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Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Master Plan

WHERE ARE THE ARTS IN THE DOWNTOWN SILVER SPRING MASTER PLAN?

The SSDAC is an ambitious master plan, proposing in the next 20 years to double the size of the current population (to 46,300); to double employment (to 44,000); and to create 11,000 new “multifamily” residences. (p. 76) . There are already 34 high-rise, multifamily buildings with 12,000 units built in Downtown. This plan seeks to make Silver Spring the “premier” office destination in the next 20 years (p.87) with office towers up to 300-360 feet in height (p.78)

There is a serious omission in the Master Plan that continues almost entirely throughout the 190 pages of the draft. **The arts, culture, entertainment, and nighttime economy** of Silver Spring are conspicuously absent, or without substantive information, in virtually the entirety of the SSDAC master plan text. In the Plan’s Appendices, the arts are mentioned primarily (Outreach Appendix) with random positive comments by the public as a desire to expand art, jazz, clubs and nightlife.

The SSDAC Master Plan **fails almost completely to address the role of arts and entertainment (including the night-time economy) in Downtown Silver Spring** as mainstream integral parts of the “Downtown” and certainly key to Silver Spring’s economic success (as well as the well-being of a growing local population) now and for the future. At their best the arts are transformative in shaping and improving the lives and well-being of youngsters, families, seniors, the disabled and people in under-resourced areas.

It is a shocking display of ignorance by the planners, and needs to be corrected immediately by the Planning Department and Planning Board --with research, data, metrics and recommendations added to the master plan **to integrate the arts into every aspect of the Downtown development.**

Numerous arts and cultural venues (theaters, concert halls, studio spaces etc) in Silver Spring have matured as cultural assets over the past 20 years; professionals in the visual and performing arts – as well as retirees and volunteers --have contributed their time and talent to the arts; and events such as the *2019 Downtown Jazz Festival* have generated millions of dollars in revenue and tax dollars.

Arts, entertainment and the night-time economy can help grow the Downtown by attracting new employers, new businesses and new residents including families. *There are more arts and entertainment assets (buildings/venues, in Silver Spring than virtually any other Urban District in Montgomery County.*

How is it possible that the people drafting – with Planning Board review – the Master Plan could be so willfully ignorant of the assets and potential to capture economic and community-building opportunities in their recommendations for future Downtown development?

This is a plain vanilla development plan without the enrichment that makes an urban area a great place to work, live and spend leisure time... in other words, *to thrive*.

RECOMMENDATIONS –AN INITIAL LIST

- Create a Master Plan Appendix on Arts and Entertainment for the official SSDAC Master Plan that includes research, data, metrics and supports the addition of Recommendations into the final SSDAC Master Plan
- Consolidate any/all text/recommendations on the “arts” from the current draft Master Plan into a **chapter or dedicated section that allows for public comment and for revisions and additions**
- Update the *Night-Time Economy study* from 2013 to determine the assets and potentials of night-time economy (bars, clubs, restaurants, theater, movies etc) as economic generator
- “Connecting the Districts” (see 2.2) Create a SSDAC Master Plan Map (and wayfinding system) that identifies all arts and entertainment sites, to establish connectivity and public wayfinding—for incorporation into the Master Plan and in street graphics
- Identify buildings in Fenton Village/ South Silver Spring—as well as willing building owners-- to permanently donate space (or provide space for indoor “tactical urbanism”) for arts uses; temporary spaces for classes, exhibitions, window art or murals, visual arts
- Use the Connectivity and Infrastructure Fund (p.78) to provide for development of Downtown arts and entertainment
- Establish a permanent, professional mural arts program with juried competitions for mural art that enhances public spaces in the Downtown -- alleys, byways, underpasses, permanent undeveloped/exposed walls of existing building (See Philadelphia Mural Program)
- Add a commitment to the SSDAC Master Plan (goal) for facilities and opportunities for underserved youth populations in the arts

WHAT IS MISSING FROM THE SSDAC PLAN !!

Economic Development (Section 3.5 p.87): In less than 2 pages, the Master Plan offers a limited number of goals and recommendations approved by the Planning Board for the next 20 years of development in Silver Spring: The primary goal is to “make Silver Spring into a premier office destination.”

This section focuses on the need for “policies and interactions that attract jobs to fill empty office space” before new development of commercial space can be achieved. (p.84)

The plan identifies Downtown as having “a vibrant retail market with sizeable clusters of diverse and independent retailers...” at the same time lamenting the number of vacant and underutilized spaces in several Downtown areas such as Fenton Village (p.84).

The arts are given no acknowledgment as contributors – real and projected into the future-- to bolster economic resilience and community vitality of the Silver Spring area. No metrics, no data in Appendices

“**Arts and entertainment venues**” are barely mentioned in Section 3.5, along with a passing mention of “civic amenities,” lacking any substantive description or depth.

Community Facilities: At 3.8 of the Downtown Master Plan (pp. 158-59) The draft plan lumps together “community facilities” such as the AFI Silver Theater, firehouse, library, farmers’ market and eldercare center as achievements over the past 20 years, plus a County Aquatic and Recreation Center now under development in a private-sector development. It skips entirely many additional facilities that serve arts and entertainment functions (*see Background & Assets subhead below, pp 5-8*).

Lumped together, the facilities listed above are hardly equivalent assets-- – given that the farmers market is an outdoor portable venue occurring on a privately owned street; and the firehouse (with emergency medical service) is an essential service, a safety net for the community.

3.8 suggests that given the wealth of new facilities over the past 20 years (firehouse, library) that few-to-no new “community” facilities should be considered. This probably also extends to assets that need updating (the Civic Center), renovation into functioning arts venues, and especially full restoration for use of Jesup Blair House, to reach their full potential in serving the public. This needs to be revised and addressed.

SSDAC MASTER PLAN PAGE BY PAGE

The Summary (Section 1.7 p. 18) No mention of the arts . Emphasis is bioscience, technology and education. Page 8: “Investment in civic spaces, the arts, and street-activating retail together with the relocation of Discovery...brought new energy and economic vitality to the CBD.”

p.26 Consider additional engaging contributions from local artists along the wall of the tunnel. (Georgia underpass)

2.3.1 Ellsworth District “New development should strengthen Civic Building and Veterans Plaza as primary center of activity and gathering...” (No arts recommendations)

2.3.2 Fenton Village “ Build on relationships with nearby Artspace SS and Montgomery College to further expand opportunities for public art and arts-related uses.” (No arts recommendations)

2.3.3 Metro Center (No arts recommendations)

2.3.4 Ripley Parks (No arts recommendations)

2.3.5 So Silver Spring “ Collaborate with Montgomery College to expand educational and science and technology programs in South SS” (No arts recommendations) . Reimagine JB Park

2.3.6 Downtown North District (No arts recommendations)

2.3.7 Falklands Historic preservation (No arts recommendations)

2.3.8 Adjacent Communities (No arts recommendations)

3.0 Planwide Recommendations (pp.7-78) No arts

3.2 Economic Growth (p.84) “It is home to arts and entertainment venues...” Goals: No arts recommendations

3.3 Housing/ 3.4 Urban design (tactical urbanism, placemaking) No arts recommendations

3.5 Parks/Trails/Public Spaces (p.94) “multi-use parks” Goals: “Promote economic prosperity by creating fun and appealing park facilities and programming that energize Silver Spring while **celebrating its rich history and vibrant culture.**”

3.5.2 Recommendations(p.96) “Celebrate SS’s Culture and History- Promote facilities that celebrate cultural and historic aspects of the community.... The proposed Cultural Arts Loop in JB Park.. a venue to celebrate more inclusive SS history. (*What about arts that do not serve an historical purpose?*)

3.5.4/C1 Renovate Jesup Blair Park. (p. 105) “Wayfinding and public art along Fenton Street.”

No reference to Montgomery College’s Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Arts Center, in close proximity to Jesup Blair Park, for the park redevelopment.

p. 106 Art crossings for two pedestrian crossings on Georgia Avenue

p.107 “improve connectivity of the JB historic house” (*there is NO recommendation to restore and use JB House for the arts and arts outreach*)

p. 107 Cultural Art Loop: : recreational and cultural art trail loop... with fitness equipment” (???)

3.8 p. 156 Community facilities “as a result of these efforts over 20 years [library, firehouse, restoration of AFI Silver Theatre] few new community facilities are being recommended in this plan.” (**None were found**)

3.8.3 Montgomery College p. 157 “The Plan recommends working with the College to explore and develop opportunities to expand the campus program in South Silver Spring. (*Very weak statement with no supporting material*)

3.9 Historic Resources p. 166 Mentions historic buildings: Silver Spring Theatre, the Fillmore.

p. 167 Recommends adaptive use of the SS Shopping Center *parking lot* for active uses

p. 176 Recommends interpretation (street markers) of historic sites related to racial discrimination , the Ethiopian community, Roscoe Nix

Section 4.1.1 Connectivity and Infrastructure Fund (CIF)/ 4.1.2 Building Heights Incentive Zone (No arts mentioned as projects or benefits)

Section 4.1.3 Fenton Village Overlay Zone No arts recommendations

Section 4.1.4 Ripley/South SS No arts/arts facilities recommendations

Section 4.1.12 Public Benefits in CR Zones (no arts/arts facilities listed as public benefits)

Section 4.3 p. 184 Capital Improvements: Proposes park named for Rachel Carson (on private land ?)

Section 4.5 Partnerships (p. 187) “The Sector Plan supports the priorities of...the Arts and Entertainment District in their common mission **to provide public services and amenities to the members of the downtown Silver Spring Communities.**” *(Please read this several times !!)*

“Use arts and culture to celebrate the past, present and future **cultures that are part of the Silver Spring community.**” *(Arts must have wider audience than people in Downtown Communities!)*

Section 4.5.2 (pp. 188/189) Arts and Entertainment District Recommendations:

(189) “Create an Arts & Entertainment Plan that identifies sustained resources for an arts and entertainment **management entity** commensurate with SS’s potential... grow the district’s offerings, programming, activities and marketing.”

(189)“Partner with property owners to capture underutilized street-level retail spaces to create an arts incubator...”

(189) “New public art...should **represent and support the diverse communities of Silver Spring.**”

Appendices: *No Arts & Entertainment Appendix*

BACKGROUND & DOWNTOWN ASSETS

(Note: Some of the text below is drawn directly from arts organization web sites)

Silver Spring has more arts and entertainment facilities than any other Downcounty location in Montgomery County MD.

The Night-Time Economy: In 2013 a study of the *Night-Time Economy of Montgomery County* was conducted with Messrs Albornoz, Glass, Jawando and others. There is NO reference to the night-time economy and its potential benefits anywhere in the SSDAC Master Plan. Oct 28, 2013

http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/NighttimeEconomy/Resources/Files/NETF_Final_Report.pdf

The Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District: In 2001, The Silver Spring **Arts and Entertainment District** (SSDAC pp 188-189) was granted a State of Maryland charter with special tax abatement

privileges for (businesses) that are eligible. "In FY16, the economic impact of Silver Spring's festivals and public events generated \$118,948,287 in visitor spending [Maryland's Arts and Entertainment Districts Impact Analysis, Regional Economic Studies Institute]." (See pp 188/189 of SSDAC Plan)

<https://silverspringdowntown.com/arts-and-entertainment-district>

From the A/E website: "The benefits offered to designated districts include property tax credits for new construction or renovation of certain buildings that create live-work space for artists and/or space for arts and entertainment enterprises, an income tax subtraction modification for income derived from artistic work sold by "qualifying residing artists", and an exemption from the Admissions and Amusement tax levied by an "arts and entertainment enterprise" or "qualifying residing artist" in a district." **These are all tools that can be used for future economic and community development in every part of Downtown, but the SSDAC Plan fails to mention them at all.**

The Silver Spring Arts and Entertainment District was designated on December 31, 2001 as an Arts and Entertainment District by the State of Maryland. Maryland's Arts & Entertainment (A&E) Districts help develop and promote community involvement, tourism and business revitalization **through tax-related incentives** that attract artists, arts organizations and other creative enterprises.

Silver Spring is now home to over 50 arts and humanities organizations, popular arts venues, entertainment businesses, etc. which attract hundreds of thousands of visitors. In FY16, the economic impact of Silver Spring's festivals and public events generated \$118,948,287 in visitor spending [Maryland's Arts and Entertainment Districts Impact Analysis, Regional Economic Studies Institute].

Maryland is one of the first states in the country to develop Arts and Entertainment Districts on a statewide basis. The benefits offered to designated districts include property tax credits for new construction or renovation of certain buildings that create live-work space for artists and/or space for arts and entertainment enterprises, an income tax subtraction modification for income derived from artistic work sold by "qualifying residing artists", and an exemption from the Admissions and Amusement tax levied by an "arts and entertainment enterprise" or "qualifying residing artist" in a district. This district is supported in part by the [Maryland State Arts Council](#)

The **AFI Silver Theater and Cultural Center**: A designated historic building in Silver Spring, the AFI Silver was completed in April 2003 at a cost of \$20 million and includes multiple theater/event spaces and an experimental black box theater. Its main auditorium hosts the "DC Metro area's third-largest commercial movie theater screen, and the second-largest commercial movie theater screen outside of the [Smithsonian Institution](#)" Academy-Award winning actor/director Clint Eastwood was a keynote speaker at the Grand Opening April 4, 2003. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b12qHbBQqBk>

"The AFI Silver undoubtedly will become an internationally known landmark in the world of film," [said then-] Montgomery County Executive Douglas Duncan.

"The \$20 million rehab is being called the "crown jewel" of a larger \$400 million project aimed at transforming Silver Spring into an arts and entertainment destination." (*Washington Post*)

The AFI Silver is the result of a restoration project for the original Silver Theatre in Silver Spring, designed by [movie palace](#) architect [John Eberson](#) and constructed in 1938.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AFI_Silver

<https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/stories/2003/04/14/focus7.html><https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2003/02/13/its-almost-showtime-for-new-afi-theater/d25b932b-588a-4267-86ce-d116e8726545/>

The Fillmore: In the former JC Penney Building, the structure was renovated at a cost to taxpayers of \$11.2 million, into a 2000-person stand-up club/venue approved in a lease-deal with Live Nation (the world's largest entertainment company) by the Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett with special economic benefits to serve as a contemporary music/entertainment venue that would attract a different audience to Downtown, with a lengthy lease and annual leasing fee of \$90,000. The original lease states required use for community events and nonprofit fundraisers.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/fillmore-silver-spring-makes-splashy-entrance-on-dcs-concert-scene/2011/09/01/glQA5DjLfk_story.html

The SS Library: Built at a cost of \$69.7 million, the Library offers additional flexible space for educational/cultural activities. Tenants have included the Levine School and formerly, the Gandhi Brigade (a youth media arts program) as tenants in the building. The Levine School continues to operate "Levine Music" as a place for a wide range of music instruction.

<https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/news/take-a-look-inside-the-new-silver-spring-library/#:~:text=Hundreds%20of%20people%20attended%20the,portion%20cost%20about%20%2435%20million.>

Levine Music: At its Silver Spring campus, "Levine Music students find a diverse range of musical activities, a supportive environment, and dedicated teachers to challenge their creative limits and to guide them. In addition to traditional one-on-one music education, such programs as their Summer Camp, Early Childhood and Elementary Music program, and adult Community Choruses foster musical discovery in inviting group settings. They encourage students to join in our jazz ensembles, chamber music groups, choruses, musical theatre, and rock groups, to gather with friends informally around a musical activity, and to participate in collaborative programs with other leading music and arts organizations across the National Capital region.

"Levine Music also believes that opportunities to hear great musicians, and to perform, can be important parts of a well-rounded music education. **Levine's performance series (Levine Presents) offers master classes with visiting artists of international renown and faculty performances in prominent venues.**"

<https://silverspringdowntown.com/go/levine-music>

Montgomery College in Takoma/Silver Spring: With 7800 students from 140 countries (and 100 areas of study) the College features a School of Art and Design. It has multiple active arts and cultural facilities

on Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring, open to public participation. It offers program of events, ranging from a free concert by the Baltimore Symphony (Feb 6 2022) to the Annual Marlow guitar concert series, with a paid subscription of hundreds countywide.

Montgomery College Cultural Arts Center : “Located on Montgomery College's Takoma Park/Silver Spring campus (7995 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, MD), The CAC complex was designed by The SmithGroup and opened in 2009. The complex consists of a 500 seat main multi-use concert hall & theatre space (Theatre I), a 116 seat lecture hall or laboratory theatre space (Theatre II), a dance studio (Dance Cube), the Cultural Arts Center Gallery, a film editing lab, and multiple classrooms for academic classes and workshops. All of these gathering spaces are immediately adjacent to our large main lobby, or atrium. A large marquee faces north at the intersection of Georgia Avenue and East-West Highway and informs the community about events occurring in the Cultural Arts Center.

“Through the programs of the Cultural Arts Center, we seek to improve cultural literacy, encourage cross-cultural understanding, and to build bridges between the arts, cultural studies, and all disciplines concerned with the expression of culture. We seek to acknowledge the differences and similarities between our own cultures and those surrounding us. In order to meet this mission, the CAC provides a comprehensive program focusing on the cultural intersection of the arts, sciences, humanities, and social sciences, and the influence of human culture on the natural and built environments. We examine traditional and contemporary indigenous, American, and international cultural expression through presentation of music, theatre, dance, cultural exhibitions, film, lectures, forums and cultural exhibitions. Through less formal gatherings we encourage opportunities for our students, the community, faculty, and staff to gather and engage in discussions about our own and other cultures. The programs of the CAC, and the CAC facility supports all areas of the campus including student life, academic programs of all kinds, and external community use in the form of performances, workshops and conferences. We frequently provide opportunities addressing campus and college-wide initiatives related to diversity and multiculturalism.” <https://mcblogs.montgomerycollege.edu/cac/>

The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Arts Center (Montgomery College): The visual arts and design programs at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus are held in the award-winning new Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Arts Center, located right across the pedestrian bridge from the main campus.

“Situated between the 14 acres of historic Jesup Blair Park and the College's architecturally distinctive performing arts center, the facility has much to offer. You'll find spacious, modern studios and labs for ceramics, sculpture, printmaking, crafts, weaving, drawing, design, painting, as well as traditional and digital photography. A tiered lecture hall provides ample space for art history classes and presentations.

“The King Street Gallery, with its exposed infrastructure and open ceilings, offers a grand space for discovering art. A diverse and thoughtful series of art exhibitions enhances the total educational experience. Students also have the convenience of their own digital labs, art library, art supply/book store, and snack bar as they study, learn, and create inside this unique arts

facility.” <https://silverspringdowntown.com/go/montgomery-college-morris-and-gwendolyn-cafritz-art-center>

Montgomery College Black Box Theater

<https://silverspringdowntown.com/go/montcoll-at-tp-black-box-theatre>

NOAA AUDITORIUM AND SCIENCE CENTER

<https://silverspringdowntown.com/go/noaa-auditorium-and-science-center>

OTHER ASSETS There are over 50 studios, galleries, venues, black box theaters, intimate venues in the study area for concerts, music and dance instruction, major motion pictures, independent film, film festivals, literary events, media arts, and public jazz festivals. **These facilities and offerings are substantially more robust than almost any nearby location in Montgomery County MD.** Link

CARPE DIEM ARTS – “Bringing the Arts to Life” (founder Busy Graham) is one of the most prolific arts and cultural presenting organizations in Montgomery County, with strong ties to Silver Spring, and a deep commitment to underserved youth and communities. CARPE DIEM is seeking permanent residence for a multi-purpose arts facility-- in a fully restored Jesup Blair House in a fully renovated JB Park (104-110). The SSDAC Master Plan does not commit to full restoration and reuse of JB House
<https://www.carpediemarts.org/>

PEOPLE IN THE ARTS & LETTERS:

Silver Spring, including its “adjacent neighborhoods” has been the hometown or (current) residence of a variety of accomplished people in the arts and letters, as well as the entertainment field. This is historically noteworthy –given the emphasis in the SSDAC Master Plan on legacy businesses in Fenton Village and the desire to acknowledge people who, in the history of Silver Spring, have shaped national policy. These individuals from the arts, letters and entertainment fields should be recognized as part of Silver Spring history and included in an Arts & Entertainment Appendix to the SSDAC Master Plan. [*All names need to be rechecked.*]

Author and environmentalist Rachel Carson

Goldie Hawn (actress) attended Blair HS

Carl Bernstein (journalist)

Ben Stein (humorist and commentator)

George Pelecanos (author of 20 books)

David Maraniss (journalist, biographer, Pulitzer Prize winner)

Sylvester Stallone (check attended Woodlin ES and Blair HS) Father was a barber in Silver Spring

Dave Chappelle (comedian) attended Woodlin, Springbrook HS

Lewis Black (comedian)

Connie Chung (journalist, tv anchor) graduated from Blair HS

Mike Ehrmantrout (actor “Mike” on *Breaking Bad*; *Better Call Saul*)

Annie Leibovitz (photographer)

(continues on next page)

Ann McGovern Scheiner (celebrated writer of “Golden” books for children) lived in Woodside Forest
Valerie Tripp (author of American Girl book series) lives in Silver Spring
Michael Dirda (critic, writer, Pulitzer Prize winner) lives in Woodside Park

✿END✿