

June 1, 2020

Montgomery Planning Board  
8787 Georgia Ave  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

## Silver Spring Downtown Plan (Item 7)

Testimony for June 4, 2020

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Chair Anderson and Planning Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am speaking on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization in the DC region advocating for more walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities. **We support expanding the boundary of the Silver Spring Downtown Plan**, in line with option D.

The Silver Spring Downtown Plan update is an opportunity for the Planning Board to embrace missing middle housing and the new “complete communities” concept. Mixed-use neighborhoods with different types of homes to rent or buy are more affordable and sustainable, enabling people from all walks of life and all incomes to live without relying on a personal vehicle.

Furthermore, including neighborhoods abutting the current central business district (CBD) will allow for a better flow of the built environment. Currently, many high-rise buildings within the CBD are adjacent to single family homes. Silver Spring would greatly benefit from “gentle density” connecting high-rise clusters with lower density neighborhoods.

East Silver Spring offers an example of a neighborhood with an array of townhomes, duplexes, and small apartment buildings. However, many of these housing options are now illegal to build due to zoning changes made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to promote segregation. Right now, an aging, modest single-family house can be torn down and be replaced with a much larger, million-dollar (or more) house, but homeowners and developers are not permitted to build a duplex or triplex alternative. **Silver Spring should be more than mansions.**

The recent housing needs assessment showed that downtown Silver Spring is the highest demand community within Montgomery County – it’s the only housing submarket to experience a net gain in both owners and renters – especially young families.

My personal experience reflects this: My partner and I are lucky to have found an affordable apartment in the Silver Spring CBD and would like to stay in this area when eventually “settling down.” When looking at the options to own in Silver Spring, we’re immediately discouraged by the dominance of homes in the \$700-800k range. Few, if any, are below \$550k. None are in our current price range. Even if our incomes rise significantly, we doubt it will be enough to keep up with the rise in housing prices.

It should be emphasized that **we're the lucky ones** – both from middle-income families, college educated with no student debt, and a combined income of approximately the county's median household income. If all our privilege is not enough to guarantee a future in Silver Spring, where do we expect existing low-income families and 20,000 future families making less than \$50k to live?

Like many, when we buy a home, we want to be able to live close to transit and jobs in order to have a high quality of life and to not add to traffic and pollution. These are also primary goals for the county and are key to our economic competitiveness.

Therefore, we urge you to expand the boundary for the Silver Spring Downtown Plan and prioritize affordability, diversity, and sustainability. **We can build a future for everyone in downtown Silver Spring.**