



Montgomery County Council

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Montgomery County Council Approves Long Branch Sector Plan

Plan Will Guide Redevelopment of Community in Silver Spring

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ROCKVILLE, Md., November 19, 2013—The Montgomery County Council today approved the Long Branch Sector Plan that will guide revitalization of that section of Silver Spring.

The plan was approved by a vote of 8-1. Council President Nancy Navarro, Vice President Craig Rice and Councilmembers Phil Andrews, Roger Berliner, Valerie Ervin, Nancy Floreen, George Leventhal and Hans Riemer voted to approve the resolution on the sector plan. Councilmember Marc Elrich voted against it.

The Council's action today amended the 2000 East Silver Spring Master Plan and the 2000 Takoma Park Master Plan. In July, the Council held a public hearing on the plan as proposed by the County's Planning Board. The plan was then referred to the Council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee for review and recommendations. The committee held three worksessions on the plan and the full Council held a worksession on the plan on Sept. 24.

The Council's decision to eliminate the proposed second stage of the plan and to not rezone most of the large residential apartment complexes led to significant changes in the draft plan originally presented by the Planning Board.

The plan recognizes that development of the Purple Line—the proposed east-west transit line that will connect the Bethesda and New Carrollton Metrorail stations—will have significant impact on Long Branch and its real estate values. To prevent a loss of market affordable units, and potential displacement of lower-income residents, the Council amended the plan to retain the zoning on most of the existing multi-family developments.

The approved plan continues implementation of programs to make Long Branch a more walkable community, with an emphasis on pedestrian safety.

Among the items addressed in the approved plan was designation of the Flower Theatre on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. The plan is specific about retaining certain parts of the structure, including the theatre façade, two adjoining shoulders and a second wall to a depth of 40 feet from the theatre building line. The plan also calls for implementation of design guidelines to encourage compatible and appropriate future development nearby. The plan states that new buildings along Flower Avenue should not rise above the theatre's height.

"The Council's approval of the Long Branch Sector Plan is an important milestone for encouraging revitalization in preparation for the Purple Line station," said Council President Navarro. "More than a decade ago, I served on the Long Branch Revitalization Task Force. I am pleased that today we have voted to reflect the aspirations envisioned by the community in those discussions through our land use policy."

Councilmember Ervin said the approved plan addresses many aspects needed for the future redevelopment of Long Branch.

"By passing the Long Branch Sector Plan today, we have taken the next step toward realizing the dreams, hopes, and aspirations for Long Branch and its residents," said Councilmember Ervin, who represents District 5, which includes the Long Branch area. "This plan envisions a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, multi-cultural community that will be served by the Purple Line. This blue-print for potential future development will provide opportunities for increased mobility for residents, shoppers and workers in a way that will revitalize the area while maintaining a sense of community."

In efforts to help preserve affordable housing in Long Branch, the plan recommends CRT Zone optional method density incentives for developers. It also recommends the targeted use of tax credits and other financing tools that support public/private partnerships. The plan encourages live/work units in appropriate locations and provides for a range of unit sizes, including those accommodating larger families.

"With this plan, we hope we have created incentives for positive commercial redevelopment, while protecting the needs of existing community members," said Councilmember Floreen, who chairs the Council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee.

The approved plan encourages the retention of small businesses and neighborhood-serving commercial uses.

"This plan allows for targeted redevelopment of the commercial areas around the Purple Line, but preserves existing zoning for much of the housing in the

surrounding areas,” said Councilmember Riemer. “It represents a cautious and balanced approach that seeks to preserve existing communities while creating opportunities for new housing and a higher quality commercial core.”

Councilmember Leventhal said: “I’m very gratified. As a neighbor, I’ve wanted to see progress in Long Branch for years and I know that the mix of shopping and amenities today is unsatisfactory to nearby residents. The Purple Line is the one thing that could change the economic mix and make the neighborhood more attractive for investment. This plan enables that to happen, and it enables the ‘superblock’ between Flower, Arliss and Piney Branch to become a vital, mixed-use shopping and residential area, and that’s exciting. At the same time, we have protected the multi-family housing around it and we are leaving that alone to remain as affordable housing.”

Councilmember Elrich said he appreciated some of the plan, but voted against it because of other elements.

"I want to thank the Council for changes that adequately protect the apartments that so many people there call home," said Councilmember Elrich. "I am disappointed that we could not assure a similar level of protection for existing small businesses."

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