

VETO OF SILVER SPRING BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT



SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

August 2nd, 2021

Council President Tom Hucker

[Delivered via e-mail]

Advice from the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board re:

VETO OF SILVER SPRING BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

Dear Councilmembers,

On March 19, 2021 the Silver Spring Citizen's Advisory Board sent an advice letter to you, the County Council, and the County Executive, concerning the Silver Spring Business Improvement District (BID). In that letter, the SSCAB raised numerous concerns with the current structure of the BID, particularly around a lack of accountability and support for local minority business owners. At this time, it does not appear that our questions have been addressed by Mr. Steve Silverman or any other council members in charge of the BID project. We have attached a copy of our original letter. In voting to approve the BID, a precedent is being created that endangers the locally owned business community we wish to support.

Mr. Silverman, along with Council President Hucker and Councilmember Reimer held an open meeting on May 27, 2021 that many of the SSCAB Board members attended. Our hope was that the questions raised in our initial advice letter, or questions raised by board members during the meeting, would be answered in a collaborative spirit. Instead, it appears answers to questions raised by the board have either been indirectly answered or answered with embellishments. For example, after the May 27 meeting, SSCAB member John Seelke, writing of his own accord not representing the SSCAB, sent Mr. Silverman, Council President Hucker and Councilmember Reimer direct questions about the BID. In one response, Mr. Silverman stated SSCAB Board member and local business owner Lene Tsegaye was approached to be on the BID board but declined the position. Ms. Tsegaye disputes this description, stating she asked for more information prior to considering a board position but did not decline it. There is also confusion on the makeup of the board. In a response to John Seelke, Mr. Silverman stated "WE ARE SETTING ASIDE 3 SMALL BIZ BOARD SEATS AND 2 SMALL PROP OWNERS ON A FIVE MEMBER BOARD" (Capitals are from Mr. Silverman). It is not clear if these are the only members of the board or if the board will have other members.

Ms. Tsegaye is also a member of the board of Fenton Village Inc (FVI), which sent a letter on June 11, 2021 to the County Council signed by 42 local businesses, many of which are owned by people of color, asking the Council to slow the process of moving the BID forward. That second letter was a follow up to a May 28 letter sent by FVI, asking many direct questions to Mr. Silverman about the BID. In a response to the FVI, Mr. Silverman repeated the comment he offered Ms. Tsegaye and Susan Peterkin were offered board position, a claim both people deny. FVI also noted how the presentation about the BID on May 27 did not incorporate any of the current festivals, many of them celebrating the diversity of Silver Spring, in their

VETO OF SILVER SPRING BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

presentation.

The lack of transparency and the dismissive attitude of Mr. Silverman is highly disturbing. We propose at least three other alternatives be considered:

Added funding to the Urban District to assist with the rebranding of Silver Spring, including a stronger presence online, more support for the Red Shirts to assist with clean up, and maintenance of the Silver Spring region.

The pursuit of a Main Street program, or an organization that currently exists in Takoma Park MD (Main Street Takoma), that brings together numerous businesses in the local area to “sustain a vibrant commercial district and preserve the neighborhood’s rich history.” (mainstreettakoma.org) Such a non-profit would not be limited to the current board structure proposed by the BID.

In the same way advocacy worked to lower the number of properties supporting the BID from 80 percent to 51 percent, proponents should advocate to change laws regarding the makeup of the BID board (as opposed to the small number currently allowed under Maryland law.)

The Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board requests you vote in support of the veto of County Executive Elrich. By continuing down the path of the BID, we leave out our counties most beloved local, minority owned businesses and grow the schism of wealth and opportunity in Montgomery County.

Lysette House*
Chair

Sofia Bushen*
Vice-Chair

Parliamentarian
Melanie Fonder Kaye*

Secretary
Katherine Lucas McKay*

*(*Signatures on file)*

CC:

Montgomery County Council Members
Jacob Newman, Silver Spring Regional Area Director
Members of the SSCAB