

## Silver Spring Downtown & Adjacent Communities Plan - Public Hearing scheduled Feb. 17, 2022

Testimony Submitted Feb. 9, 2022 by: John Parrish, Silver Spring, MD 20910

To: The Montgomery County Council

Dear Councilmember,

I am a 25 year resident of Woodside Park, one of the adjacent communities impacted by the Plan. My neighborhood, founded in the 1920's, is ethnically, racially and religiously diverse. Along with single-family detached homes, we have three town home clusters and homes with accessory apartments. My community lies within a 15-minute walk to shops in Silver Spring and Montgomery Hills. My community is a green oasis next to the gray Central Business District. My community conveys a sense of place due to its architecture, diversity, greenery, history and vigorous civic participation. Many in my community chose to live here due to these attributes and we would like our neighborhood character to remain intact.

Below I outline many areas of concern followed by recommendations to improve the plan.

### 1) The Adjacent Communities Component Would Take 16 Homes and a Church from our Neighborhood and Further Fragment our Woodside Park Community into Three Master Plan Areas.

I object to this plan because it would take a portion of my community and convert it to higher densities. This would come about by tearing down good homes to construct missing middle housing. The Silver Spring Downtown & Adjacent Communities Plan (Plan) would undermine the integrity of my community by destroying the historical housing stock, causing unnecessary impacts to trees and greenery, and by altering the zoning abutting our streets. The Plan would change our historic architectural character and have direct negative impacts to trees and landscaping surrounding our homes. Sixteen homes and church in my neighborhood are directly affected include the following addresses:

Colesville Road - 8808, 8900, 8904, 8908, 8910

Noyes Court - 1, 2, 3, 4

Noyes Drive - 1000, 1004, 1006, 1007, 1008, 1009

North Noyes Drive – 1000, 1006

### 2) The Proposed Zoning Change From R-60 to a CR Zone at the end of Cameron Court Would Raise the Building Height Limit From 35' to 100' Negatively Affecting my Community (see Map 16 page 80).

I object to this Plan because it would eliminate R-60 zoning from a parking lot and an adjacent playground area owned by the Unither Corporation surrounding the terminus of Cameron Court. This area abuts homes in Woodside Park on Noyes Drive, Fairview Road and Fairview Court is proposed to become a CR zone. A zoning change would allow more intrusive land uses that would negatively affect the quality of life for residents at 1008, 1020, 1024 and 1026 Noyes Drive, 8917 and 8919 Fairview Road and thirteen townhouse units at Fairview Court. Under the current R-60 zone, the maximum building height limit is 35 feet. If changed to a CR Zone the maximum building height is 100 feet. **Buildings of this size would cast a huge shadow over the homes listed above and darken the skyline for many more homes in my community, especially during winter months when the daily arc of the sun is low.** Simply put, this intrusion could heavily impact the quality of life for nearby residents. How is this acceptable or desirable? The R-60 zoning must remain in place to restrict building heights to 35 feet.

This Plan is one of many attempts to increase density in and around Woodside Park. Such efforts date back to the 1950's and run to the present day. During this time, M-NCPPC and the County Council changed zoning along Colesville Road, Spring Street, Fairview Road and Georgia Avenue. This has led to a steady encroachment of higher density housing and non-residential zoning at the edge of our beautiful community. **Now the Plan intrudes directly onto our streets!**

The following paragraphs outline additional areas of concern I have regarding this Plan.

### 3) Sidewalks Would lead to Loss of Trees in Woodside Park

Map 22 on page 127 indicates two sidewalks recommended in our neighborhood. It shows sidewalks on both sides of Noyes Drive from Colesville Road. **Construction of sidewalks would necessitate the destruction of over 30 young and old trees in the County right-of-way that beautify our streets.** Some of the trees are exceptional specimens. Woodside Park was originally designed without sidewalks with an intention to preserve the scenic park-like character of the neighborhood. **Building sidewalks in Woodside Park conflicts with a key goal of the Plan to “maintain mature tree canopy” in the adjacent communities.** If built, it will surely lead to more proposals to construct connecting sidewalks in my neighborhood at the expense of our trees and tree canopy. The loss of trees directly undermines the County's Climate Action Plan which seeks to increase tree cover in the County to counter CO2 emissions.

### 4) Zoning Map Error

Map 15, 'Existing Zoning' on page 79 indicates that the existing zoning on 5 lots in Woodside Park is CR Zone. The addresses include 1000, 1004, 1006, and 1008 Noyes Drive and 8808 Colesville Road. **This map is incorrect.** Current County zoning maps indicate these lots to be under R-60 zoning. **Please confirm the correct zoning and present the map accurately.**

### 5) Trees and Urban Tree Canopy Threatened by Higher Density Housing

One of the stated goals of the Plan is to: “maintain mature tree canopy by continuing to plant and replace street trees as needed.” At first glance this appears to be a worthy goal and is very worthy so long as existing mature trees are a high priority to protect and preserve. However, the Plan's statement can be construed that mature trees are expendable so long as they are replaced by planting new trees. The language in the Plan needs to be clarified to emphasize preserving mature trees in addition to planting trees where none currently exist. It takes many decades for trees to mature and provide maximum ecological services. Woodside Park has experienced a steady decline in tree canopy in recent decades due to severe storms, old age and lack of replanting. **Allowing higher densities in housing in the adjacent communities will inevitably lead to an acceleration of tree loss due to increased impacts to trees critical root zone areas as well as outright tree removal to accommodate new construction.** The downtown area has the greatest need for trees. I support an aggressive tree planting throughout this area.

### 6) Community Gardens and Food Security (page 154)

The community garden programs in the County have long been insufficient and under-funded to meet the high demand for gardening plots. It is great that this Plan calls for increased opportunities to garden, but it fails to identify specific places that could be suitable to meet the demand in the downtown area. Community gardens are especially important for those that reside in homes without a yard space. **The Plan should recommend specific public spaces for community garden use.** This could be on treeless parts of public parkland as well as other non-park public spaces lacking trees.

### 7) Delineation of the Adjacent Communities Boundary Splits our Community into Separate Master Plans

**The delineation of adjacent community boundaries in Woodside Park appears to be haphazard.** No explanation is provided to justify why one portion of my neighborhood is included while other areas are

excluded. For example, there are parts of my neighborhood that are excluded even though they are nearer to the current boundary of the downtown CBD compared to areas proposed to be included in the Plan. The delineations appear to be arbitrary and capricious. Please stay within the existing CBD and leave us out of the Plan. **For planning purposes our neighborhood should be under one master plan, not multiple plans.**

#### 8) Jesup Blair Park

This park is an exceptional green space. **It is the largest area of public green space in downtown Silver Spring and should be regarded as a gem.** I agree that it is good to keep the park activated to lessen crime and to offer a variety of recreational and contemplative spaces for people to enjoy. However, over the past twenty years, efforts to “activate” the park led to a massive loss of mature trees due to impacting their root zones with paved surfaces, excessive mulching, excessive wall structures and other intrusive construction projects. Special care needs to be exercised to assure that the remaining trees are respected and protected from harm when adding recreational amenities. The park has already suffered too much at the hands of well intentioned planners.

#### Recommendations:

- A) Eliminate the Adjacent Communities component of the Plan and focus housing density on the downtown CBD area. This will respect existing communities and help keep the tree canopy and green spaces intact. Woodside Park and other old communities should be under one master plan not several.
- B) Keep the R-60 zone intact for the area surrounding the end of Cameron Court. This will assure that Woodside Park residents are buffered from intrusive incompatible land uses by current and future land owners.
- C) Eliminate the proposal for sidewalks in Woodside Park on Noyes Drive. This will help maintain the tree canopy and preserve the historic park-like green character of the neighborhood.
- D) Add a serious community garden component to the Plan by making site specific recommendations. Nothing brings people together better than growing food together. This can provide much needed food security to low income residents and will strengthen community connections.
- E) Respect Jesup Blair Park for the gem it is. Keep construction projects completely outside the root zone areas of existing trees. Install pollinator friendly trees, shrubs and perennials to benefit bees and butterflies. Make sure park development plans result in an increase in trees and tree canopy.
- F) Provide more diverse housing types within the existing downtown area. There are many vacant and underused buildings in the CBD that can be retrofitted or rebuilt for more diverse housing.
- G) Aggressively plant trees, shrubs and flowerbeds throughout the downtown area. Provide the trees with adequate spaces for their roots to grow. Current standards do not always provide enough root zone space for the trees to thrive. If this means removing concrete, so be it.
- H) Revise the Plan to add sizable (>one acre) parks and green spaces. **The Plan fails to envision or seriously attempt to add sizable green spaces into the downtown area.** The most desirable and attractive towns and cities have sizable parks centered amid their urban districts. Rather, this Plan relies on green space at the periphery of the CBD to satisfy a green component even to the point of annexing surrounding neighborhoods. The interior of the Silver Spring downtown area would benefit greatly by

additional parks and green spaces that are more than an acre in size. This would help counter the urban heat island effect and beautify the core. Why not consider tearing down some vacant or underused buildings to convert into sizable parks and green spaces?

The proposed pocket parks and “greens” are desirable but are simply too small to significantly reduce urban heat island effects, treat storm water, nor would they provide adequate habitat for most species of native wildlife. The Plan cites the huge cost it would take to provide more parkland as an obstacle to providing it. Yet, we spend many hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to perform “restorations” to streams damaged by excessive impervious surfaces from urban environments such as Silver Spring. Our local streams, Sligo Creek, Fenwick Branch and Rock Creek will become cleaner only when we reduce the concentration of buildings and pavement and replace that with sizable pervious green spaces.

**It is sad that failures of past planning allowed for the destruction of the very spring that Silver Spring is named for.** Acorn Park is a pathetic reminder of the total disregard by past planners to keep enough acreage in natural condition to maintain the namesake spring. Burying streams by piping them underground is yet another sad example of disregard by planners. The least we can do is make a serious attempt to reverse the extent of environmental destruction in downtown Silver Spring. This will take a much bolder vision than is presented by this Plan. Green loops are but cosmetic distractions from the real problems our society faces with climate disruption, loss of biodiversity, species extinctions, declining water quality and over population. **Without the creation of sizable parks, downtown Silver Spring will remain an artificial landscape perpetuating the illusion that our human community is somehow separate from, and not dependent on, the well-being of the other species we share the planet with.**

#### Conclusion

Please revise the Plan to focus the high density housing within the existing downtown. Also, please remove some gray infrastructure and replace it with green infrastructure, and stay away from our green neighborhoods. Our future health and well-being depends on it.

Thank you for considering and acting on my comments.

Sincerely,

John Parrish