



December 2, 2021

Mr. Casey Anderson, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board
2425 Reedie Drive, 14th Floor
Wheaton, Maryland 20902

Re: Downtown Silver Spring and Adjacent Communities

Dear Chair Anderson and Planning Board members –

Over the past 20 years, Silver Spring has grown into a major transit-oriented community, housing many diverse cultures, and a growing and unique small business retail market. Many new assets have materialized -- the new Silver Spring library, the Civic Building and Veterans Plaza, a new Recreation and Aquatic center (under construction) and the east/west Purple Line light rail (also under construction). Now it is time to plan for the next twenty years.

Sierra Club Montgomery Group supports transit-oriented development and the “15-minute living” concept, where people can access their everyday needs – schools, jobs, housing, restaurants, retail, parks and community amenities --- by walking, biking, rolling or transit.

The plan provides many opportunities for land-use that we support:

- Permit diverse housing types and unit sizes
- Promote mixed-income neighborhoods where exclusive single-family zoning is not a barrier to development
- Allow additional height in core downtown via flexible zoning
- Redevelop underused parking garages into mixed-use buildings. And since this is county-owned property, residential units should include 30% MPDUs to benefit more lower income households.
- Convert empty office space into residential units (this is currently happening)
- Office-to-School adaptive reuse of existing office buildings – other school districts have done this, for example Alexandria VA. (So, even if adding more housing were to increase the school population, this could serve as a remedy.)

In terms of energy use and climate threats:

- Solar-oriented buildings to maximize active and passive solar energy
- Stormwater management lays out goals, with some innovative treatments like combining stormwater treatment areas and pedestrian access by using permeable grid-decking in lieu of concrete sidewalks (Section 4.7.6)
- Assure innovative/integrated stormwater design as properties are redeveloped
- Prioritize urban tree canopy and green infrastructure, targeting the hottest streets
- Add new parks and open spaces; redevelop 14-acre Jesup Blair Park



Transportation opportunities we support:

- Dedicated Bus Lanes from SS Transit Center on Colesville Rd – all the way up to the Howard County Line!
- Dedicated Bus Lanes on Georgia Avenue -- adding BRT stations and stops
- Upgrade all bus shelters in downtown SS and provide real-time bus arrival display
- Green Loop (Central and Outer Loops), for pedestrians and bicyclists, will connect downtown to residential areas and to parks and open space thereby promoting active/healthy living

This plan outlines smart growth policies, transit-oriented development, comprehensive new bike/ped infrastructure, and methods to provide income-diverse housing for our growing population. The plan underscores preserving and adding green spaces, building an urban tree canopy, and upgrading stormwater management practices -- essential steps to cope with escalating climate change.

The Sierra Club Montgomery County Group is pleased to support the Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan.

Sincerely,

Shruti Bhatnagar, Chair
Sierra Club Montgomery County
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