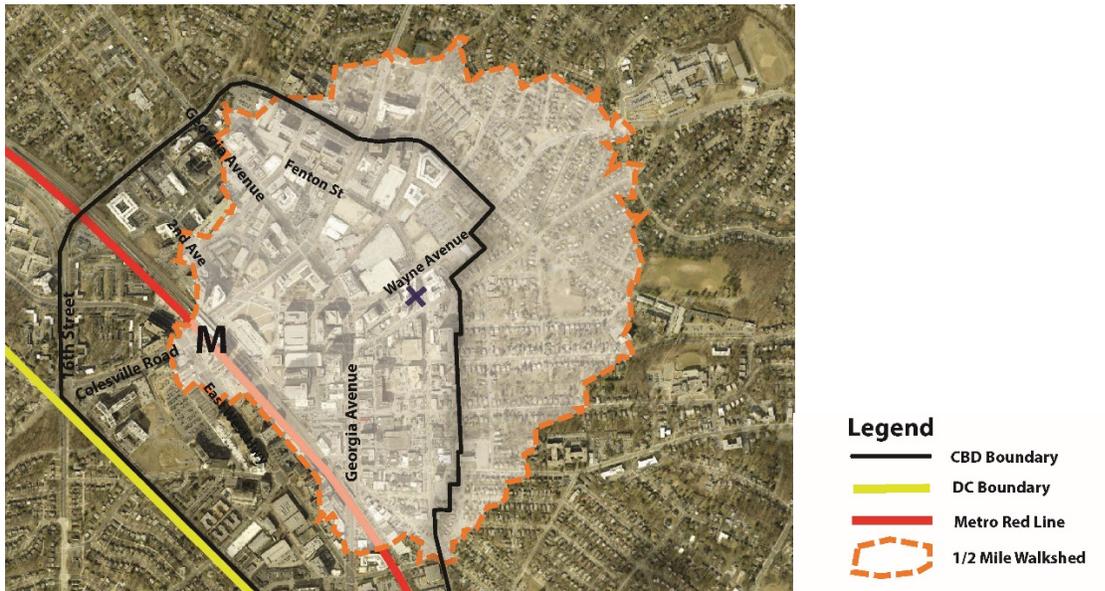
- Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan (2020)
- Lyttonsville Sector Plan (2017)
- North and West Silver Spring Master Plan (2000)
- East Silver Spring Master Plan (2000)
- Takoma Park Master Plan (2000).



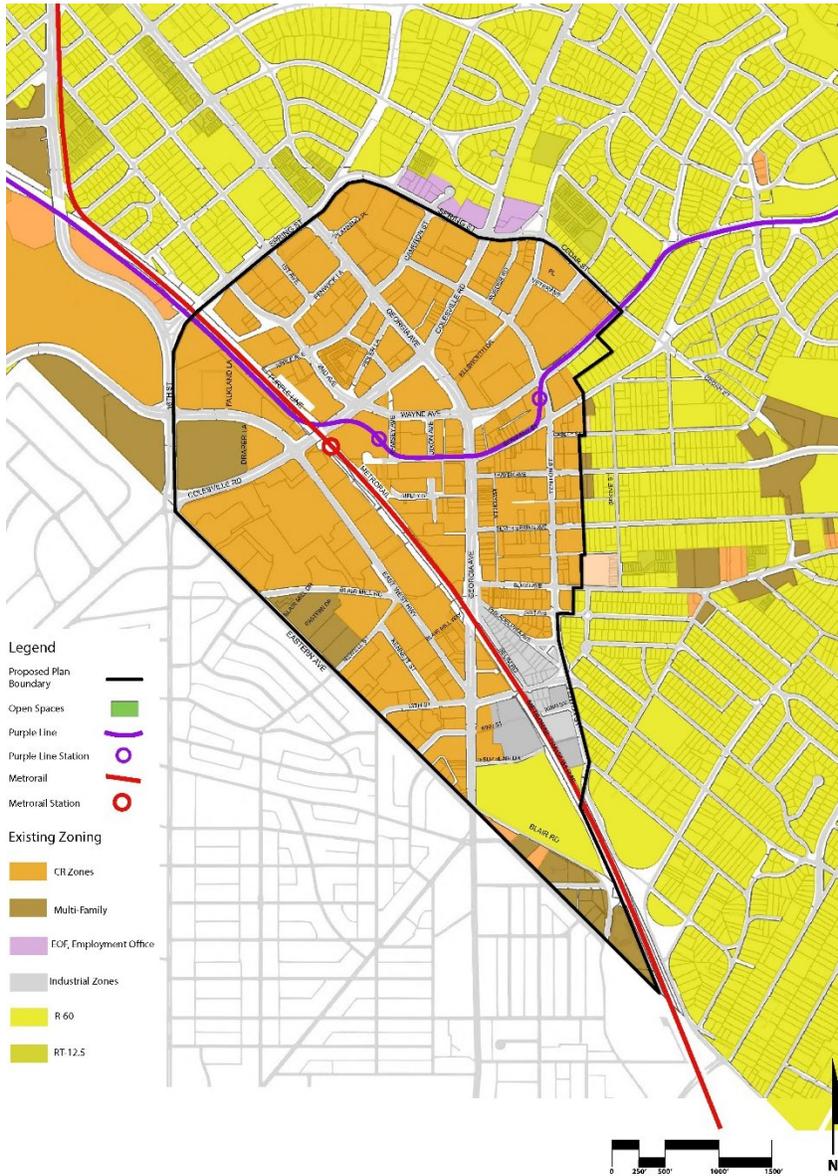
The walkshed from the Transit Center encompasses most of the downtown commercial core but does not extend to the adjacent neighborhoods; those are largely just outside of the walkshed.



However, as transit expands to the east with the Purple Line, the walkshed from the Purple Line Station at the Silver Spring Library expands into the neighborhoods to the north and east.



The neighborhoods that surround the downtown commercial core are predominantly residential, characterized mostly by single family homes on lots zoned R-60. There are a handful of properties adjacent to Fenton Village that are zoned R-20, R-30, or CRN. There are also several townhouse developments with a zoning of RT-12.5, just outside the downtown area. Along Spring Street, between Ellsworth Drive and Fairview Road there are several parcels zoned EOF, with a mix of commercial/medical office use and high-rise multi-family developments.



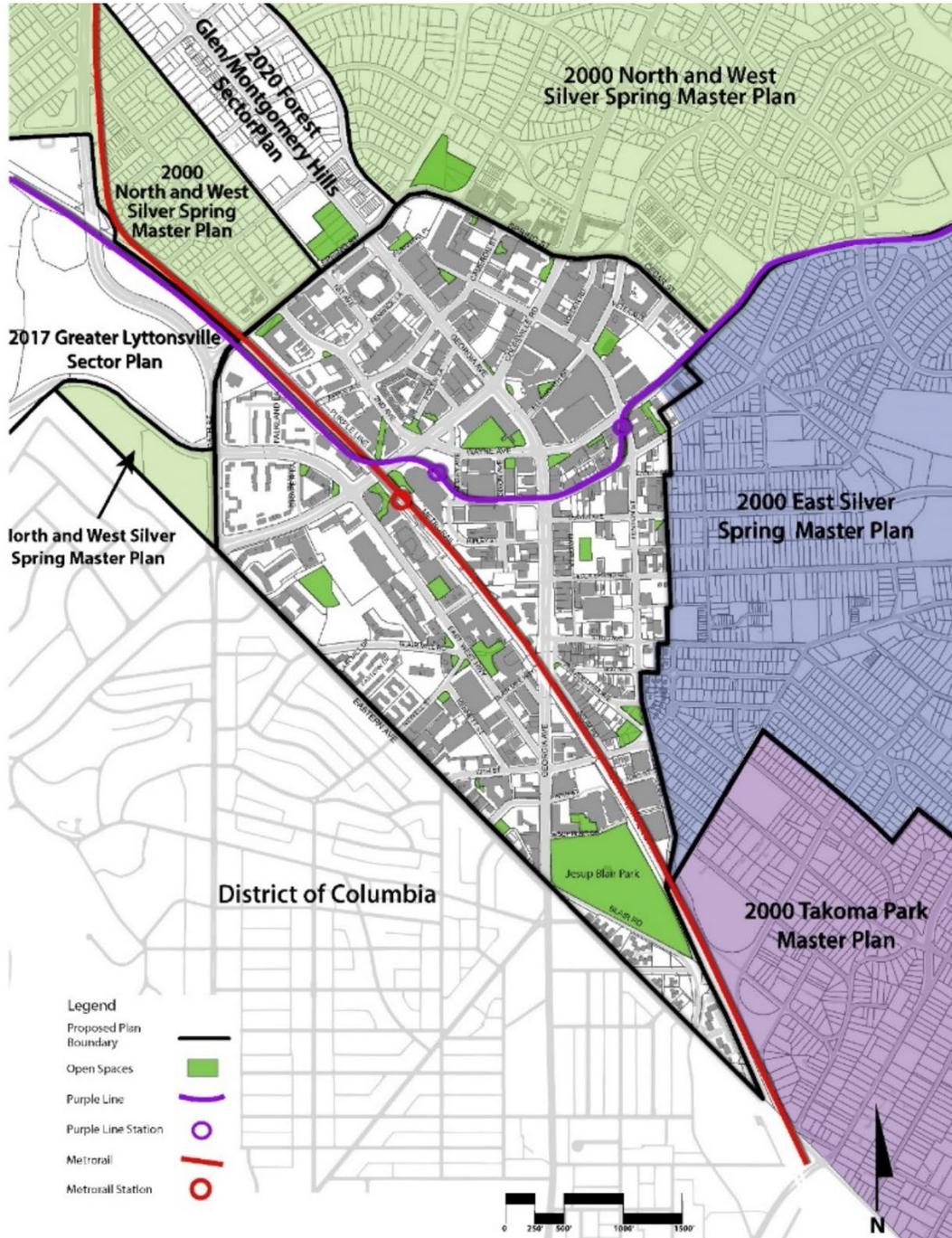
Boundary Options:

The staff has assembled the boundary options detailed below. A map of each option follows the boundary description.

Option A: Proposed Plan Boundary + County-wide “Missing Middle” Approach (map on following page)

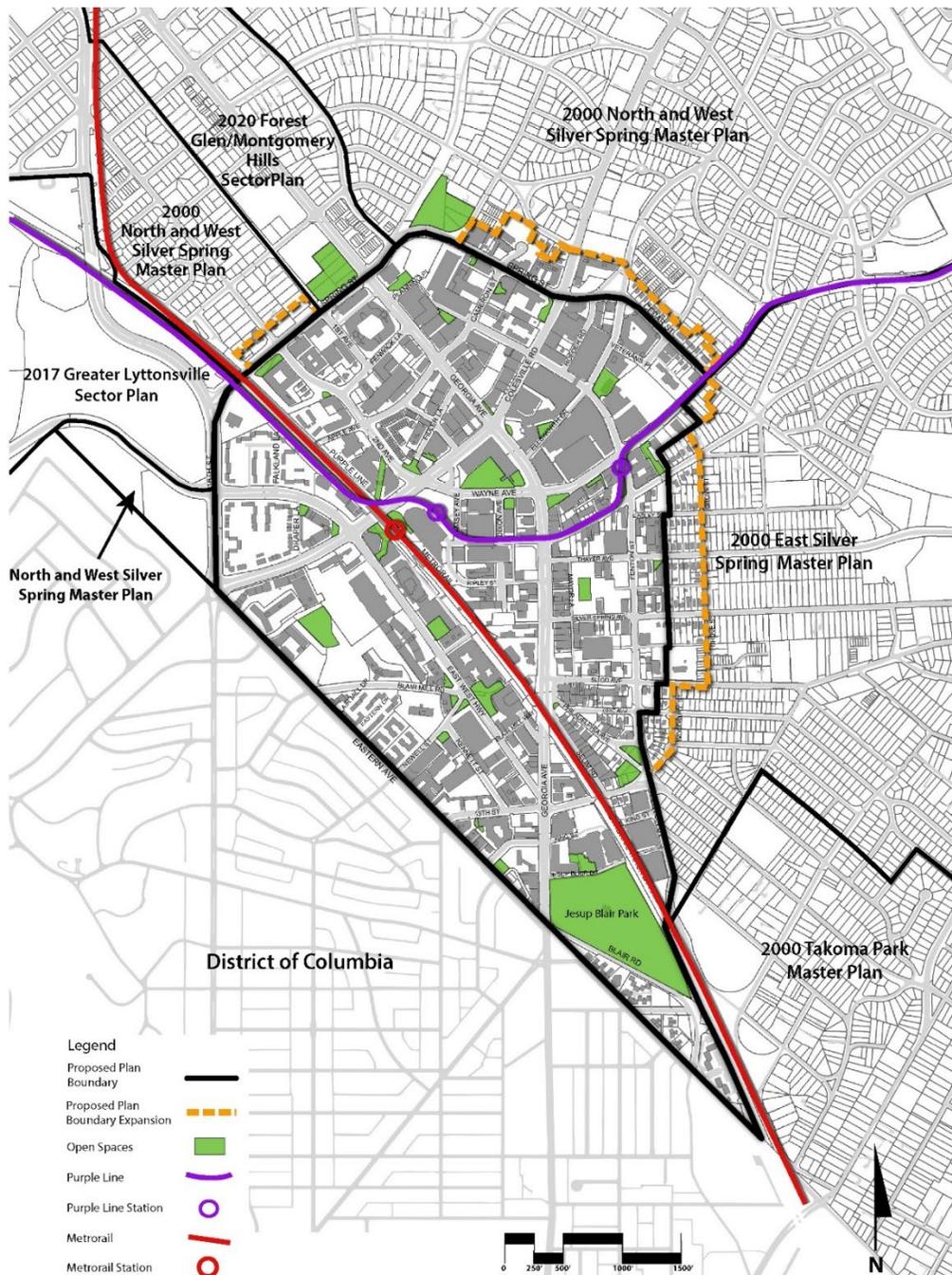
Option A is the plan boundary originally proposed in the Scope of Work presented to the Board on March 26. This follows the 2000 plan boundary with the addition of a few parcels along Wayne Ave as described in the scope. Throughout the proposed plan area there are numerous opportunity sites for future development. The staff has identified several of those sites as potential sites for “missing middle” housing. To address the lack of “missing middle” housing outside of the proposed boundary, the staff recommends pursuing one of the county-wide paths proposed in the *2018 Missing Middle Housing Study*. In the 2018 study, staff studied several jurisdictions across the country that implemented zoning changes to allow for denser housing types in single family zoning districts. These changes were made at the zoning code level, even if they were restricted to certain areas within a county or a city. The report notes that implementing zoning changes designed to encourage and permit “missing middle” housing can be done at the sector/master plan level, but that will result in a slow and potentially cumbersome rollout of the concept across the county. The report proposes a holistic, county-wide approach as the most effective path to encourage this change, whether through a zoning text amendment or a “Missing Middle Functional Master Plan.” Option A also supports the approach that *Thrive 2050* is developing regarding diverse and affordable housing options proximate to transit access as presented to the Board on April 16.

(map of Option A; description on previous page)



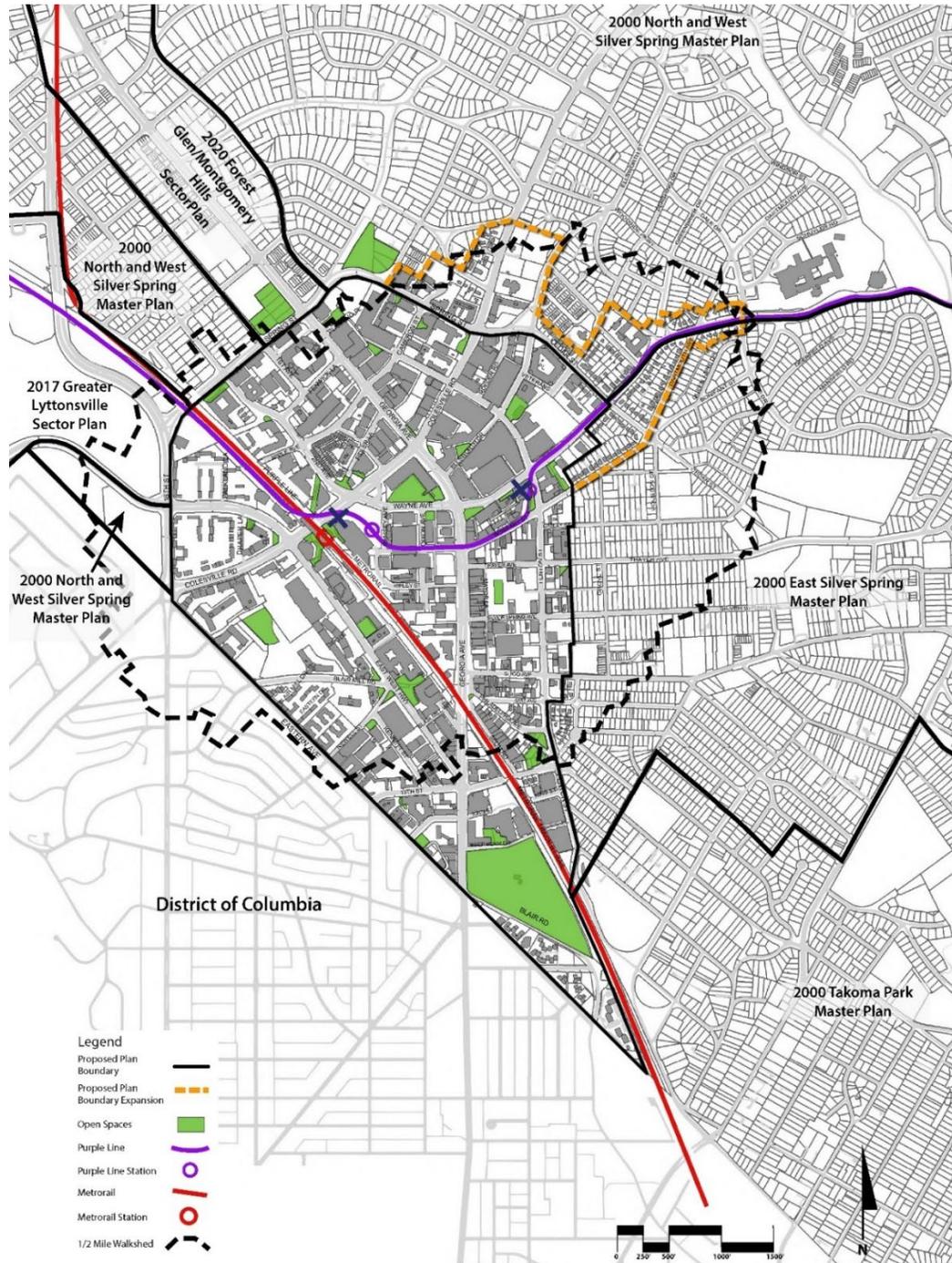
Option B: Neighborhood Edge Expansion

Option B expands the Plan Boundary one block into the neighborhoods to the north and east of downtown Silver Spring. The expansion boundary includes properties located on the north side of the Spring Street ring-road that connects the gateways of Georgia Avenue, Colesville Road and Wayne Avenue to downtown Silver Spring. Several of these properties are multi-family high-rise buildings, or commercial/medical office buildings. This expands the eastern edge of the plan boundary to Grove Street. This proposal does not include any properties within the recently approved *Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan*.



Option C: Transit Corridor Expansion

Consistent with the Board’s focus on transit access as a guide for expanding the Plan Boundary, Option C is a “transit corridor” expansion on either side of Colesville Road and Wayne Ave to the limit of the half-mile/ten-minute pedestrian walkshed from the future Silver Spring Library Purple Line Station.



Attachments:

1. Addendum to the Scope of Work - May 28, 2020
2. Scope of Work – March 26, 2020