



December 21, 2021

MCPB Item 4

Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan
Supplement: Revisions to 2.3 History of Silver Spring

Per the Planning Board's direction at Work Session #1 on December 9, 2021, Section 2.3 in the draft *Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan* is proposed to be revised as follows:

2.3 History of Silver Spring

Indigenous peoples have lived in Montgomery County and the surrounding region for over 10,000 years. The Piscataway and Nacotchtank appear to have used the river valleys mostly for occupation and relied on the adjacent uplands for temporary camps associated with hunting and obtaining materials such as workable stone, until European colonization.

In the 1800s, Silver Spring consisted of a crossroads community and plantations, including that of Francis Preston Blair, built upon an enslaved Black labor force. The opening of the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (1873) and the Washington, Woodside, and Forest Glen Railway & Power Company (1897) allowed for more housing and commercial opportunities in the area, limited primarily to whites. At the start of the twentieth century, developers of residential neighborhoods in Silver Spring often included racial restrictive covenants to bar Blacks (and people of other nationalities, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds) from the housing market. De jure and de facto segregation permitted Blacks to work in the plan area but excluded them from owning or renting property within its boundaries.

The opening of the Silver Spring Shopping Center and Silver Theatre (1938) and Hecht's Store (1947), along with associated infrastructure improvements, transformed Silver Spring from a bedroom community to a regional retail center with offices, shops, hotels, and other businesses, and a successful manufacturing and light industrial area near the train station. Segregation and discrimination in various forms continued to exclude non-white residents from many of the benefits of this growth.

During the Civil Rights movement, County residents, Black and white, fought for fair access to housing and public accommodations. Notable individuals during this period include: Mary Betters who served as President of the local branch of the NAACP, J. Charles Jones who directed the Action Coordinating Committee to End Segregation in the Suburbs (ACCESS), David Scull who led the County Council to pass the Fair Housing Ordinance, Morris Milgram who built the first integrated apartment housing in

greater Silver Spring, and Roscoe Nix who challenged business owners and held the County accountable for upholding its public accommodations law.

In the 1960s, Silver Spring's dominance as a regional shopping center declined with the opening of suburban malls. However, the arrival of new industries (such as financial institutions), increased federal services and reliance on contractors, and the shift of federal office space away from Washington, D.C. led to the rebranding of the plan area as a regional office destination. This office space, along with ample county-owned parking and accommodating zoning, led to the construction of several high-rise apartment buildings.

Office development of Silver Spring waned in the 1970s. Many pinned their hopes for the revitalization of Silver Spring on the opening of the Red Line of the Metro operated by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). Early plans for the line first sited the Silver Spring station on Georgia Avenue. Developers and the business community, however, successfully lobbied the County Council and WMATA to approve the station near its present-day location to service a proposed, but never realized mixed-use, high-rise redevelopment of the Falkland garden apartments. The station served as the terminus of the line when it opened in 1978, but it failed to spur revitalization. In part, the station's isolation from the Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road intersection dampened any immediate effects on the existing commercial and business districts.

The presence of the Metro station eventually led to the construction of high-rise office buildings. Regional developer Lloyd Moore built 1100 Wayne Avenue, the first consequential office tower in nearly a decade, in 1983. Developers then built a series of offices within the triangular area bound by Colesville Road, Georgia Avenue, and Second and Wayne Avenues. This included the Metro Plaza complex completed in 1987.

The burgeoning office environment did not coincide with revived retail. The closing of many of the mid-sized retailers followed by the Silver Spring Theatre (1984), Hecht's Department Store (1987), and J.C. Penney's (1989) left the area with a definitive void. The commercial vacancies, however, were filled by the establishment of a rich, ethnically diverse, local business community that continues today.

Montgomery County and local developers started to plan for the revitalization of Silver Spring in the mid-1980s. The first two proposals, the Silver Triangle and the American Dream, failed to be realized due to community opposition, extensive litigation, and inability to secure tenants or financing. Regional developer Lloyd Moore introduced the Silver Triangle proposal that included an enclosed mall with two department stores, a hotel, and four office buildings in 1988. The Silver Spring-Takoma Traffic Coalition led by Pat Singer and historic preservationists objected to the scale, traffic congestion, and demolition of historic resources including the Silver Spring Theatre and Shopping Center required by the proposal. After years of public hearings and approvals, Montgomery County and Lloyd Moore severed an agreement to build the mall in 1995. That same year, Triple Five proposed the American Dream, an urban entertainment mall with a wave pool, ice skating rink, indoor roller coaster, IMAX, hotel, restaurants, and retailers. Montgomery County entered a memorandum of understanding with the developers, but as with the Silver Triangle proposal, the plan faced community opposition and failed to secure necessary financing.

In 1997, Foulger-Pratt and the Peterson Company proposed the successful “Town Center” plan, later renamed “Downtown Silver Spring.” The project included a retail core with street-level entrances, public plaza, civic building, office building, and parking garage. The redevelopment plan included the restoration of the Silver Spring Shopping Center and Theatre.

While there are many immigrant communities in the plan area, the Ethiopian community has had particular success in Silver Spring and regards this urban area as a center for Ethiopian life and culture in the region. In the late 1990s, Ethiopians moved from Washington, D.C., to Silver Spring and Alexandria, Virginia. Ethiopian food became a defining element of downtown with at least a dozen current businesses operating in Fenton Village. Other organizations such as the Ethiopian Community Center of Maryland opened an office in Silver Spring to assist immigrants and further foster a sense of community. Since 2000, revitalization efforts envisioned by the Silver Spring Central Business District Sector Plan have seen the redevelopment of the Downtown Silver Spring retail core, the establishment of an arts and entertainment district including the reopening of the historic Silver Theatre, and the opening of the Discovery corporate headquarters. With this, the former light industrial areas west of Georgia Avenue have been redeveloped with multi-family housing and the Paul Sarbanes Transit Center has been completed at the Silver Spring Metro station. The 2000 Sector Plan also recommended several civic and community facilities that draw people to downtown Silver Spring today including the Civic Building and Veteran’s Plaza and the Silver Spring Library. In the coming years, both this Plan and the Purple Line light-rail system connecting Silver Spring to Bethesda and New Carrollton will create new opportunities for growth and development in the downtown.