



SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

January 26, 2021

Marc Elrich, County Executive
Montgomery County

[*Delivered via e-mail*]

Advice from the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board re:

FOULGER-PRATT ELLSWORTH DRIVE PROJECT

Dear County Executive Marc Elrich:

In October 2020, Foulger-Pratt updated the community about plans for the redevelopment of Ellsworth Place. They shared how they had tweaked their plans based on community feedback over the past year, including adding a water feature and making some changes to the layout to meet requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board continues to have concerns about the upcoming redevelopment of Ellsworth Drive that we ask Foulger-Pratt and County decisionmakers to consider.

Specific issues include:

1. **The water feature.** Community members were pleased to learn that a water feature will be added due to their requests to replace the current fountain with something similar. Parents--and some people without children--expressed concern that the space may be less kid-friendly than in the past.
2. **Accessibility and inclusiveness of the redesigned space.** More importantly, CAB members, disability advocates, and numerous members of the public are not satisfied with the inaccessibility of Foulger Pratt's plan. This is a critical public policy matter and we encourage you, Mr. Elrich, and other public servants who have roles in this project to be strong proponents of accessibility at every step. Since this redevelopment was announced, Silver Spring CAB members have encouraged Foulger Pratt's leadership to see ADA as the bare minimum and asked them to implement accessibility features that go beyond that minimum (such as installing power doors in the shops facing Ellsworth Drive, none of which are currently automated). The firm has not responded to that request, but has reiterated commitment to complying with the law.

We encourage you to prioritize accessibility and encourage the firm to be more inclusive before the project is underway. The accessibility concern is that the planned artificial turf lawn ringed by a concrete sidewalk will not be accessible for people using certain mobility devices. People using walkers, non-powered medical scooters, manual wheelchairs, and canes have reported negative experiences with artificial turf. Many concerns relate to slip resistance, others to the difficulty of using mobility devices on the turf in wet and dry conditions alike. It is possible, though not certain, that current plans for the space will not fully meet ADA requirements. Foulger Pratt could ensure the accessibility of the space without abandoning artificial turf altogether by: 1) adding additional concrete sidewalks crossing the lawn, and 2) ensuring that the

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amenities located on the lawn will be easily accessible to people on the sidewalks who cannot easily move across the turf.

3. **Space for outdoor winter dining.** We request that Foulger-Pratt and County government be more supportive of outdoor dining this winter, leveraging Ellsworth Drive's and Veterans Plaza. Residents have strongly voiced the need and desire for more outdoor dining and gathering space in Downtown Silver Spring for months. Every outdoor dining space available over the summer was filled to capacity; we need more safe spaces like this, not fewer. Foulger-Pratt could meaningfully help by making space available on Ellsworth Drive, even if the road remains mostly open to cars. The County could help by using Veterans Plaza. Local restaurant owners and employees face a significant disadvantage compared to those located in other local food destinations, such as downtown Bethesda. So do hungry, socially isolated Silver Spring residents who want to help our neighbors and favorite places make it through the pandemic.
4. **Moving and preserving SILVER SPRING sign.** Community members love the iconic Silver Spring sign at the southeast corner of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road, which is slated for demolition as part of the project. If all parties agree, we encourage the County and Foulger-Pratt to relocate the sign to County property at the corner of Fenton and Bonifant streets, adjacent to the future site of the Silver Spring Library Purple Line station. The curvature of the existing stone wall at that location closely matches that at the intersection of Georgia and Colesville and would both preserve the signage, which has become a Silver Spring landmark, and add luster to this increasingly vibrant area on the edge of the urban district.

Ellsworth Drive has, since it opened 15 years ago, been a place where everyone in the Silver Spring community is welcome and everyone has a reason to go. We need public leadership to ensure that Ellsworth Drive remains a space for everyone--especially families, disabled people, and older residents. Please continue championing these issues as the project moves forward; now that the public engagement period is over, county leaders are best positioned to make a difference. Silver Spring CAB members would be happy to discuss this further with you or your staff.

Sincerely, on behalf of the SSCAB,

Lysette House*
Chair

Sofia Bushen*
Vice-Chair

Parliamentarian
Melanie Funder Kaye*

Secretary
Katherine Lucas McKay*

(*Signatures on file)

CC:

Montgomery County Council Members
Reemberto Rodriguez, Silver Spring Regional Area Director
Members of the SSCAB