

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. How has this project impacted the local community?

Settled in the mid-1840s, Silver Spring was one of the first commercial areas to develop in the county. It thrived as regional retail center in the 1950's and 1960's and degenerated as suburban development and shopping malls drew away residents and businesses. While other DC suburbs prospered in the 1970's and 1980's, Silver Spring became increasingly blighted. It was the last suburban center in the County to revitalize, and earlier attempts failed. This project distinguished itself as a shared vision of the community and business investment to create a downtown for Silver Spring as a focal point of community life, offering a mix of historic preservation, the arts, and public incentives.

Safety issues were addressed through the design of new parking structures, urban district patrols on bikes, police on bicycles, and horse patrols by M-NCPPC park police. The project created evening and weekend activities in such venues as the American Film Institute (AFI) multi-screen theater, Round House Theater and children's workshop and the Majestic Theaters, and through extensive programming, such as the Silver Spring Jazz Festival. It has provided a venue for community gathering and festivities such as the Magical Montgomery festival, Thanksgiving Parade and a summer outdoor concert series. The revitalized Downtown provided jobs nearby neighborhoods for the community, and increased property values significantly. Following shortly is a Transit Center that joins a train line, bike trail and local and regional bus service with the existing Metro subway station; a veterans' memorial; and an open space that will host concerts in the summer and be converted into an ice rink in winter.

2. Describe the underlying values of the project. What, if any, significant trade-offs were required?

The project was based on sustainable development that incorporated existing infrastructure and Smart Growth, economic health, crime reduction, street safety, pedestrian-orientation, transit-orientation, housing choices, active street life, community-serving retail, cultural diversity, citizen participation, enhancement – not replacement – of existing residences, sustained public commitment to revitalization, historic preservation, and economic feasibility

The area lost some historic resources: the Armory was demolished to accommodate project design veterans to be commemorated in a new plaza; only the façade of the historic Silver Spring Shopping Center was preserved; the Tastee Diner had to be moved from a historic location to a new one.

3. Describe the key elements of the development process, including community participation where appropriate.

Planners, politicians and developers worked through two failed projects with community participation to arrive at a shared vision. The process included:

- Silver Spring Central Business District Sector Plan – preceded by community participation through focus groups and public hearings, and approved by M-NCPPC Planning Board and County Council
- Urban Renewal Plan with a public hearing and Council approval
- Redevelopment Plan for the Core with a large Steering Committee and several public meetings
- Historic Preservation Commission reviews for the Armory/Silver Spring Shopping Center/Silver Theater/City Place modifications)
- Regulatory approvals by the Planning Board after public hearings for the Project Plan, Preliminary Plan, and Site Plan

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The County gave Downtown Silver Spring Enterprise Zone status, allowing businesses to earn tax credits for expansion and capital improvements. This sped up development of retail and restaurants along Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road. Silver Spring's Green Tape Zone designation provides for a County team that gives Downtown projects special priority in reviews and inspections involved in the permitting process. An Annual Growth Policy regulates traffic capacity. The "Live Near Your Work" program provides a \$3,000 cash grant to qualifying Silver Spring employees for the purchase of a home in the Silver Spring/Takoma Park Region. A new very proactive, "pro-small" and minority business program covers everything from financial assistance to networking events to special, bi-lingual seminars. The business community and the local government collaborated on the "Silver SprUng" media campaign announcing that Downtown was open for business and recreation.

4. Describe the financing of the project. Please include all funding sources and square foot costs where applicable.

Downtown Silver Spring project was made possible through a \$400 million public-private partnership. The County provided \$96 million of the original funding and the State \$36 million, while a private sector development team invested approximately \$189.4 million in the project. Public funding sources included a tax-exempt bond underwritten by the Montgomery County Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC); tax credits issued by the Maryland State Housing and Community Development Agency; \$4 million in County funding from the Housing Initiative Fund; and a credit enhancement for the tax-exempt bond from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Unlike previous failed attempts, this project is one that the private sector felt comfortable financing. A county partnership with the PFA group of developers has meant nearly \$1 billion in private and public investment in downtown Silver Spring. Also, Silver Spring's designation as a Neighborhood Business Development area and Smart Growth area allow the use of State funds to assist businesses, property owners and residents of the downtown.

5. Is the project unique and /or does it address significant urban issues? Is the model adaptable to other urban settings?

This project presented the unique challenges of a large CBD that had fallen into dilapidation for almost three decades, in which there was little interest from private sector. Moreover, it is surrounded by settled neighborhoods of single-family homes, with politically active, environmentally sensitive residents who made their priorities clear for a community focus rather than regional.

The planning model is assuredly adaptable to other urban revivals where multiple agendas and existing features have to be incorporated in a dynamic, market-oriented and community-focused process. M-NCPPC's plan stimulated appropriate development, provided market responsive land uses, zoning and plan approval processes; provided more flexible land use and zoning, responsive to the CBD's changing real estate markets; identified key major public and private development initiatives; develop implementation strategies and tools; and balanced the need for development with sensitivity to the potential negative impacts on transportation systems, historic preservation, neighborhood compatibility, and the environment.