

# THE VISION – SILVER SPRING’S FUTURE

*This Plan envisions a downtown serving both the surrounding residential community and a broader market.*

Silver Spring will become the downtown serving the surrounding residential communities, the eastern part of the County, and a broader regional market, including the District of Columbia and western Prince George’s County. The downtown’s Core will re-emerge as the center of the community, with offices, shops, restaurants, and civic uses arranged along landscaped, pedestrian-friendly streets.

All of Silver Spring’s districts will be enriched with amenities and linked by tree-lined sidewalks, local and regional trails, and a pedestrian bridge over the railroad tracks. The new connections will capitalize on Silver Spring’s role as a transportation center where local and regional train, bus, road, and trail systems come together. The downtown’s parks and plazas will be connected by a linked park system supplemented by sidewalks edged with trees, and buildings with shopfronts that enliven the sidewalks.

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**From the 1993 General Plan Refinement of the Goals and Objectives for Montgomery County:**

“The County needs bustling central business districts where people can work and enjoy life. Centers should be places where residents can watch a play or visit an artist’s studio, eat at an ethnic restaurant or sit at an outdoor café, meet friends while shopping on the main street or farmer’s market, listen to a band concert in the summer or ice skate in the winter in the center of town, relax with a good book on their balcony or in the public library.”

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Silver Spring will become an even more desirable place to live, with a choice of housing types, supported by convenience shopping and enhanced with parks and gardens.

Civic and cultural uses will make Silver Spring a true community center. Private and public buildings and open spaces will provide venues for regular programs and special events that draw the community together. A network of fiber-optic and telecommunications connections, supporting electronic media, will serve businesses seeking to compete in a high-tech environment.

The CBD’s excellent transit, trail, and transportation connections will combine in an improved aesthetic environment to continue Silver Spring’s role as regional downtown. A variety of new and renovated buildings and activities will serve Silver Spring residents and workers, as well as visitors from throughout the region, drawn by varied shops, services, and entertainment outlets, which will enliven downtown.

As its main thoroughfares, **Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road** define the CBD and have the potential to be the front door for each of the downtown revitalization districts. Streetscaping and redevelopment will combine to create a pedestrian-friendly corridor. Likewise, distinctive signs and landscaping at the CBD gateways will mark the entrance into downtown Silver Spring.

The **Core** (see Map 7) will be the center of downtown, with retail, commercial, and residential development near the Transit Center. Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road will become true boulevards, busy with walkers, lined with trees and shops—the transportation spine of the community with cross streets connecting to Silver Spring’s other urban neighborhoods.

The **Ripley District** will become a focal point for revitalizing the west side of Georgia Avenue and linking it to other CBD neighborhoods with bike trails and pedestrian routes, connecting pedestrians and drivers to the nearby proposed Transit Center. New development will be organized around open spaces, surrounded by a mix of high-density office and apartment buildings, and complemented with civic and recreational uses.

**Fenton Village** will be a local neighborhood retail center, recharged with the energy of multi-cultural restaurants and businesses. Townhouse development will offer another downtown residential option. Fenton Street will be its main street, lined with low-scale buildings and refitted as a pleasant walkable street with sidewalks shaded by trees and opening into the occasional small plaza.

**South Silver Spring** will become a revitalized gateway to the County and the Silver Spring CBD, an area of complementary uses—including businesses supporting the emerging high-tech and communication arts development in the Core—enhanced by Montgomery College’s expansion and improvements at Jesup Blair Park.

Other areas of the CBD, primarily at its northern and southern ends, will continue to mark the entrance to the CBD and buffer surrounding residential neighborhoods. Some development projects offer the potential to strengthen and further define those edges.

The strengths of each part of the CBD will be protected and built upon to regenerate the housing, offices, and services in these districts.

## **THE THEMES**

The Sector Plan’s themes articulate the shared goals and vision for the CBD. These themes developed from discussions with community members and will serve as guides to evaluate development proposals and future work program efforts and are reflected in the Plan’s text and recommendations.

- TRANSIT-ORIENTED DOWNTOWN
- COMMERCIAL DOWNTOWN
- RESIDENTIAL DOWNTOWN
- CIVIC DOWNTOWN
- GREEN DOWNTOWN
- PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY DOWNTOWN

Each theme is a tested planning approach comprising a set of ideas, tools, and projects that will contribute to downtown revitalization.

The strength of the downtown will come from applying these themes together. A successful commercial downtown hinges on a full and varied residential downtown—shops create convenience for residents, and residents create a market for shops and offices. Likewise, the other themes will affect the entire downtown.

It is this essential interconnectedness that makes a downtown interesting and successful. These themes strive to create varied land uses, development patterns, environments, and transportation choices. The Sector Plan and the development process strive to create variety, the hallmark of an active downtown.

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### ***Community Goals***

- Plan recommendations and development projects should be market-oriented to ensure a long-term revitalization.
- Silver Spring should be an active place with mixed uses attracting people at all times of the day, week, and year.
- Silver Spring must be an attractive place; an upgraded urban environment will attract private investment.
- Local, state, and federal governments must commit public resources to support private investment.

*These goals were articulated in focus groups and public workshops.*

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## TRANSIT-ORIENTED DOWNTOWN

*The Plan's land use and development recommendations strive to balance the needs of commuter and local traffic, of walkers and drivers, and to maximize the investment in Silver Spring's transit infrastructure.*

This Sector Plan's revitalization strategy envisions Silver Spring as a lively place, and along with activity comes traffic. However, the benefits of redevelopment are great and can outweigh the inconvenience of additional traffic. A mix of development projects, office, housing, retail, and entertainment, will generate traffic at different times of the day. It is imperative that Silver Spring maximize its already considerable transportation infrastructure—roads, Metro and MARC, bus service, trails, and sidewalks—and capitalize on its high transit ridership. Focusing development around these connected transportation systems meets local goals as well as the regional transportation goals of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), and the goals of the State's Smart Growth initiative.

Silver Spring developed around the crossroads of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road, State roads that are and will continue to be major commuter arteries, connecting Howard and Montgomery Counties and the Capital Beltway to Washington, D.C. The challenge comes in maintaining these routes as regional arteries, while establishing a local circulation pattern that is pedestrian-friendly, supports the development of existing and proposed businesses, and provides necessary access to and throughout the CBD.

Creating a transit-oriented community is not only a transportation effort, but also a land use effort. Providing development close to the new Transit Center will encourage its use. If transit facilities are convenient to downtown activity, they will become a viable option for local and regional travelers. (See the Land Use and Zoning section.)

### ELEMENTS

- **Land use patterns** are the most influential factor in making public transportation usable and convenient. The transit system must take people where and when they need to go, and once arrived, they must be able to travel without a car. Offices, housing, stores, child care, and entertainment must all be within walking distance of the transit stop. Silver Spring's urban pattern of streets and blocks should be filled in with development that is street-fronting, pedestrian accessible, and near transit. (See the Circulation Systems section.)
- **Circulation patterns** in Silver Spring are established by the crossroads that define the downtown: Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road. As they pass through Silver Spring, these two roads must continue to link commuters to the Beltway and downtown Washington, while serving the local community by providing auto and pedestrian access. Each street in the CBD plays a role—local or regional, pedestrian or auto, through-travel or destination—and those roles must be defined and supported with streetscaping and design.

- **Transportation choices** go beyond the car to link local and regional buses and trains, bikes and foot travel. A system of paths combined with a full complement of transportation options and sidewalks can increase mobility for the elderly, handicapped, children, and those without a car. Increased mobility can open employment, residence, and entertainment options in the CBD to more people, making downtown a useful and lively place.
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### ***Smart Growth and Transportation***

The State of Maryland is moving forward with short- and long-term solutions that create a comprehensive approach to balancing the demands of growth, traffic, and quality-of-life.

As a transportation hub with the potential for significant new housing, office, and retail development, Silver Spring is poised to take advantage of the State's commitment to expanded demand management techniques, enhanced transit opportunities, and road improvements. The CBD's urban, mixed land use patterns will encourage people to live, work, shop, and entertain themselves in downtown Silver Spring.

As a Smart Growth community, redevelopment in Silver Spring can help ease mounting traffic congestion in Montgomery County.

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## COMMERCIAL DOWNTOWN

*Silver Spring's location, infrastructure, and position in the metropolitan area market will continue its role as an employment center. New retail development will serve the local community with a mix of chain and independent businesses offering convenience and specialty shopping, restaurants, and entertainment.*

Commercial activity—a mutually supportive mix of offices, stores, and other business enterprises—is the defining feature of a successful downtown. Offices support lunch spots—from sit-down restaurants to sandwich shops—mailing services, banks, copy shops, child care services, and office supply stores. In turn, those uses generate other activities and customers.

Silver Spring's transportation infrastructure, its fiber-optic network, its proximity to Washington, D.C., and its variety of office, retail, and industrial space make it an employment center. This Sector Plan encourages a mixed commercial profile in Silver Spring to create a well-rounded local economy and a community where people can live, work, and meet their shopping and entertainment needs. Reinforcing Silver Spring's role as an employment center also meets the goals of the State's Smart Growth initiative, which focuses public infrastructure investment in existing urban centers. Focusing commercial development in the CBD also lessens the potential for commercial intrusion into surrounding residential neighborhoods.

A rejuvenated mix of commercial uses will combine with housing and civic uses, all linked to the metropolitan area by transit, to create a complete and active downtown in Silver Spring. (See the Land Use and Zoning section.)

### ELEMENTS

- **Retail** should reposition itself in Silver Spring to serve both local and regional markets with a variety of quality stores, both chain and independently owned.
- **Office** uses should build on the CBD's existing base of business activity. From large headquarters to independent proprietors, Silver Spring should offer opportunities for new construction and renovation of existing space, supported by business services and regional transportation links.
- **Entertainment and restaurant** uses serving the business and resident communities should be incorporated into downtown development, to round out the available choices with leisure-time opportunities.

## RESIDENTIAL DOWNTOWN

*This Plan seeks to create a mix of housing choices, including low-rise, high-density apartments and townhouses, supported by parks, shopping, cultural, civic, and employment uses with transit and Beltway access to make a convenient and thriving community.*

Housing desirability is generated by more than the individual building; the surrounding community makes a vital contribution. By creating a community with employment and shopping choices, and supporting it with civic facilities, parks, and recreation uses, the downtown becomes an enriched and active place attractive to a new residential population.

Developing new housing and supporting existing housing in the CBD also supports the State's Smart Growth initiative by increasing options for living near work and transit connections, and meets the General Plan goal of supporting redevelopment around transit centers.

Silver Spring's existing housing stock and new housing will be supported by the redevelopment goals stated in the Plan's themes. A green and pedestrian-friendly downtown will create the parks, plazas, and streets of a desirable residential community. The mix of uses—cultural, civic, shopping, restaurants, and employment—will also provide the amenities and necessities of a mutually supportive community. Silver Spring's access to Metrorail, Washington, D.C., and the Beltway will continue to make it a convenient place to live.

CBD housing choices will offer size, ownership, and location options to old and young, families and singles. Expanding the residential population will build a community that uses and supports the CBD. People use and care about the place they live. This Plan strives to make Silver Spring that place.

## ELEMENTS

The following housing types offer housing choices that add activity and create pleasant physical spaces in the urban environment. (See the Housing section.)

- **Urban row housing** is a proven traditional pattern that creates a defined street edge, increases activity and surveillance by placing front doors and windows near the street, and offers flexibility in unit size, arrangement, and ownership.
- **Low-rise high-density housing** is an economical way to create housing in an urban area where land costs are high and development potential must be maximized. This housing type also creates an approachable residential urban scale.
- **Housing over parking garages** also offers convenience, economic feasibility, and maximizes valuable urban property.
- **Housing over retail** can offer convenience and can often create an economic opportunity for small business people.

- **High-rise housing** remains a long-term housing development option that maximizes the CBD's proximity to Metrorail, and makes the most efficient use of urban land.
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### ***Live Near Your Work Program***

To encourage home ownership in targeted revitalization areas, this grant program funded by the State, the County, and participating employers offers a minimum of \$3,000 toward the purchase of a home.

Resident owners care about and become involved in their neighborhoods. Employees who live near their workplaces are more likely to walk or take transit, rather than add more car trips to already congested roads.

This program is available in designated areas of Silver Spring and Takoma Park, convenient to the CBD and its participating employers.

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## CIVIC DOWNTOWN

*This Plan views civic facilities as partners in economic revitalization. New and regenerated facilities will draw people downtown, returning it to the center of community life and creating opportunities for economic and social connections.*

Recasting Silver Spring as the community downtown is the first step in reviving the CBD as an active and useful place for residents and businesses. The buildings, spaces, and programs in Silver Spring should be enhanced by continued County investment, essential to making the downtown a center of community.

A civic presence in the CBD will be formed by the concentration and proximity of plazas, recreation facilities, community centers, historic buildings, and police and fire facilities adding to downtown's convenience and texture. The proximity of these varied activities draws people to the downtown and creates opportunities for economic and social connections.

A mixed urban environment creates opportunities for businesses and individuals. Providing civic spaces and services becomes an economic development tool, assuring private developers that their investment in Silver Spring will be supported and enhanced by public commitment. Incorporating civic services into downtown also provides increased service to the community.

## ELEMENTS

As downtown redevelops, the CBD will offer a full complement of flexible community facilities. Structures, programs, and open spaces that vary in size, location, services, and operations will serve the most people and respond to the community's daily and special needs. (See the Community Facilities section.)

- **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. Other structures are more flexible in their use and character. Meeting rooms, for example, can be used for public gatherings or private parties.
- **Civic spaces** are formal or informal, large or small, public or private—anywhere people meet, cross paths, and gather. From sidewalks to plazas, Silver Spring should have a variety of civic spaces.
- **Civic programs** A community is more than bricks-and-mortar. Its expression, values, and future are determined by the time and effort people spend with each other. From story hour at the library to job training, Silver Spring will build a stronger community. The physical environment should support that growth.

## GREEN DOWNTOWN

*This Plan envisions shaded, tree-lined streets and well-placed green parks and plazas, creating a comprehensive system of open spaces that provide economic, environmental, and aesthetic benefits throughout downtown.*

Incorporating nature into the city makes both economic and environmental sense. An environment of superior aesthetic quality—for example, the improved image and amenity of a well-designed and located park—creates value for property owners and users, employees and residents. Shaded, tree-lined streets punctuated by parks can convey the image of success and security.

A green CBD can also improve the overall environment, improving air and water quality. Trees provide oxygen, modulate light, and buffer wind. Urban open spaces can also gather and cool stormwater run-off, lessening its impact on area streams, watersheds, and even the Chesapeake Bay. (See the Environmental Resources section.)

Incorporating environmental improvements, recreation facilities, and landscaped parks, plazas, and sidewalks into downtown revitalization will make Silver Spring more competitive in the metropolitan-area commercial and residential markets.

Every opportunity should be used to add landscaping and green respites to the CBD's hardscaped environment. Silver Spring's urban profile and its residents' quality of life will be improved by a series of tree-lined streets and connected urban parks, together creating a distinctive and safe open space system that will draw people to Silver Spring.

## ELEMENTS

The Silver Spring Green Downtown will comprise a series of landscaped streets and sidewalks connecting a variety of urban open spaces.

While all downtown streets should be landscaped to create an improved pedestrian environment, the different types of urban street treatments described below should be used in different parts of downtown. (See the Circulation Systems section.)

- **Urban boulevards** are main thoroughfares that provide the first image of Silver Spring from a car. They are lined with wide sidewalks, distinct street trees and pavers, street furniture, and wide and well-marked pedestrian crossings.
- **Promenade streets** are landscaped with a double row of trees to create distinct green, linear spaces that incorporate high-quality pedestrian and bike paths.
- **Mixed streets** are designed to emphasize pedestrian circulation while allowing for limited, slow auto traffic. Trees, bollards, and street furniture are used to mark the pedestrian domain.
- **Green streets** are urban streets enhanced with landscaping.

The CBD's linked open space system of gardens and parks should be designed and located for high visibility to offer seasonal variety, to be safe, to increase property values, and to provide flexible recreation opportunities. (See the Community Facilities section.)

- **Green parks** are natural areas of respite and recreation. Grassy and shaded, parks can offer visual, physical, and recreational alternatives to the hard-edged urban environment. Parks of various sizes and character should be located throughout the CBD.
- **Landscaped plazas** are incorporated into building and site design to create visual and physical respite, to create formal and informal gathering places, and to complement street and building design. Plazas should be sized and located to complement surrounding uses and activities.
- **Green parking lots** are paved and landscaped to minimize impervious surface, lessening development impact on air and water quality. Tree-lined and pervious-surfaced parking lots will contribute to the CBD's overall green profile, and will provide areas for temporary events or markets.

## PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY DOWNTOWN

*This Plan encourages the development of active streets and sidewalks, busy with people walking to shop, commute, or for pleasure. They will become downtown's defining feature, and will support activity, creating the setting for community.*

The feel of a community is created on its streets and paths, and Silver Spring's sidewalks should be bustling and active. An urban area's greatest economic asset and strongest physical definition comes from its pedestrian environment. Sidewalks and streets scaled to walkers create active environments where people can shop, commute, recreate, and socialize. Communities where people can walk are communities where people will spend time and money.

The design of the pedestrian-scaled environment combines buildings and streets, active sidewalks, and open spaces detailed with street furniture and landscaping to provide a safe, pleasant, and interesting environment.

The CBD's pedestrian-friendly environment must also connect to surrounding neighborhoods and facilities. In Silver Spring, direct pedestrian connections to an expanded and redesigned Transit Center will improve the pedestrian environment and contribute to economic revitalization.

### ELEMENTS

- **Sidewalks** sized to accommodate walking traffic and to fit the overall street scale should be landscaped, edged by buildings, and connect urban parks, plazas, and activities.
- **Street crossings** should promote safety and access by creating a pedestrian refuge.
- **Street definition** is formed by the harmonious proportions of buildings edging the street and sidewalk, and the activity created by that arrangement. The vertical building walls and their spacing along the street should combine to create a comfortable space. The street should be articulated with building details. Blank walls, parking lots and garages, driveways, and loading docks should be located to preserve streetfront building facades for doorways, windows, and shopfronts.
- **The street pattern** should make easy pedestrian connections between downtown activities and provide the structure of a pedestrian-friendly downtown.
- **Urban plazas** are breaks in the street pattern to attract groups of people—commuters streaming off Metrorail, employees on an outdoor lunch break—ideal spots for people-watching.
- **Street furniture** includes signs, lighting, benches, wastebaskets, and other elements that combine with building features to detail the street. A pedestrian-friendly environment includes the small-scale architectural and streetscape details that contribute visual interest and texture.
- **On-street parking** buffers pedestrians from moving traffic and makes local businesses more convenient with streetside, short-term parking.

- **Scale** in buildings and streets is the measure of place in relation to people and can contribute to creating a comfortable urban environment. In Silver Spring, the scale of a corridor—composed of buildings, sidewalk—and street, is defined by its width and the height of adjacent buildings. The relationship between these dimensions determines the light, air, and character of the street.

