



June 8, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: Clare Lise Kelly, Research and Designation Coordinator *CLK*
Historic Preservation Office

VIA: Scott Whipple, Historic Preservation Supervisor *SW*
Mary Dolan, Acting Chief, Functional Planning and Policy Division *MD*

SUBJECT: Silver Spring Baptist Church (Resource #36/61): Determination whether to prepare and transmit a Public Hearing Draft Amendment

STAFF RECOMMENDATION – Provide guidance to staff on whether to prepare and transmit a Public Hearing Draft Amendment

BACKGROUND

The Silver Spring Historical Society nominated the Silver Spring Baptist Church property for historic designation and submitted a completed Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties form.¹ The resource, known historically as the Silver Spring Baptist Church and now as the First Baptist Church of Silver Spring, is located at the intersection of Wayne Avenue and Fenton Street, at the edge of the Silver Spring CBD and the gateway to the Fenton Village neighborhood. Nominated structures include a 1956 modernist sanctuary, designed by Ronald Senseman; the Colonial Revival parsonage (1925; 1931); the 1931 auditorium extending behind the parsonage; and a 1950 temporary sanctuary. The Silver Spring Baptist Church property is not currently identified on the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*.

Under the Historic Preservation Commission’s approved Executive Regulations, the HPC must review submitted nominations and forward a recommendation to the Planning Board. On March 23, 2011, the Historic Preservation Commission evaluated the Silver Spring Baptist Church. The HPC voted not to recommend the Silver Spring Baptist Church for addition to the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites* and not to recommend inclusion in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.

¹ In a May 17, 2011 letter, Silver Spring Historical Society President Jerry McCoy notified the Board “that the Silver Spring Historical Society has transferred to Marcie Stickle and George French the official role of nominators of the Silver Spring Baptist Church complex.”

Historic resources are reviewed through the update of area master plans, as part of an ongoing evaluation of the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*, or, as in the present case, through nominations by the public. As a nomination received from the public, the evaluation of the Silver Spring Baptist Church is not in the Planning Board’s current work program. Because this resource is outside the Board’s work program and the HPC has found that the resource does not merit designation, staff is seeking guidance from the Planning Board as to whether the Board wants to initiate a Public Hearing Draft Amendment. If the Board directs staff to prepare a Public Hearing Draft Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation, it must be done in accordance with Chapter 33A of the Montgomery County Code.

Included with this staff report are the Maryland Historical Trust inventory form (“research form”), nomination request, and public submittals received to date. Materials are available at <http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic/silverspringbaptistchurch/>. Organizations in addition to the Silver Spring Historical Society that have provided testimony in support of historic designation include the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Preservation Maryland; Montgomery Preservation Inc., Historic Takoma, Inc., and the Art Deco Society of Washington, as well as University of Maryland professors Isabelle Gournay and Mary Corbin Sies. The owner of the property, the First Baptist Church of Silver Spring, opposes designation. On March 15, the owner submitted a report by the firm Historian for Hire in support of its position. Submissions received after the staff report is transmitted will be conveyed to the Planning Board at its scheduled meeting.



Sanctuary (1956)



Parsonage (1925; 1931)

PLANNING ISSUES

Previous Evaluations of Historic Resources in Silver Spring CBD

The *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*, an inventory of potential historic resources, was published in 1976. This survey focused on 18th, 19th, and, to a lesser extent, early 20th century structures that were generally over 50 years old at the time of the publication of the *Atlas*. The 50-year threshold is a general rule-of-thumb for how old buildings should be before they are considered for historic designation; nothing in County law requires that a resource be 50 years old in order to be designated. The 1976 *Locational Atlas* loosely identified a Silver Spring Historic District, but documentation prepared for the district did not include any portions of the Silver Spring Baptist Church complex. The main sanctuary building was but 20 years old at the time. The *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* was adopted in 1979, designating resources that had been identified on the *Locational Atlas*.

The first review of Silver Spring historic resources after the Locational Atlas was created took place in 1985. M-NCPPC staff developed a historical and architectural context for Silver Spring resources. The Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan adopted in 1985 included an evaluation of certain historic resources in Silver Spring. This plan did not include an evaluation of the Silver Spring Baptist Church sanctuary, which by this time was 29 years old, or other church buildings. The boundary of the Silver Spring Locational Atlas Historic District was defined, bordered generally by Georgia Avenue, Ellsworth Drive, Fenton Street and Colesville Road, as part of this Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan.

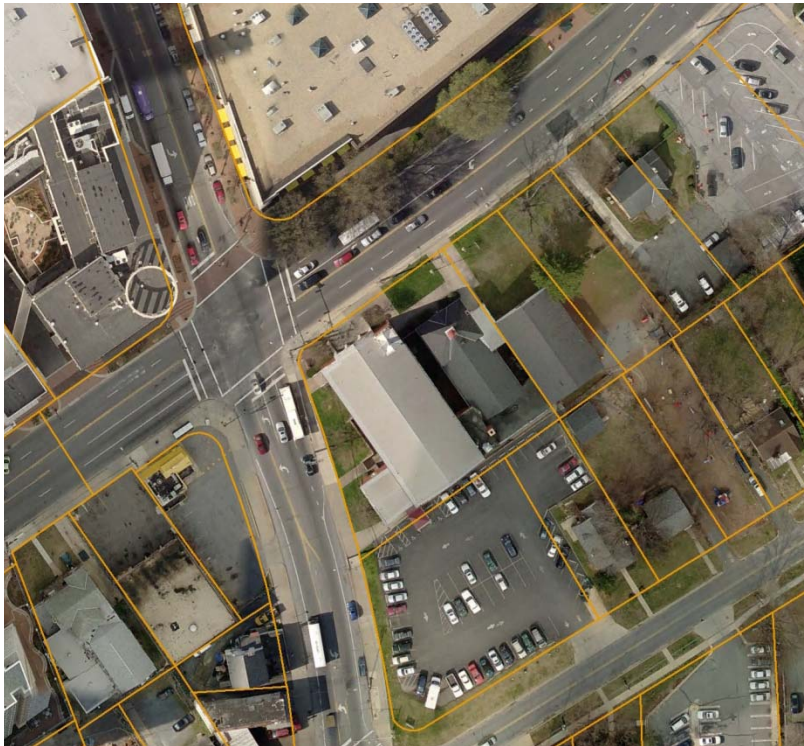
When the Sector Plan was updated in 1993, it did not include an evaluation of any more historic resources in the Silver Spring CBD. In 2000, a new Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan was published, with the general policy to “support the reuse of Silver Spring’s historic resources.” This latest update again did not include an evaluation of historic resources.

In the early 1990s, several individual resources were evaluated in response to pending development projects. As a result, Montgomery Arms, Tastee Diner, and the Silver Theatre and Shopping Center were designated on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation.

In 2002, Potomac-Hudson Engineering, Inc. conducted a survey of the Silver Spring Central Business District (CBD) to ascertain which properties in the CBD—above and beyond those already designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*—may have historic and/or architectural significance. The survey was conducted under a contract with the Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning. A total of 205 properties were surveyed for the project.

The survey included one structure of the Silver Spring Baptist Church complex—the parsonage. Identified as Resource #CBD-118, the parsonage was described as the “First Baptist Church Sunday School/Inglesia [sic] Bautista Emanuel”, at 832 Wayne Avenue (p6). The inventory form Potomac-Hudson developed for the survey states that the building is not National Register eligible on the grounds that religious properties are not eligible for listing.²

²Potomac-Hudson’s statement that religious properties are ineligible for the National Register is incorrect. Under National Register Criterion Consideration A, a religious property may be eligible for the National Register if justification is found on architectural, artistic, or historic grounds using National Register Criterion A, B, C, or D. *National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, National Park Service, 1990 (revised 1991, 1995, 1997, 2001, 2002). More relevant to this review is the eligibility of churches for designation in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation.



The 1956 sanctuary was not analyzed in the 2002 survey. Perhaps this was due to the consultant’s position on the National Register eligibility of church structures; perhaps it was because it was not yet 50 years old. The Silver Spring Baptist Church was 46 at the time of the survey, and is now 55 years old.

In 2008, University of Maryland professors Isabelle Gournay and Mary Corbin Sies completed a statewide survey of Modern Movement resources, conducted at the request of the Maryland Historical Trust. The University of Maryland provided a context for mid-century resources survey. While several churches were highlighted, the survey did not identify the Silver Spring Baptist

Church. Based on their research, however, Gournay and Corbin Sies support local designation of the resource (a letter from Gournay and Corbin Sies is included in the record).

Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan

The Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan (2000) directs the Planning Board to “use the aesthetics, character and economic potential of Silver Spring’s historic resources to help create a revitalized downtown.” The plan recognizes that the reuse of historic buildings gives “texture and depth to the CBD’s redevelopment.”³ The property is the subject of a proposed development plan. If directed by the Board to prepare a Public Hearing Draft, Staff proposes including language in the designation which anticipates redevelopment at the site, including potential reduction of the environmental setting and identifies key features to be preserved.

Robert Kronenberg, Supervisor, Area 1, offered the following comments:

While no application has been submitted for public review, Staff has met with the proposed applicant team to offer feedback on their proposal. As of April, 2011, the applicant team consisting of Lakritz Adler and Torti Gallas and Partners, as well as representatives from the Church proposes a mixed-use project consisting of ground floor retail along Fenton Street with residential above and relocation of the existing church further east toward St. Michael’s property.

I understand that the applicant team also presented their proposal to the local community groups to address any concerns and request support for the application. The site is currently split-zoned CBD-1 and R-60, with the CBD portion directly adjacent to Fenton Street. The Fenton

Twenty-nine churches are designated as individual sites on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation; more have been included as contributing resources in Master Plan historic districts.

³ Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan, p135.

Village Overlay Zone encompasses the CBD-1 portion of the site. While the CBD-1 zone allows an FAR (floor area ratio) up to 3.0, the Fenton Village Overlay Zone does restrict other development standards including building heights along Fenton Street. The applicant team has indicated they will be requesting a zoning text amendment to the overlay zone to increase the height for this site; however, a ZTA has not been submitted for staff review and is not required for the submittal of an application.

As presented to Staff, the general layout and organization of the proposed development corresponds primarily to Fenton Street with respect to the retail and housing component. The relocated church will be subordinate to the retail and housing with a greater presence on Wayne Avenue. The construction of the new regional library and purple line stop will further encourage new development at this high visibility quadrant. Additional development will likely occur on the remaining portion of property associated with the library site.

Staff does not offer any recommendation with respect to the designation process since no application has been submitted for review. If an application for an optional method of development is submitted, the applicant will be required to go through the project plan, preliminary plan and site plan process. During the regulatory review of an application for this property, the site will be evaluated for development standards, circulation, site layout and design, landscaping and lighting, recreation, public use space and environmental factors. If a ZTA is submitted for the additional height it would need to be approved by the Board of Appeals prior to the regulatory applications.

In early 2010, in response to a preliminary development proposal, the historic preservation section initiated the evaluation of the church resource, in advance of planning board review. Staff wrote a draft inventory form. The HPC scheduled a public hearing for April 28, 2010. After meeting the owner and developer, staff learned that the development plan timeframe had been extended, and the hearing was postponed. Budget cuts and a changing work program prevented staff from returning to this project.

HPC FINDINGS

On March 23, 2011, the HPC evaluated this resource. The HPC carefully considered testimony and material submitted for the record. At the conclusion of its worksession, the Commission voted 6-2 to recommend the resource not be added to the *Locational Atlas* and not be designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.

The HPC Chair, Leslie Miles, transmitted the HPC recommendations to the Planning Board in a letter dated May 1, 2011 (attached). The HPC responded to each of the designation criteria proposed in the nomination, finding that, based on testimony and materials submitted for the record, that the nomination failed to establish that the resource met designation criteria 1a, 1d, 2a, 2b, or 2e (section 24A-3 of the County Code).

The Commission did recommend that certain key visual features of the Wayne Avenue facade, including the modernist bell tower, be incorporated into future development of this property.

ISSUES RAISED IN HPC REVIEW

Architectural Style

Silver Spring Baptist Church is not a good example of mid century modern design: According to Historian for Hire, architect Ronald Senseman’s interactions with a strongwilled pastor resulted in his use of outdated Art Deco elements that compromise a bold modernist design.

Staff Response: The primary Art Deco feature of the church’s exterior is the lettering above the church’s entrances. This is a minor feature of the building’s overall design. The use of Art Deco in the 1950s, when it was more widely popular in the 1930s, is not uncommon in Montgomery County, where the persistence of tradition is known to influence architectural taste and/or preference.

County residents continued to build Gothic Revival houses, for example, into the early 1900s, long after the style had lost favor in other parts of the nation. This tendency to adhere to older forms and styles is particularly true with church architecture. The Bethesda Meeting House (1850) is a Greek Revival temple, a style in local use from c1830, with Gothic Revival windows, a new style for this time and place. Furthermore, Robert Senseman’s use of Art Deco detailing on a modernist building was not out of keeping with his work. He designed the Council Office Building (1951), which is listed in Rockville’s Historic Buildings Catalog, in a predominantly mid-Century modernist architectural vocabulary, but with significant Art Deco features, such as the corbelling and detailing of the elevator doors.

Silver Spring Baptist Church is not a good example of mid-century modern design: The 1956 sanctuary is a modest and common example of a modernist style church.

Staff Response: The Silver Spring Baptist Church is a noteworthy local example of modernist architecture. Key modernist features include geometric façade with stylized pediment and pilasters, needle spire rising out of the belltower, and colored spandrel glass. While churches throughout the region continued to be built in revivalist styles through the 1950s and 1960s, this one is an uncommon example of mid-1950s modernism in the county. It is the only modernist church in the Silver Spring CBD.

The buildings lack architectural coherence.

Staff Response: The 1956 modernist sanctuary and the 1930 Colonial Revival parsonage are each highly representative of their time. Each is characteristic of architectural styles that dominate Silver Spring’s historic built environment. Colonial Revival style resources that have already been designated historic sites are the Silver Spring Post Office (1936-37) and the Falkland Apartments (1936). The church is representative of the local expression of the mid-century modern aesthetic, featuring limestone pilasters and glass spandrel panels found throughout the CBD, and particularly in Fenton Village.

Integrity of Setting

Redevelopment has isolated the church from its historic context so that it is no longer a singular element in the cultural landscape.

Staff Response: The intersection of Fenton Street and Wayne Avenue became a civic node with the church on the southeast corner and the 1927 Armory on the northwest. The Armory was demolished and the intersection’s redevelopment continues. The construction of the Silver Spring Library across Fenton Street from the church will return a prominent public building to this civic node.

Furthermore, changes in an area often serve to increase the value of extant historic resources. That the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road has changed over time has only enhanced the historical value of the Silver Theater and Shopping Center, which now faces the Discovery Building across Georgia Avenue, the Lee Building across Colesville Road, and abuts new retail on Ellsworth Drive. This redevelopment does not diminish the shopping center and theater's historic and architectural significance.

While this argument focused attention on new construction at Fenton and Wayne, an important part of the church's context lies south along Fenton Street. The church is located at the gateway to Fenton Street Village. Much of the unique character of this corridor community is derived from mid-century modern resources. Many of the Fenton Street buildings date from 1957-1965 and share features with the Silver Spring Baptist Church sanctuary, including colored spandrel glass, stone elements, aluminum detailing, and generous use of brick.

Church's Mission

The churches needs have changed since the buildings were constructed. The buildings must change to meet today's needs.

Staff Response: The 1956 sanctuary and 1930 parsonage are reflective of their time. If buildings were not preserved that reflect a previous era, we would not have physical reminders of our past. Designation does not preclude change and does not require owners to maintain a museum. Designation is a means of guiding change that preserves the historic character of the resource while allowing for redevelopment to meet modern needs and uses. In anticipation of a development proposal for the site, staff is recommending that the amendment designing the complex include language that would, in the event of redevelopment, establish a preservation emphasis by identifying those building elements on the Wayne Avenue façade that merit preservation and integration into a new building.

DISCUSSION AND STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Board is charged with considering the purposes of the Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 24A, with other public interests.⁴ Concerns were raised by the owner and representatives and echoed by the HPC that the extant church complex will hinder the congregation's plans to expand their facility to meet growing needs. Redevelopment in Silver Spring has been a challenge to the preservation of historic resources. An example of the reuse and redevelopment of a CBD historic resource is the Silver Theater and Shopping Center, which was designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* with language in the Amendment which anticipated redevelopment and specified features to be preserved and those that could be removed. In another case, the Planning Board added a portion of the Canada Dry Building to the *Locational Atlas*. This allowed historic preservation staff to work with the developer to ensure proposed alterations would be consistent with the "substantial alteration" provision of the Preservation Ordinance.⁵

Historic resources in Silver Spring provide a unique sense of place for the community. The Acorn gazebo represents the 19th c picturesque Blair estate, the Post Office represents the New Deal Colonial Revival, and the Silver Theater and Shopping Center represents the auto-oriented Streamline Moderne

⁴ Master Plan for Historic Preservation in Montgomery County, Maryland (1976), p22.

⁵ Section 24A-10 of the Preservation Ordinance.

era. Staff finds that the modernist Silver Spring Baptist Church is highly representative of Silver Spring in the post-war era.

In this context, the Silver Spring Baptist Church sanctuary, built in 1956 of brick and limestone, is the primary structure on the property. It is a landmark that commands a prominent location at the top of a rise at the corner of Wayne Avenue and Fenton Street, two key roads in Silver Spring's downtown. Its traditional front gable church form is modernized with Art Deco influences and strong modernist geometric interpretations of formal design elements. Most notable are its monumental pillars and cornice of limestone, forming an abstraction of a traditional portico, and its slender limestone spire, piercing the sky atop a four story tower belfry. The sanctuary fronts on Wayne Avenue.

Adjacent to the sanctuary, and further east on Wayne Avenue is the hip-roofed brick parsonage, constructed in 1925-26. Its present Colonial Revival appearance, dating from 1931, features an elegant, oversized cupola, a central pavilion and a broken-scroll pedimented entrance. Extending behind the parsonage is an auditorium, built in 1931. To the east of the parsonage is a gable front structure built in 1950 as an interim sanctuary. This structure has a deep setback from Wayne Avenue, since it was built as a rear addition to a structure facing Wayne (north of the temporary sanctuary) that is no longer standing.

The 1956 sanctuary retains a high level of architectural and material integrity, a factor becoming increasingly uncommon in buildings of this vintage. The parsonage has a lower level of integrity and is a secondary resource. The front entry has been altered with a picture window and brick has been painted. In addition, the parsonage is a 1926 building which was remodeled in 1931 and does not have the landmark character of the 1956 sanctuary. The 1950 interim sanctuary has a lower level of historical and architectural significance, being located on a separate parcel, built as a simple addition for temporary use by the congregation, has a low level of historical and architectural significance.

While the 1956 sanctuary, the 1926/1931 parsonage, and the 1931 auditorium represent important physical manifestations of the church community's occupation of this property and merit designation, staff recognizes that the parsonage and auditorium convey less of the significance of the resource. As a concession to the possible redevelopment of the site, staff finds that it would be appropriate to allow demolition of these two buildings in the event of an approved development plan for the property.

The nominators find that the resource meets five of the nine criteria for designation established in section 24A-3 of the County Code. A report by Historian for Hire, prepared on behalf of the Silver Spring Baptist Church, finds that the resource meets none of the criteria in the Preservation Ordinance. The Historic Preservation Commission also found that the resource failed to meet the criteria for designation. Staff finds that the resource meets four criteria for designation, as outlined below.

The research form documents the historical and architectural significance of the Silver Spring Baptist Church. Staff finds that the nomination establishes that the resource is eligible for designation under the following criteria, Montgomery County Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 24A-3:

1a. The historic resource has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the County, State, or Nation.

The Silver Spring Baptist Church is a physical representation of the development of the congregation from its founding in 1924 through the second half of the twentieth century. The church trustees acquired the land, Lots 20-22, in 1925. The sanctuary, built on those lots in 1956, is a significant example of the work of prominent architect Ronald S. Senseman, FAIA, a Silver Spring resident, experienced in the design of religious and educational buildings.

1d. The historic resource exemplifies the cultural, economic social, political, or historic heritage of the County and its communities.

The 1956 modernist sanctuary represents the major commercial and civic center that Silver Spring had become in this era of postwar suburbanization. The parsonage, built in 1926 and modified in 1931, exemplifies the first wave of suburbanization, built one year before the Armory, built diagonally across the intersection.

2a. The historic resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.

The 1956 sanctuary represents the Modern Movement esthetic that came to define the postwar era. It is the first modernist church in Silver Spring's CBD, and one of the first post war modernist churches built in Montgomery County. The Classical Revival parsonage represents traditional architecture of Silver Spring in the second quarter of the 20th century, as expressed by the Silver Spring Post Office and the Silver Spring Train Station.

2e. The historic resource represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or County due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape.

The landmark Silver Spring Baptist Church sanctuary and bell tower mark a prominent location at the intersection of Wayne Avenue and Fenton Streets. This crossroad location has historically been an important Silver Spring civic node, a corner originally shared with the now demolished Silver Spring Armory. Changes in recent years to this historic junction have increased the wayfinding value of this monumental resource.

The nomination cites an additional criterion: "2b. The historic resource represents the work of a master." Staff does not agree that this resource qualifies under this criterion. Senseman was an accomplished and prolific architect but his work does not rise to level of being a master. Staff does not find, based on the information submitted for the record, that the nominators have established that the resource meets this criterion for designation.

By practice, the environmental setting is generally established as the entire parcel on which the resource is located. Language may be included to provide guidance in the event that a subdivision necessitates the reduction of the environmental setting. Staff recommends that the environmental setting be established as Lots 21, 22, and part of Lot 20, which constitute the entirety of tax parcel 13-01046292, on which the 1956 sanctuary and 1931 parsonage sit (see map next page). The nomination proposes a larger environmental setting which includes Lot 23, on which is located the 1950 interim sanctuary. Staff does not find this building to be significant to the complex and recommends this lot, which is a separate tax parcel, not be included in the designation.

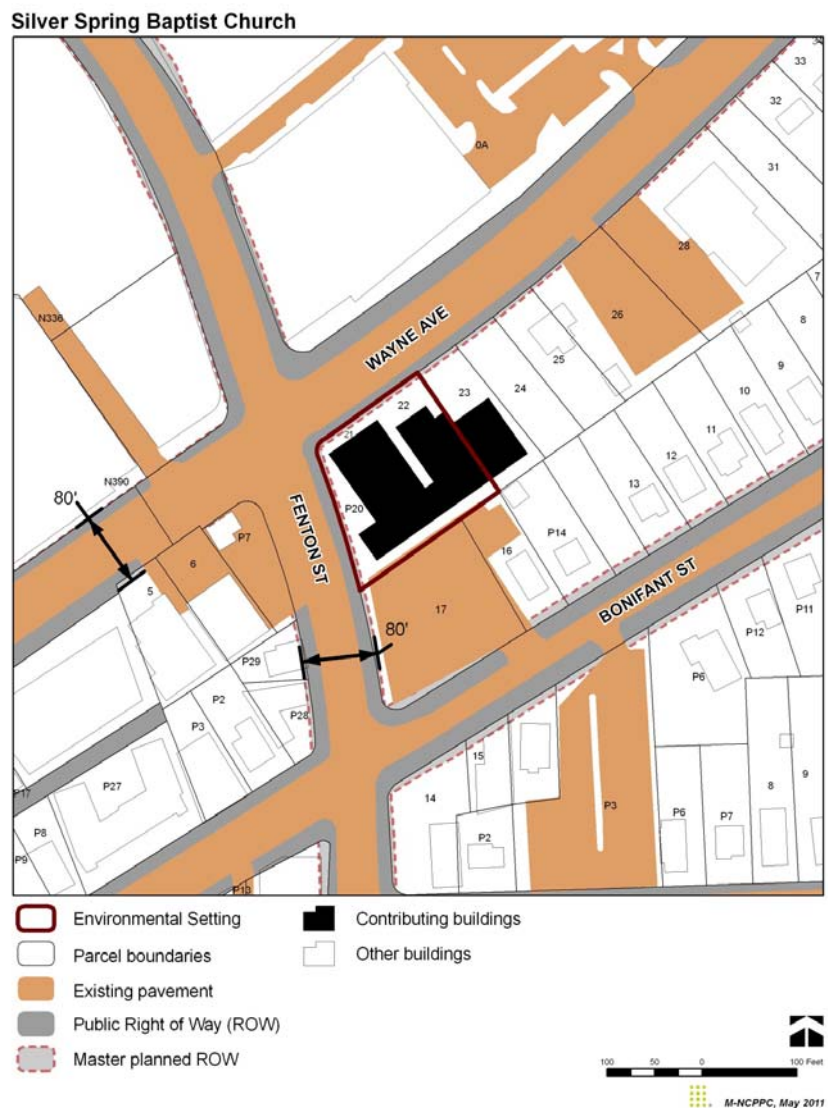
SUMMARY OF STAFF FINDINGS

- The Silver Spring Baptist Church (Resource #36/61) merits designation as an individual site on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. Staff finds that the complex is historically and architecturally significant, meeting Criteria 1a, 1d, 2a, 2e.

- The resource merits addition to the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites* as an interim measure until its evaluation for Master Plan designation is complete.
- An environmental setting, if established, should include Lots 21, 22, and part of Lot 20. The primary resource is the 1956 sanctuary, and the parsonage is a secondary resource. Language should be included in the designation expressing that new development at the site is anticipated, and that the environmental setting may be reduced at the time of development. Key features of the 1956 sanctuary to be preserved include the gablefront (Wayne Avenue) façade with limestone pillars and gabled cornice; inscribed nameplate; stained glass windows; and four-story bell tower.

Staff is seeking guidance from the Planning Board as to whether to initiate a Public Hearing Draft Amendment. If the Board directs staff to prepare a Public Hearing Draft Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation, it must be done in accordance with Chapter 33A of the Montgomery County Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDED ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING



Attachments--also online at www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic:
 -HPC Transmittal
 -Jerry McCoy letter, May 12, 2011
 - Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties form, #36/61, Silver Spring Baptist Church
 -Nomination Letter
 -Owner Submission
 -Public Submittals