

## URBAN DESIGN

Sometimes dismissed as just aesthetic, a community's appearance can significantly contribute to its function, value, and safety. This Plan makes recommendations to improve the downtown environment and encourage private investment.

For Silver Spring to become a thriving downtown it must also be inviting to the pedestrian. A continuous building line, no blank walls, interesting window displays, street trees, continuous sidewalks, outdoor cafes, and parking along the street, in rear yards, and in mid-block public parking facilities will create an attractive environment that also addresses safety concerns of residents, businesses, and visitors. Incorporating green and open spaces into the downtown will create attractive and useful spaces. Bike trails and safe pedestrian routes through downtown will provide vital connections, but also make downtown a pleasant place to be.

Private sector development will be supported with public/private partnership investments in streetscape improvements, the proposed Transit Center, park projects, and community facilities. By capitalizing on existing and proposed developments, Silver Spring will meet the goals of the state's Smart Growth initiative. This combination of efforts and environments will make the CBD a more convenient place in which to live and work, and will begin to transform it into a true community downtown.

The following general urban design guidelines should be incorporated into redevelopment projects in the Silver Spring CBD. Proposed projects should:

- conform to the CBD-wide planning issues of this Plan such as transportation, historic preservation, and environmental resources, the Urban Renewal Plan for site specific issues such as land use and zoning, and the standards of a revised Silver Spring Streetscape Plan that covers the entire Core
- create an attractive pedestrian environment by creating a system of short blocks, and defining streets with buildings, open spaces, and streetscaping at a human scale created by street-front retail, frequent doors and windows, architectural detail, and appropriately scaled building heights
- through urban design treatments, establish streetscapes that emphasize the hierarchy of the circulation system
- create formal and informal civic spaces—buildings and open spaces—that add to property values, provide amenity, and improve downtown's aesthetic appearance
- provide safe and attractive pedestrian connections between new development on the Urban Renewal site and surrounding CBD neighborhoods, particularly Fenton Village
- incorporate historic resources into new development whenever possible
- contribute to implementing the Silver Spring Green Trail, a linear park intended to link downtown locations with the surrounding park and trail system, while creating a distinctive green path through the CBD
- incorporate the principles of crime prevention through environmental design by integrating visibility, pedestrian activity, and programming into project layouts.

More specific urban design recommendations follow. The CBD's primary crossroads that give the downtown its shape—Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road—are discussed first. Recommendations for each of the four revitalization areas follow.

## **CORRIDORS AND GATEWAYS**

Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road will become urban boulevards, while remaining regional routes for commuters and visitors to and through Silver Spring.

## **VISION**

Through the CBD, Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road should be envisioned as urban boulevards, linking the downtown's revitalization areas while balancing the needs and demands of public transportation, bicyclists, pedestrians, and car traffic. As wide, tree-lined corridors, made safer and more pleasant with improved signs, streetscaping, landscaping, and signal timing, these corridors will link redevelopment projects in the Core, Ripley District, Fenton Village, and South Silver Spring. CBD gateways and nodes will also be defined by landscaping, streetscaping, signs, public art, and buildings, all designed to signal the entrance and change to an active urban area.

Design changes in the street's public realm will be complemented by changes in the character of buildings and businesses that line Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road created by new development opportunities (Map 29). Wide sidewalks will be activated by street level shops, restaurants, and the pedestrians who visit them.

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### ***Objective:***

- Improve the image of the entire downtown by improving the appearance of its primary corridors.
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### **Analysis of Existing Conditions**

Georgia Avenue begins in the District of Columbia and runs north out of the city, through, and eventually beyond Montgomery County. Its entrance into Montgomery County from the District is marked by Jesup Blair Park, slated for renovation. At its intersection with Colesville Road, Georgia Avenue marks the center of downtown.

Colesville Road begins at Silver Spring's eastern boundary with the District and, as US 29, runs northeast through Montgomery County to Howard County and Baltimore. Colesville Road's beginning is marked by the "portal", a landscaped traffic circle at the recently renovated Blair Apartments. Just past its intersection with East West Highway, Colesville Road gives access to the Silver Spring Metro station, planned to be rebuilt as the Transit Center.

While some stretches of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road are streetscaped, the treatment is inconsistent and incomplete. Compounding the unpleasant street environment is an overall lack of street definition, with empty lots, buildings set back from the street, and only a few street-animating uses that contribute to creating a distinct, safe, and interesting pedestrian space. Street crossing is also difficult, with major crossings barely marked and offering no pedestrian refuge, and other crossings not marked at all.

## **Circulation**

Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road are and will remain regional transportation corridors and primary transit routes, but in Silver Spring, they must also serve as urban boulevards. Although both roads experience rush-hour congestion, heavily congested intersections outside the CBD act as meters to traffic entering the CBD, limiting downtown congestion.

These corridor roads must serve pedestrians as well as vehicular traffic. An active downtown takes its life from busy streets and this Plan's streetscape and development recommendations contribute to creating a pedestrian-friendly environment. The heavy and high-speed traffic along Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road make it sometimes unpleasant to walk on these streets and difficult to cross them. This Plan also recommends considering off-peak, on-street parking to buffer pedestrians from moving traffic and create short-term parking for downtown businesses.

## **Redevelopment Opportunities**

A number of redevelopment projects are already proposed or underway that will effect Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road and the CBD gateways. The design and development of these projects should recognize their corridor and gateway locations to improve the image and activity in the CBD.

Core redevelopment projects include the Downtown Silver Spring Project and Discovery Communications' plans to construct office headquarters, both at the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road. The vacant portion of the Lee site also offers redevelopment opportunities in the Core. Also in the Core, reconstruction of the Transit Center will include ground level retail and will make pedestrian connections to surrounding redevelopment projects.

In the Ripley District, improved streetscape and redevelopment opportunities will make this section of Georgia Avenue more attractive and competitive with other downtown development. Recommendations for Fenton Village will support redevelopment of Georgia Avenue's eastern side, and redevelopment in South Silver Spring will be focused around the expanded campus of Montgomery College and the renovated Jesup Blair Park, along Georgia Avenue.

## **Gateways and Focal Points**

Gateways are sometimes amorphous things, nothing more than the subtle sense that your surroundings have changed, but they can also be definite and marked to send a message about the area being approached. Most of Silver Spring's gateways are marked by significant redevelopment proposals. These proposals not only upgrade and create needed facilities, by their location, they signal the beginning of the downtown.

In the Core, corridors are punctuated with focal points, the most notable being the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road. Both the Downtown Silver Spring and Discovery projects will significantly change the character of this intersection. The remaining corner of the intersection, now occupied by a gas station, also offers an opportunity to redefine this primary intersection. The section of Georgia Avenue between Wayne Avenue and Colesville Road is the major activity center of downtown and merits special treatment. Streetscaping and pedestrian improvements should make this stretch attractive and pedestrian-friendly, with particular attention to crosswalks at Colesville Road, Ellsworth Drive, and Wayne Avenue. Also in the Core, the southern end of Colesville Road will be marked by the redesigned Transit Center. Farther west along Colesville Road, the recently installed sculpture and fountain at the Blair Apartments should be enhanced with public streetscape and landscape improvements.

In the Ripley District, redevelopment will be focused on new open spaces and improved road connections, providing a focal point for development along Georgia Avenue and in the Ripley District. Fenton Village will be marked by the South Fenton gateway park, refurbishing a small, underused and unattractive public park. In South Silver Spring, the CBD's gateway is marked by Jesup Blair Park. The park's renovation will be coordinated with improvements to the Montgomery College campus.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure an active and animated corridor by rezoning gateway and corridor properties to encourage redevelopment.

- Rezone areas along Georgia Avenue—Fenton, Ripley, and South Silver Spring—to create redevelopment opportunities.
- Do not allow parking in the front yard of CBD properties, except for handicapped parking, along Georgia Avenue.

Improve the physical character of the corridors through combined public and private efforts.

- Include a gateway concept and design standards for streetscaping and gateway treatment and identify public facilities improvements by updating the *Silver Spring Streetscape Plan* to include comprehensive treatment for the Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road corridors.
- Design standards should distinguish Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road as urban boulevards and create a pedestrian-friendly environment, including comprehensive streetscape and landscape treatment that includes:
  - a new focus along Georgia Avenue at the Ripley District using open space and improved road access
  - street furniture and landscaping that emphasizes public transportation with distinctive bus shelters and other transit support
  - specially paved crosswalks, and a tree-lined median on Georgia Avenue
  - improved visual quality in the public and private realms by encouraging compatible heights, setbacks, and street activating uses
  - consider off-peak parking to replace existing neck-downs (i.e., curb extensions at intersections) on Georgia Avenue
  - continuity of design treatment along Colesville Road as remaining sites redevelop
  - cohesive streetscaping by filling in streetscape gaps in the context of an expanded *Silver Spring Streetscape Plan* to help create a pedestrian- and mass-transit-friendly corridor, including bus shelters and a tree-lined median on Colesville Road
  - focal points created by redevelopment projects at the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road emphasizing bike, pedestrian, and bus movement, linking across Georgia Avenue to connect the Transit Center and the Downtown Silver Spring Project.

Mark the CBD gateways as distinctive and defined places that create a civic presence.

### **Georgia Avenue**

- Complete the approved design concept for Jesup Blair Park. Along Georgia Avenue the park would have a ceremonial character, which, coupled with proposed street-facing College buildings and proposed special streetscape features, would mark this gateway.
- Woodside Park, at the corner of Spring Street and Georgia Avenue is outside the CBD boundaries, but still marks the entrance into downtown Silver Spring as the buildings and streetscape change character at this point. Intersection improvements should be made here.

### **Fenton Street**

- Reconfigure the park and streets at Philadelphia Avenue and Fenton Street to create an attractive and usable public park, to improve pedestrian circulation, and to maintain access to abutting properties.

### **Colesville Road**

- Improvements at the “portal,” the intersection of Colesville Road and 16th Street, should include streetscape and landscape features, intersection improvements, and incorporating a Class I bikeway along Colesville Road linked to local and regional bike routes.
- Design the Transit Center to create a presence on Colesville Road, including street-level retail and accommodating all forms of transit.

## CORE

Three significant projects in the Core of Silver Spring will be influential in shaping downtown's future. Redevelopment in the Urban Renewal Area will include regional and local retail, a hotel, movie theaters, and offices. The Transit Center redevelopment will make convenient transportation links from Silver Spring throughout the region. The Discovery Communications headquarters will bring a significant corporate presence to downtown.

## URBAN RENEWAL AREA

The Urban Renewal Area (see Map 9) is located in the very center of the Core, and includes existing development, historic buildings, and vacant land. The proposed Downtown Silver Spring development and the Discovery Communications corporate headquarters capitalize on the CBD's primary intersection. Additional visibility is created by a gateway plaza proposed at the corner of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road that will also reorient the area east of Georgia Avenue around a redesigned pedestrian-friendly Ellsworth Street. This community-serving development will also reuse the historic Silver Theatre and Shopping Center. Development in the Urban Renewal Area will continue to be governed by the goals and guidelines of the Urban Renewal Plan.

- Design of individual projects within the Urban Renewal Area should contribute to the greater urban environs.
- Ensure that the Urban Renewal Area development frontage along Wayne Avenue incorporates activating uses, includes the proposed Green Trail, and allows visible pedestrian connections to Fenton Village.
- Develop the Urban Renewal Area parcels east of Georgia Avenue as a mixed use retail, entertainment, office, and hotel project.
  - Renovate the Silver Spring Shopping Center, using it to create a CBD landmark.
- Ensure that the links between the Silver Theatre and the Downtown Silver Spring project are clear.
  - Redevelop the Silver Theatre as a film education and entertainment venue maintaining, as much as possible, the building's original appearance and function.
  - Incorporate a civic building and public outdoor space into the project that can accommodate varied community activities and commemorate Silver Spring's veterans. Relocate the civic functions components of the Armory to this facility.
- Develop the Silver Triangle site west of Georgia Avenue, recognizing and using its strategic location and potential to create a focus in the Core as a mixed-use development, including a large open space that is visible and accessible from adjacent streets.
  - Should the approved project plan be changed, buildings on this site should be located next with ground floor retail along Colesville Road and be an opportunity for a signature building at the CBD's center.

- The Silver Triangle's open space should: be integrated with the Transit Center's open space, be visible and easily accessible from surrounding streets, be landscaped with shade trees, and both grassy and paved areas, include a central focal point, such as a water feature, be activated by ground floor retail uses, pedestrian routes, and programming, and be designed and sized to accommodate a variety of community activities.
- The Silver Triangle's central CBD location near Metro and the Urban Renewal Area give it the potential to be an active downtown focal point. Allow additional height above 143 feet on this site subject to Planning Board approval.
- Include a mid-block crossing of Georgia Avenue to connect to development on the Urban Renewal site
- Include pedestrian connections through the Silver Triangle site linking the Downtown Silver Spring project with the Transit Center.

## **TRANSIT CENTER**

The Silver Spring Metrorail Station will become part of a true transportation center and a gateway to downtown. The redesigned station will incorporate and connect bus, taxi, and local and regional rail service in one pedestrian-friendly facility. Including street-level convenience retail and a landscaped park will make transit a more convenient and attractive option for the CBD's residents, employees, and visitors, and will make the Transit Center a community crossroads and landmark.

The following project guidance is designed to ensure that the Transit Center is accessible to pedestrians and vehicles from all parts of downtown, that it is compatible with adjacent development, and that it contributes to the CBD's revitalization.

- Design and build the Transit Center to:
  - integrate access to all modes of mass transit—Metrorail, MARC, buses, and a future transit line to Bethesda—in one facility on Colesville Road
  - improve pedestrian safety and aesthetics in and around the Center with wide, tree-lined paths and specially paved crosswalks
  - include a street-front retail component facing a tree-lined Colesville Road promenade for the convenience of transit riders and other CBD users
  - meet revitalization goals by incorporating a relocated park, pedestrian and bike connections, and street-fronting retail in a landmark building
  - include direct connections to the Silver Triangle site and to the Capital Crescent/Metropolitan Branch Trail
  - consolidate curb cuts at the triangular corner of Colesville Road and Wayne Avenue

- minimize conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians, ensuring pedestrians equal or greater prominence in the design, and minimize conflict between buses and vehicles on the Transit Center and Silver Triangle sites.

## **OTHER CORE PROJECTS**

- Develop the Lee Block with a mix of uses that could include housing, office, and retail uses. Buildings here should: incorporate street-activating uses, be designed with sensitivity to the historic Montgomery Arms Apartments along Fenton Street, and incorporate the J.C. Penney facade into new development. The remainder of the block should be included in the Silver Spring Historic District evaluation, and be configured to create through-block pedestrian paths.
- Future development on the Apple Avenue site could include a mix of uses that include housing, office, and retail uses. New development should be compatible with surrounding development including existing high-rise residential and office buildings as well as the townhouses at Cameron and Second Streets.
- Redevelopment of the northwest corner of the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road should recognize that site's critical visual significance and make safe and attractive connections to the Urban Renewal site and to the Silver Triangle.
- Incorporate a public open space along Fidler Lane from Ramsey Avenue to Second Avenue, and redevelop Fidler Lane as a mixed street or park and as a bike-friendly area.
- Establish the Silver Spring Green Trail through the Core as a defining aesthetic feature, and to link pedestrian and bike routes through the downtown.
- Establish a gateway presence with building design and landscaping at Colesville Road and Cedar Street, and at Colesville Road and East West Highway.
- Review existing signs and develop a way-finding plan including directional and informational signs, identification of gateways and districts, banners, kiosks, graphics, and visual cues to enhance the CBD's image and function.

## **RIPLEY**

The Ripley District's proximity to the Transit Center and other downtown development projects makes it a natural location for spin-off development. The following goals and guidelines should be incorporated into future development in this area.

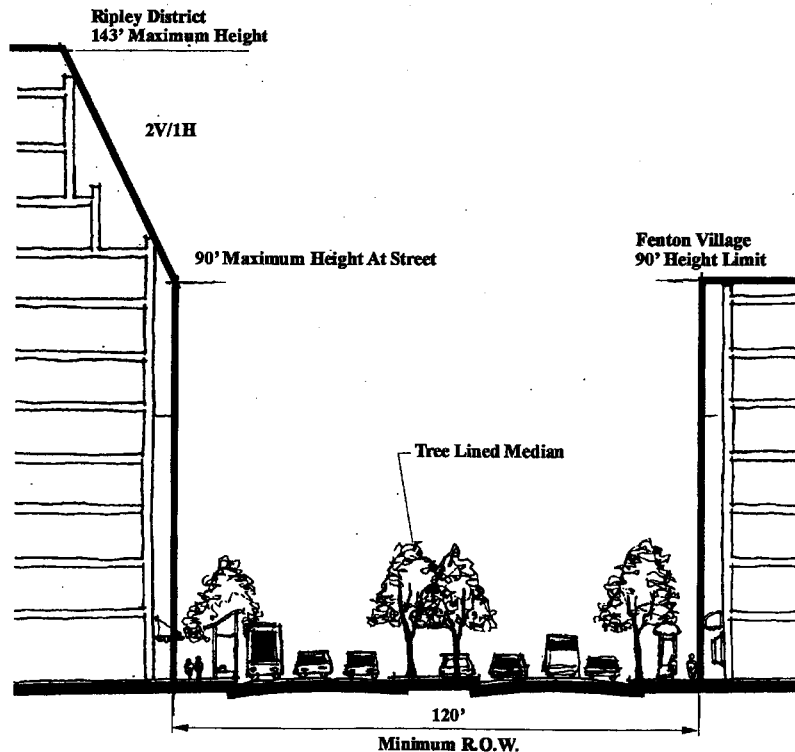
- Prepare drawings that illustrate development options for the Ripley District.

These drawings will be used by staff to guide and evaluate optional method development proposals. They should explore development patterns; open space as an organizing feature; car, pedestrian, and bike connections to the proposed Transit Center; and a pedestrian/bike connection across the CSX railroad tracks. A bridge to cross the tracks was a condition of the NOAA phase 3 approval. Although escrow money exists, the bridge has not been built because there is no landing on the north side of the tracks. A site for the bridge should be identified when the Ripley District builds out.



- make connections to the proposed Transit Center, the Capital Crescent/Metropolitan Branch Trail, and other CBD facilities and neighborhoods
- incorporate one or more recreational facilities sized and programmed to meet community interests, and that make use of their urban location
- create open spaces designed to form a new image for this neighborhood, and contribute to an improved visual quality along Georgia Avenue.
- Building heights along Georgia Avenue should contribute to an attractive and coherent street.
  - At the building line, limit height to 90 feet, consistent with height limits on the east side of Georgia Avenue (Figure 5).
  - The building may step back and its height may be increased up to 143 feet, provided that the building is contained within a 2:1 slope.
- Building heights along Dixon Avenue and Ripley Street should contribute to an attractive street with adequate light and air.
  - To be in proportion with the 70- to 80-foot street widths, building height should be limited to 80 feet at the property line.
  - Beyond 80 feet, the building may step back and its height may be increased up to 143 feet, provided they are contained within a 2:1 slope.

Figure 4 Georgia Avenue Street Section



## **SOUTH SILVER SPRING**

South Silver Spring is the CBD's gateway and offers many opportunities for redevelopment. The following guidelines should be incorporated into redevelopment.

- Prepare studies and drawings that illustrate development options for South Silver Spring

Further efforts to identify and examine revitalization issues and illustrate an urban design vision of the area through drawings and perspective sketches is important in realizing South Silver Spring's potential. These initiatives can be used to encourage business relocation to the area and assist staff in evaluating development proposals. It should explore development patterns; open space as an organizing feature; car, pedestrian, and bike connections, as well as potential of adaptive reuse, infill development sites, and site assemblage in the context of market needs and building programs.

- Improve links within South Silver Spring and between South Silver Spring and the Core, the Ripley District, the Transit Station, Montgomery College, and the District of Columbia.
- Building heights along Newell Street and Eastern Avenue should ensure compatibility with the adjacent residential neighborhood.
  - At the property line, building heights should be limited to 45 feet.
  - Above 45 feet, the building may step back 60 feet and its height may increase to 90 feet.
- Building heights along Georgia Avenue should contribute to an attractive and coherent street.
  - At the building line, limit height to 90 feet, consistent with height limits on the east side of Georgia Avenue.
  - Beyond 15 feet, the building may step back and its height may be increased up to 143 feet, provided that the building is contained within a 2:1 slope.
- Building heights along East West Highway should contribute to a coherent and attractive streetscape with adequate light and air.
  - Building heights on the street's west side are limited to 90 feet by the CBD-1 Zone.
  - Building heights on the street's east side can go up to 143 feet, allowed in the CBD-2 Zone, provided that the building height is contained with a 2:1 slope after the initial 90 feet.

## FENTON VILLAGE

With its location between redevelopment on the Urban Renewal site, and residential neighborhoods, redevelopment on and around Fenton Street should create a local retail neighborhood that serves residents and CBD employees.

- Prepare studies and drawings that illustrate development options for Fenton Village

Further efforts to identify and examine revitalization issues and illustrate an urban design vision of the area through drawings and perspective sketches are important in realizing Fenton Village's potential. These initiatives should include:

- examining the potential for housing in Fenton Village, particularly in the transition area between the commercial and residential areas. This effort should include input from the adjacent East Silver Spring planning area
- identifying potential commercial and residential development sites and developing conceptual development scenarios
- supporting an Adopt-a-Block program on the two blocks bounded by Wayne Avenue, Fenton Street, Thayer Avenue, and Georgia Avenue
- examining parking demands and the design and configuration of parking lots and garages throughout the area, and suggesting renovations to improve their appearance, safety, and convenience. Options can include improved lighting, signs, and landscaping
- supporting Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) and Main Street recommendations to upgrade the physical appearance of Fenton Street through streetscaping, landscaped parking lots, infill development that helps define the street, and attractive screening of parking and vacant lots to help create a distinctive image, to improve the pedestrian environment, and to encourage private reinvestment. Efforts should include:
  - examining the potential for a mid-block pedestrian connection between Core redevelopment and Fenton Village
  - examining potential reuse and redesign of public parking lots with infill residential or commercial development, or improved landscaping
  - improving links and road alignments within Fenton Village and between Fenton Village and the Core, the Ripley District, the Police Station on Sligo Avenue, the Transit Station, and Montgomery College
  - landscaping the public parking lot between Silver Spring Avenue and Thayer Avenue to include landscaping at Fenton Street, shade trees distributed throughout the lot, seating, special paving, and well-defined pedestrian paths. The lot should be designed to accommodate community events.
  - examining potential for landscaping opportunities throughout Fenton Village.

- Proposed projects should provide efficient, safe, and attractive at-grade pedestrian links within Fenton Village and to the surrounding CBD.
- Projects proposed along the east side of Fenton Street should make a transition between the commercial district and the adjacent single-family homes, creating compatibility through height changes, siting, and green, landscaped buffers.
- Limit building height for new construction fronting along the east side of Georgia Avenue to 90 feet, and 60 feet for remaining properties, interior to the block, to the west of Fenton Street.
- Limit building height for new construction fronting on the east side of Fenton Street to 45 feet for all uses except housing which would be allowed up to 60 feet.

*Figure 10 Fenton Village—Typical Street Section*

