



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

February 26, 2003

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** John A. Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division *JAC*

**FROM:** Glenn R. Kreger, Team Leader, Silver Spring/Takoma Park *JK*  
Miguel Iraola, Planner Coordinator (301/495-4512) *MI*  
Community-Based Planning Division

**REVIEW TYPE:** Mandatory Referral

**PROJECT NAME:** Silver Spring Fire Station #1 (Relocation)

**APPLICANT:** Montgomery County Department of Public Works and  
Transportation (DPWT)

**CASE NUMBER:** 02110-DPW&T-1

**REVIEW BASIS:** Article 28, Chapter 7-112 of the Regional District Act

**ZONE:** CBD-2

**LOCATION:** West Side of Georgia Avenue

**MASTER PLAN:** February 2000 Approved and Adopted Silver Spring Central  
Business District (CBD) Sector Plan

**FILING DATE:** December 17, 2002

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** APPROVAL with comments

1. Limit the proposed facility to the 34,670 square feet proposed in the application (plus the two ancillary structures).
2. Limit the use of the unfinished fourth floor of the proposed building to general office space (or meeting space for the user agencies) unless there is further review by the Planning Board.
3. Continue coordination with the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) as noted in the attached letter from MTA to ensure that adequate right-of-way will exist for the Inner Purple Line and the Metropolitan Branch Trail in addition to existing facilities.

4. For non-emergency response personnel, enter into a traffic mitigation agreement or memorandum of understanding with the Planning Board and DPWT for a best faith effort to assist the Transportation Management District (TMD) in achieving and maintaining Silver Spring's traffic mitigation goal of auto drivers being no more than 50 percent of all employees arriving or departing during the three hour a.m. and p.m. peak periods.
5. Coordinate with the Maryland State Highway Administration regarding the design of site access points along Georgia Avenue (US 29).
6. Modify the proposed horse stall in order to make it more functional for use by the Park Police. At a minimum, the stall should be 12' by 12' in size—preferably 14' by 14'. Water and electric service must be provided to the stall. The County should also consider the following:
  - a. Reversing the locations of the two ancillary buildings (i.e, the Urban District bike storage/horse stall structure and the Police motorcycle/bicycle storage structure) in order to increase the distance between the horse stall and the railroad tracks.
  - b. Providing an area next to the bike storage/horse stall structure for use by a truck/horse trailer, even if this means the loss of a few parking spaces.
  - c. Providing an additional 6' by 6' enclosed area near the horse stall for storage of hay and bedding for the stall.
  - d. Avoid emptying the dumpster when the horse stall is occupied. This might be accomplished by scheduling trash pickup for times when the horse stall will not be used or by requiring trash removal to be delayed if the horse stall is occupied.
7. Consider including public art at an appropriate location within the project.

## **PROJECT LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION**

### Location

The Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) proposes to relocate Silver Spring Fire Station #1 from its outmoded facility at 8131 Georgia Avenue to a new "landmark" civic building on the opposite side of the street. In the past, the subject property was known as the "CSX Property" because it was owned by CSX and provided parking for the Silver Spring Train Station. AT&T also owned the site briefly prior to its acquisition by Montgomery County.

The subject property is a 2.08 triangular site that is bordered by Georgia Avenue on the east and the railroad tracks on the west (Attachment 1). The historic Silver Spring Train Station—which has recently been renovated by Montgomery Preservation, Inc.—adjoins the site on the south. Some retail uses along Georgia Avenue and a day care center lie to the north of the proposed project. A public parking lot and Progress Place are also located to the north.

### Zoning

The subject property is located within the Ripley Revitalization Area designated in the February 2000 Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan (Attachment 2). Like the Ripley District as a whole, it is zoned CBD-2 with the Ripley/South Silver Spring Overlay Zone (Attachment 3). The properties to the east across Georgia Avenue are zoned CBD-1.

### Land Uses

The civic building is proposed to be a four-story, mixed-use facility containing approximately 34,670 square feet of space. Each floor of the building will house a different user (Attachment 4). The first floor will contain Silver Spring Fire Station #1 which will be relocated from its current, inadequate facility on the east side of Georgia Avenue near the subject property. (Since the relocation of Fire Station #1 was the primary impetus for the project, the new facility is frequently referred to simply as Fire Station #1 despite the fact that it will contain multiple users.) The fire station will be operated 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to provide fire and rescue services to the community.

The second floor of the building will house a Montgomery County Police Substation. Unlike the District station, this substation will operate normally during regular business hours. It may remain open for extended hours in special circumstances.

The third floor of the building will contain new offices for the Silver Spring Urban District, which is part of the Silver Spring Regional Center. These offices are planned to be open primarily during normal business hours.

The fourth floor of the building will be constructed as unfinished, "shell" space for future use. It is anticipated that a County, or County-related user will finish the space for its own use and occupancy after the proposed project has been constructed. At the time of this application, the leading candidate for use of this space is believed to be the national "Safe Kids" program working with the County's Fire and Rescue Services.

### Building Design

The proposed facility will be constructed as one phase, with the exception of future tenant fit-out of the fourth floor shell space. It will be constructed in a way that complements and respects the surrounding buildings architecturally without trying to mimic the design of the adjoining historic train station (Attachment 5). The first floor of the building along Georgia Avenue will be 19 feet high to provide sufficient clearance for the fire apparatus. The four fire apparatus doors will be sectional aluminum and glass doors that maximize light infiltration and visual access. Large "Chicago Style" windows will characterize the front and rear elevations of the building. Exterior walls will be masonry with glass block utilized at street level. The majority of the roof will be flat, with a sloped metal roofing system over the round stair tower in order to emphasize the location of the main entrance to the building. Proposed signage is limited to the premise address and the pre-cast concrete seals of the user agencies.

### Site Layout

The proposed facility will front on Georgia Avenue (Attachment 6). The existing decorative masonry walls along the street will be removed. (These were not included within the historic designation of the Silver Spring Train Station.) The standard Type A streetscape and street lighting treatment will be provided along the Georgia Avenue frontage (Attachment 7). As suggested by staff, the County will maintain a clear sidewalk/tree planting width of 25' along Georgia Avenue. Additionally, a landscaped seating area will provide a public space between the Georgia Avenue sidewalk and the building. Three flagpoles in front of the facility—one large and two smaller—will highlight its civic nature.

As described under Finding #4, the submission provides a circulation pattern for fire apparatus that takes advantage of the station's drive-through design. Fire engines leaving the facility will have a new median break that allows them to go north on Georgia Avenue. A driveway has also been provided to facilitate vehicular access to the adjacent historic train station site. Appropriate lighting for safety and security has been provided in the rear parking lot.

Seventy-seven (77) parking spaces are provided on-site behind or next to the building. A flagstone patio and barbecue grill may be constructed as an add-alternate immediately behind the dining room for the fire station employees. Although a privacy fence was originally proposed within the parking area, this was deleted from the application after objections from the community.

Ancillary structures to be constructed behind the main building include an enclosed dumpster; a storage structure for Police bicycles and motorcycles; and a bicycle storage structure for the Urban District with an attached horse stall for Police use. The County has indicated that the horse stall will have water and power, but no heat since this is intended to be only a temporary stop rather than a place to stable horses. Nevertheless, the County should modify the proposed horse stall in order to make it more functional for Park Police horses. At a minimum, the proposed horse stall should be increased in size from 8' by 12' to 12' by 12' so that a horse that lies down will be able to get up again. (14' by 14' would be preferable.) It would also be desirable to provide an enclosed 6' by 6' area for storage of hay and bedding.

The County should also seek to provide an area next to the structure containing the horse stall that would permit a truck and horse trailer to park temporarily and turn around. This might require the deletion of a few parking spaces, but the application as proposed includes at least a half dozen extra parking spaces. The County should also consider two modifications that would reduce the likelihood that a horse would be "spooked" by unfamiliar noise:

- Reversing the locations of the two storage structures in order to increase the distance between the horse stall and the railroad tracks.
- Scheduling the times when the dumpster next to the horse stall is emptied so that this noise occurs only when the horse stall is unoccupied.

A 35' wide area along the back edge of the site has been reserved for the future Metropolitan Branch Trail. The spatial relationship between the Trail and the proposed Inner Purple Line is discussed in Finding #4, below.

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

DPWT staff presented the proposed project to the Urban District Advisory Board on November 21, 2002. The County also presented the project to the CBD Committee of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board on December 18, 2002; the CBD Committee subsequently recommended the project to the full Citizens Advisory Board. A letter of support from the Silver Spring Urban District and a resolution of support approved by the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board are attached to this staff report as Attachments 10 and 11. The County has also coordinated their design efforts with Montgomery Preservation, Inc., the owner of the historic train station adjoining the fire station site on the south.

Pursuant to the *Uniform Standards for Mandatory Referral Review*, Community-Based Planning staff notified area civic groups on January 21, 2003, that the proposed Silver Spring Fire Station #1/Police Substation had been officially submitted for Mandatory Referral. Several interested citizens have reviewed the plans for the proposed project as a result of this notification. The Silver Spring/Takoma Park Team has also utilized our Web site to notify the general public regarding the Mandatory Referral submission and the anticipated date for review by the Planning Board.

In addition to community outreach, the applicant and the Planning staff have also coordinated with WMATA and MTA concerning the relationship between the proposed fire station/police substation and the proposed Inner Purple Line and Metropolitan Branch Trail projects. This topic is discussed further below.

## **PROJECT ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

**Finding #1: The proposed project is consistent with the guidance in the *Approved and Adopted Silver Spring Central Business District Sector Plan*.**

Creating a "Civic Downtown" is one of the six themes of the Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan. The Sector Plan recommends that the CBD offer a full complement of community facilities, which are defined to include civic structures, civic spaces and civic programs. According to the Sector Plan, "Civic structures are often tied to the services they provide. The fire station, for instance, is a visible manifestation of community involvement and investment in public safety." (Sector Plan, page 21.)

In addition to general support for public and private investment in community facilities, the Sector Plan provides specific guidance with regard to several key facilities. The Plan includes the following recommendation: "Develop a new downtown fire station and courthouse, and eventually, if needed, a new downtown library and police sub-station in central CBD locations." (Sector Plan, page 115) The Sector Plan recommends that fire and rescue services be located along Georgia Avenue (page 126) and specifically

identifies the site of the proposed fire station as an appropriate location for this facility (Attachment 8). It also provides the following guidance with regard to the design of the fire station:

“The best arrangement would be a drive-through building with on-site parking. Within the land limits of the CBD, the new station could be constructed as a two-story building or could share space with another tenant.” (Sector Plan, page 119.)

The facility proposed by DPWT is both a multi-level building and a building that will house multiple public services, including a police substation. The provision of a police substation at this location is consistent with the Sector Plan recommendation for a relocated police station at a location that is “visible and accessible by the community” (Sector Plan, page 122). The accessibility of the proposed facility (via both the Metropolitan Branch Trail and the sidewalks along Georgia Avenue) is consistent with the “Pedestrian Friendly Downtown” theme in the CBD Sector Plan. The employees and visitors to the proposed facility will also help to activate the CBD in accordance with the goals of the Sector Plan.

**Finding #2: The proposed project is consistent with the intent and standards of the CBD-2 zone.**

Existing Zone:		CBD-2			
<i>Description</i>		<i>Optional Method Required/ Permitted</i>	<i>Standard Method Required/ Permitted</i>	<i>Provided</i>	
Gross Site Area:				2.08	ac
Net Lot Area:				2.08	ac
				99,605	sf
Minimum Lot Area:		22,000 sf	N/A	99,605	sf
Maximum Building Coverage:		N/A	75 %	16	%
Minimum Public Use Space:		19,921 sf	9,961 sf	18,820	sf
Percent of Net Lot Area		20 %	10 %	19	%
Maximum Density of Development					
(GFA Non-Residential)		398,420 sf	199,210 sf	34,670	sf
(Floor Area Ratio)		4.0 FAR	2.0 FAR	0.35	FAR
Maximum Building Height:		143 ft	60 ft	59	ft
Parking Spaces Required:					
Fire Station*				29	
Police Sub-Station (Office)		6,700 sf @ 2.4/1000 sf=		16 sp	
S.S.Urban District (Office)		6,700 sf @ 2.4/1000 sf=		16 sp	
Future Use (Office)		6,700 sf @ 2.4/1000 sf=		16 sp	
Total Spaces				77 sp	84 sp
Parking Interior Green Space:		4980 sf		5070	sf
		5 %		5.09	%

\*Parking requirements are per the MC DPWT

**Finding #3: The proposed project is compatible with existing and proposed adjacent uses in terms of the nature and size, shape, scale, height, arrangement and design of structures.**

- a. The proposed fire station will provide a civic landmark along Georgia Avenue, one of the CBD's two major boulevards. The 59' height of the building—70' for the stair tower—is appropriate for its location along Georgia Avenue and compatible with other buildings in the immediate vicinity. The exterior finishes of the facility will respect and complement the surrounding buildings. A colored brick similar to that at the historic train station will be incorporated to complement the color scheme established by the existing buildings. At the street level, oversized masonry units and glass block will provide an urban edge to enhance the Silver Spring streetscape. The streetscape along Georgia Avenue will be provided in accordance with the design manual and transition to the existing streetscape north and south of the site. The building will be positioned along Georgia Avenue in a way that will help to activate the street while allowing sufficient room to accommodate the fire apparatus.
- b. The proposed fire station will have no physical impact on the adjoining historic site (see Finding #4). It may have a positive impact to the extent that visitors to one facility also visit the other.

**Finding #4: Circulation systems (vehicular and pedestrian), landscaping, open spaces and recreational facilities are adequate, safe and efficient.**

- a. Traffic impacts- The traffic study for the proposed facility demonstrates that the proposed use satisfies Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) standards with existing network capacity. If the unfinished fourth floor of the building is ultimately utilized for something besides general office use, the impacts with regard to trip generation and parking should be reevaluated.
- b. Vehicular circulation- The first floor of the building will provide a drive-through facility for fire apparatus. Fire trucks will access the site from Georgia Avenue and drive around to the back parking area where they will enter the fire station building. (Three of the four apparatus bays are accessible from the rear of the building.) The apparatus bays will have reinforced concrete pads in the back and front of the building. Four large doors provide egress for the fire trucks back out to Georgia Avenue. A new median break will be constructed in Georgia Avenue to enable fire trucks to go north on Georgia Avenue when needed.

Two driveways will provide access/egress for other vehicles from Georgia Avenue. Employees and visitors will park next to and behind the building. (There will be a maximum of 70 employees during normal business hours and 20 during "off" hours.) Seventy-seven (77) parking spaces are provided on-site. Accessible parking spaces will be located on the south side of the building adjoining the historic train station. A driveway has also been provided connecting to the historic train station property.



- c. Transit Access - The planned Metropolitan Branch Trail on the western edge of the fire station site will provide connectivity to the proposed Silver Spring Intermodal Transit Center. It is anticipated that various forms of transit will be accessible at the Transit Center, including the proposed Inner Purple Line.

DPWT has coordinated with MTA and WMATA to ensure that the construction of the fire station will not preclude the possible construction of the Purple Line (Attachment 9). The first phase of the Inner Purple Line, connecting Bethesda to Silver Spring, would terminate just north of the fire station site, requiring a tail track for double crossovers that would extend into the 35' trail easement in the northwest corner of the site. These tail tracks would be in a tunnel that descends at a two percent grade into the corner of the fire station site.

The second phase of the Inner Purple Line, connecting Silver Spring to New Carrollton, would be in a tunnel that traverses the fire station site underground and crosses under Georgia Avenue at a point in between the new fire station and the historic Silver Spring Train Station, impacting neither one. The future Metropolitan Branch Trail would be located at-grade on top of the Purple Line tunnel. To date, it has not been decided whether the tunnel would be constructed through the fire station site using cut and cover construction or by boring underground.

In order to provide space for construction of the Purple Line tail tracks and retaining walls for this segment of the proposed Purple Line and Metropolitan Branch Trail, Montgomery County has agreed to relocate the storm water facilities for the fire station site to locations within the parking lot. The storm drain outfall and proposed storage facilities will be located within the northwest corner of the parking lot and an 18' storm water pipe will run under the parking lot parallel to its western curb.

In addition to allowing adequate space for the future Inner Purple Line and the future Metropolitan Branch Trail connection to the Intermodal Transit Center, the applicant is also requested to enter into a traffic mitigation agreement for the proposed facility. The Silver Spring Transportation Management District (TMD) works with employers and developers in the CBD to implement individual traffic management plans and to provide commute alternatives to employees. Under County law, all employers with more than 25 employees in the Silver Spring TMD area must submit a traffic mitigation plan to the director of the DPWT indicating how the site (or complex of sites) proposes to achieve the Annual Growth Policy goal (currently a 50 percent non-auto driver mode share for peak period trips). In developing and reviewing the traffic mitigation plan, consideration should be given to the fact that the travel needs of emergency response personnel are different from those of the office or administrative staff.

- d. Bicycles – A 35' wide easement has been provide along the back edge of the site to permit future construction of an at-grade segment of the Metropolitan Branch Trail. North of the subject property, the Metropolitan Branch Trail is likely to be elevated as it crosses Colesville Road and traverses the future Transit Center. It would then return to grade just before it reaches the fire station site. If the Inner Purple Line segment from Silver Spring to New Carrollton is also programmed, the Metropolitan Branch Trail would be located at-grade on top of the Purple Line tunnel as it traverses the fire station site.

Montgomery County has not yet started to engineer the Metropolitan Branch Trail. However, it is anticipated that the Trail design would provide alternative routes for “through traffic” and local traffic stopping at the renovated train station to see the historic building or visit its tenant, a local arts organization. The former would swing around the north side of the train station while the latter would continue directly along the tracks.

Neither the Metropolitan Branch Trail nor the Silver Spring Train Station is part of the subject Mandatory Referral application. In light of the planned hiker/biker trail, however, the County plans to provide bike racks on-site for employees and guests in addition to the proposed bike storage facilities for the Police and Urban District. The Zoning Ordinance requires that all parking facilities providing more than 50 parking spaces also provide one bicycle parking space or locker for every twenty automobile parking spaces (Section 59-E-2.3).

- e. Pedestrian Access- In addition to pedestrian access via the future Metropolitan Branch Trail behind the fire station, pedestrians will be able to access the front of the site via sidewalks along Georgia Avenue. Sidewalks and street lights will be provided in accordance with the Silver Spring design guidelines.
- f. Landscaping- The proposed landscaping will include the street trees along Georgia Avenue, the landscaped seating areas in front of the building, a hedge planting along the northern property line parallel to the parking area, and shade trees in the rear parking lot.
- g. Public use space- The landscaped seating area along Georgia Avenue will serve as the primary outdoor public use space. The proposed project will also include a “public meeting room” that will be available to the general public when scheduled with the County user agencies.
- h. Public art- No public art is proposed at this time. It is recommended that the County consider an appropriate location for public art.

**Finding #5: The proposed project is generally consistent with environmental guidelines and requirements.**

The fire station site is located in the Lower Mainstem East West Highway tributary and subwatershed of the Lower Rock Creek watershed. Labeled by the County Stream Protection Strategy as a Watershed Restoration Area, this subwatershed has fair stream and habitat conditions. The National Park Service and the U.S. Department of the Navy are making comprehensive efforts to examine and address storm water retrofit, stream restoration, and habitat improvement opportunities in this subwatershed.

The fire station site drains to the west with one storm water management structure to service the entire site. The Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services approved a Storm Water Concept Plan for the subject property on December 4, 2002.

The proposed fire station will be constructed on the portion of the former Silver Spring Train Station site that was not designated on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. This site was cleared of vegetation long ago and provided a rail siding and paved parking area when the train station was in operation. The application has an approved NRI/FSD and its Forest Conservation Law requirements are being fulfilled through tree planting on site. A final Forest Conservation Plan has been approved.

The Montgomery County Noise Ordinance (Chapter 31B, Noise Control) contains an exemption for emergency operations by fire and rescue services and police agencies.

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Attachments:

1. Vicinity Map
2. CBD Sector Plan, page 35
3. Zoning Map
4. Floor Plans
5. Elevations
6. Conceptual Site Plan
7. Landscape/streetscape plan
8. CBD Sector Plan, page 121
9. MTA comments
10. Silver Spring Urban District Letter of Support
11. Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board Fire Station Resolution