

Silver Spring Downtown & Adjacent Communities Plan

Testimony by George French, 2/17/22

I crafted and submitted testimony concerning this initiative to the Planning Board, 12/2/2021. I was put in one of the matrix summary boxes for comments that were completely, 100% opposite of my testimony in this regard. I stated NOT to renovate and construct more park “amenities” in Jesup Blair Park, but rather restore the Jesup Blair House and lease it to a group to further activate the Park which some people consider “underutilized.” There is an organization ready and able to activate and lease the Historic Mansion/House. That is Carpe Diem Arts run by the multitalented award winning founder and executive director, Busy Graham. They have had meetings with state and local government officials, the Parks Dept, architects, interested arts organizations and concerned individuals who would be willing to lease and program the House.

The Park is a Gem! Except for minor maintenance, let it be! Some may have the wrong impression about the recreation facilities available. There are lighted basketball courts that get no mention in the study, which gives the wrong impression of the perceived need for basketball courts. Parks sports a full size regulation soccer field which has myriad uses, jogging paths, amphitheater, and 2 tennis courts.

From the plan, staff seems as if they would turn the Historic Park into a circus park, or a carnival park or an amusement park. I am totally opposed to that concept. Please leave the Park alone. The Park is a Gem! It has 330 trees in its 15 acres; 20 of which are ancient oaks. The Park would make a wonderful Arboretum No dog park please with its attendant problems. In the Parks public dog park survey several parks were favored ahead of Jesup Blair Park; with patrons begging to receive a dog park. I believe the more requested parks were North Four Corners Park, Nolte, and one other.

Please request and read the comments that were left on the Montgomery Planning MCRReactMap website, requested by Parks and Planning offering comments on what is liked, not liked, and needs fixing about Jesup Blair Park. There are many good recommendations not collated or otherwise presented from this interactive site. Again, the BEST way to activate the Park further is to restore the Mansion and its Annex and lease to arts groups led by Carpe Diem Arts!

I am opposed to the Parks dept proposal to spend \$8 million to construct a one acre interim park at 1110 East West Hwy. A fraction of that amount could be used to restore the Jesup Blair House. Then the Plan is to spend millions more in the future, to expand this interim park by a half acre more and make it permanent. This is only 4 blocks from the Jesup Blair House and 3 blocks from Jesup Blair Park, a Park falsely perceived by many officials as “underutilized.” This begs the question of why have competing parks if you believe the established park is sparsely used. Please fix up the Mansion first before constructing the interim park. Restore the Mansion first, and then revisit the proposed new park later.

To safely access the Park and see that it has more users, set up more cross walks or enhanced cross walks on Ga. Av. and Blair Rd. for South Silver Spring patrons of the Park. The other answer is to fix up the mansion and lease to Carpe Diem Arts.

Here is the cost of the proposed Urban Park at 1110 East West Highway: \$7, 500,000 to acquire the 1 acre piece of land (from the Parks land acquisition fund) for the property. Then \$500,000 to demolish and land fill the NTB building, a useful business and the former Coca cola bottling plant, and set up an Interim park. Then spend around \$3,000,000 to \$4,000,000 (this is unspecified) for the half acre adjacent church property to expand the interim park to 1.5 acres. Other yearly costs associated with this endeavor: \$2,500 OBI (Operating Budget Impacts), initially for Interim park, expanding to \$5,000/yr for the completed park. Figures are from MOCO announcement.

George French, Takoma Park, MD