

INTRODUCTION

This Sector Plan focuses on revitalization through combined public and private efforts. It articulates a vision and principles for future development and defines the Silver Spring CBD's physical and functional aspects.

Although Silver Spring has experienced a cycle of decline over the past several decades, a new sense of optimism about the CBD's future has emerged as the local economy rebounds from a recent recession. This optimism has also been sparked by the announcements of several major community-supported development projects, including Downtown Silver Spring (a collection of retail, restaurant, and entertainment), Discovery Communications, Inc. (office headquarters for more than 1,000 employees), the Towns at Silver Spring Commons (market-rate townhouses), a redesigned Transit Center, and the expansion of Montgomery College into South Silver Spring. Smaller development projects including the renovation of the Rock Creek Foundation and the Blair Mills Arts Center on East West Highway have also proven that individual owners of small properties can achieve success in the CBD. While the recent burst of activity in Silver Spring is promising, additional efforts toward revitalization are still needed to ensure long-term success.

Silver Spring's existing infrastructure offers significant advantages—a position recognized by the community, and by the State's Smart Growth policy and funding initiative. Some projects are already underway with Smart Growth funds and this Plan creates the opportunity for more.

This Sector Plan creates a structure for revitalization and makes specific recommendations to achieve a successful downtown. The Plan's themes and recommendations are multi-faceted, approaching downtown revitalization from many angles. Past experience has shown that no one project, person, or group can itself revive Silver Spring.

REVITALIZATION APPROACH FOR THE SILVER SPRING CBD SECTOR PLAN

The Sector Plan's general approach and specific recommendations reflect the Silver Spring business, investment, and residential communities' shared vision of the future. This vision is to create a downtown for Silver Spring that will be the focal point of community life, offering a variety of activities where residents and visitors can work, live, play, and socialize. A mix of regional and national business and cultural uses will serve the greater Washington region, creating a downtown that serves, but does not overwhelm, surrounding residential neighborhoods.

This Plan for revitalization strives to stimulate appropriate and targeted development, provide flexible land uses to respond to changing market forces, identify key development initiatives, and balance the need for development with sensitivity to the potential impacts on transportation systems, historic preservation, neighborhood compatibility, and the environment.

This Plan shifts the vision for downtown Silver Spring from a single, large-scale private project to an emphasis on development of many projects to complete the whole. Coupled with public investment in

community facilities and community initiatives in programs and promotion, this incremental approach to downtown revitalization can make Silver Spring a lively and responsive community, establishing a development pattern that can grow into the future.

While proposed development in the Urban Renewal Area, combined with other private office and residential development proposals, has begun downtown revitalization, the momentum must be sustained by public investment and policy efforts. This Plan makes recommendations for public efforts and provides standards for reviewing private projects.

This Plan establishes themes that are consistent with the goals of the 1993 Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan and provide the basis for its revitalization initiatives. The themes in the new Sector Plan are: a transit-oriented downtown, a commercial downtown, a residential downtown, a civic downtown, a green downtown, and a pedestrian-friendly downtown.

THE INTENT OF THIS PLAN

This Plan develops a vision, revitalization strategy, and implementation steps that set into motion coordinated, sustained public sector investment that will be used to leverage private investment in the Silver Spring CBD.

This Sector Plan is first and foremost a revitalization plan. Like plans for other communities in the County, it seeks to guide and modulate growth, but it also seeks to encourage the redevelopment of downtown from a disjointed assemblage of uncomplimentary buildings to a thriving community providing choices and opportunities. Within the framework of its themes and its specific recommendations, the Plan identifies public and private potential and responsibilities in creating a future for Silver Spring.

This Sector Plan strives to...

- Approach each component of the Plan from the point of view of **stimulating appropriate development**.
- Provide **market responsive land uses, zoning, and plan approval processes**.
- Provide more **flexible land use and zoning**, responsive to the CBD's changing real estate market.
- Identify key major public and private **development initiatives**.
- Develop **implementation strategies** and tools that will be available to realize the vision for the CBD.
- **Balance** the need for development with sensitivity to the potential negative impacts on transportation systems, historic preservation, neighborhood compatibility, and the environment.

The Sector Plan, through its broad goals and specific guidelines, will frame future development and future work efforts in the CBD.

Revitalization of the Silver Spring CBD will have both direct and indirect effects on surrounding communities. Concurrent with this Sector Plan update, master plans are being prepared for four residential communities surrounding the central business district: North Silver Spring, West Silver Spring, East Silver Spring, and the City of Takoma Park (Map 1).

Smart Growth

- **What is Smart Growth?**
Smart Growth is a State policy and funding program that invests public funds in older urban areas, revitalizing them into desirable places to live, work, and spend time.
 - **Why use Smart Growth?**
Using public funds to encourage private investment in urban areas preserves rural and suburban open space, and maximizes investments already made in urban infrastructure such as roads, transit, water and sewer.
 - **How can it work in Silver Spring?**
Silver Spring is ideally positioned to become one of Maryland's premier Smart Growth communities. This Plan identifies public and private development potential that can create jobs, housing, and civic opportunities that will return urban vitality to the community.
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PLANNING PROCESS FOR THE SILVER SPRING CBD SECTOR PLAN

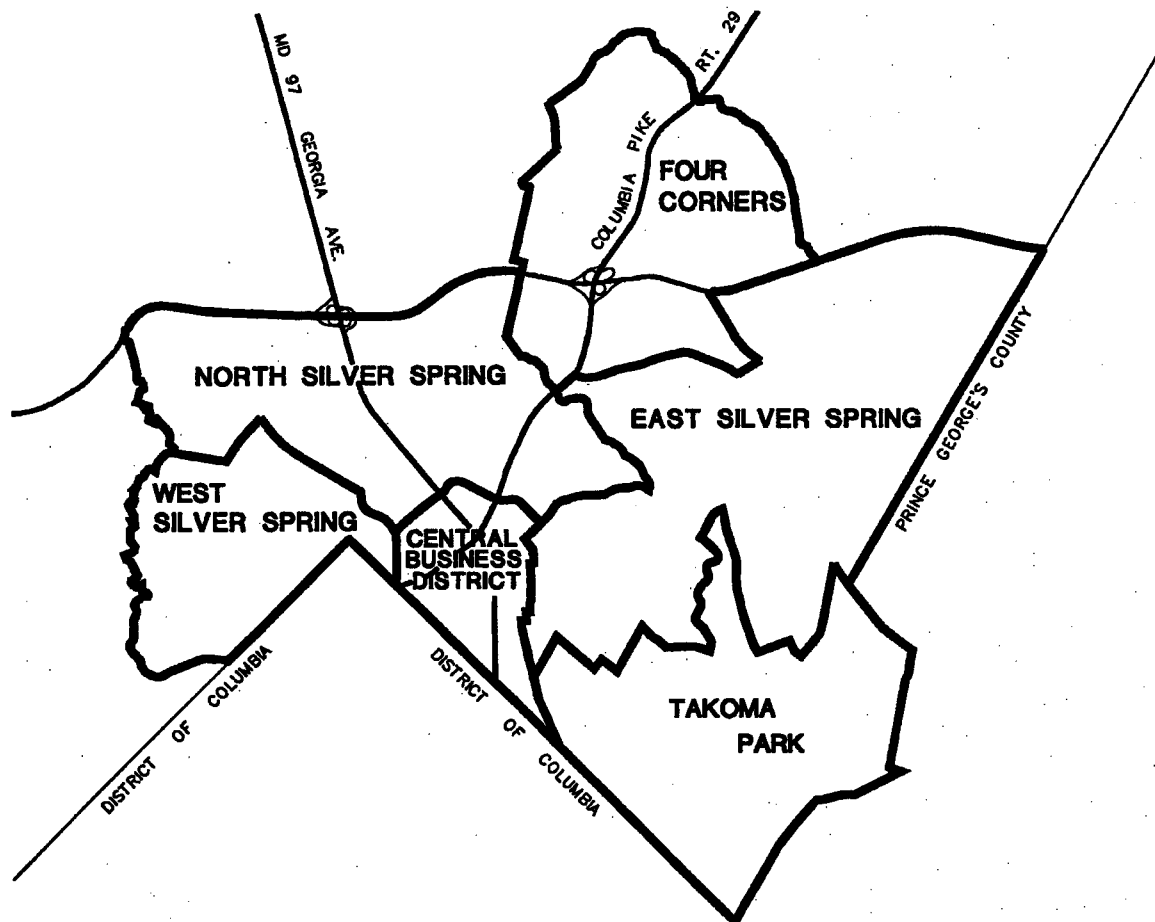
The 1993 Silver Spring Sector Plan recognized the need to monitor and evaluate development in the Central Business District and mandated a reassessment of the Plan within five years. Also since 1993, the State's Smart Growth initiative has refocused development funds and incentives on revitalizing downtowns.

This Sector Plan was completed under the streamlined planning process approved by the Planning Board and County Council. As part of this process, two rounds of focus group meetings and two open workshops were held with community leaders, developers, residents, business owners, and public officials to articulate and confirm the fundamental needs and approaches to revitalizing downtown Silver Spring.

The issues identified in the first round of focus groups were incorporated into a Draft Illustrative Concept Plan, presented to the Planning Board in July 1997. The Draft Concept Plan was presented to the community in the second round of focus group meetings that included initial participants, and sought out new participants.

The Draft Purpose and Outreach Report, completed in October 1997, outlined the rationale for undertaking this Sector Plan update, including changes in the CBD since the 1993 Plan and the larger issues to be addressed in the update. This Report was presented to the Planning Board at a public meeting and, with their comments, the update proceeded.

Map 1 Silver Spring/Takoma Park Community-Based Planning Area



A telephone survey conducted in English and Spanish also gathered information about the community—the concerns and opinions of Silver Spring and Takoma Park residents. Zoning and Transportation working papers were presented at open community forums, allowing citizen comment on draft ideas.

The County Executive’s Silver Spring Redevelopment Steering Committee advised on issues and policies in lieu of a separate Master Plan Advisory Group to maintain a seamless process of community input. The comments and ideas generated by discussion of the Draft Concept Plan with public agencies; representatives of civic, community, and business groups; and the Silver Spring Core Group (representatives of local government agencies who coordinate their work in the CBD) were also refined into the specific proposals and recommendations of this Sector Plan.

The Silver Spring Master Plan Process

- Phase One*** Collect data and meet with community focus groups
Develop Draft Illustrative Concept Plan

- Phase Two*** Meet with community focus groups and hold open house
Complete Purpose and Outreach Strategy Report

- Phase Three*** Undertake Silver Spring/Takoma Park Phone Survey
Develop working papers and additional studies
Hold issue-based community workshops identifying concerns with
working paper recommendations
Consult with Silver Spring Steering Committee and Core Group

- Phase Four*** Prepare Staff Draft Sector Plan

- Phase Five*** Transmit Staff Draft to Planning Board
Hold community forum in preparation for Planning Board hearing
Planning Board Worksessions

- Phase Six*** Prepare Planning Board Draft for submittal to the County Council

- Phase Seven*** County Council public hearing and worksessions

- Phase Eight*** County Council approval and adoption of the Sector Plan

OVERVIEW OF THE CBD

LOCATION

Silver Spring has tremendous advantages for residents and businesses seeking a location close to Washington, D.C. or Baltimore. Businesses are a 12-15 minute Metrorail trip to Capitol Hill and 35 miles from downtown Baltimore. Metrorail links Silver Spring with major local and national resources, including Union Station, the United States Congress, the MCI Center, the Smithsonian Institution, major federal government offices, the World Bank, Ronald Reagan National Airport, and the Washington, D.C. business district. The Silver Spring CBD is also accessible by two Capital Beltway interchanges and by Maryland Area Rapid (MARC) Commuter rail (Map 2).

As the Washington metropolitan region has developed as an information technology and computer center, and as new media and computer businesses have already committed to the CBD, the Silver Spring CBD is ideally positioned to become a high-tech center, by offering both start-up and established businesses, the computer, telephone, fiber-optic, and media network connections needed to compete effectively in this market.

BACKGROUND

The Silver Spring CBD is part of Montgomery County, Maryland, one of the most prosperous jurisdictions in the country. Montgomery County offers an excellent school and park system and proximity to Washington, D.C.'s cultural amenities. Silver Spring is located in the County's designated Urban Ring, which also includes the County's other CBDs: Bethesda, Friendship Heights, and Wheaton. Densely developed and established residential neighborhoods surround the CBD. The approximately 55,000 households within the Silver Spring market area (that extends into the District of Columbia and Prince George's County) have an aggregate annual income of over \$3 billion and estimated retail spending of two-thirds of a billion dollars that can support about 1.9 million square feet of retail space.

Silver Spring is the County's last suburban center to revitalize and its location makes it a prime candidate for the State's Smart Growth initiative. Redevelopment efforts should maximize the convenience of Silver Spring's excellent business and residential location.

THE EVOLUTION OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S FIRST COMMERCIAL CENTER

The first step in developing a vision and revitalization strategies for the downtown is to recognize that Silver Spring's development over the past 50 years has been unique in Montgomery County. While there are other CBDs in the County, none is as large as Silver Spring, none has ever experienced the same magnitude of decline as Silver Spring, and none has experienced as dramatic a shift in demographics as Silver Spring.

The Silver Spring CBD's early success and subsequent decline mirrors the experience of many of the first developed suburbs throughout the United States. Suburban outlets of downtown retailers located in Silver Spring first, then moved on to enclosed malls following expanded development and population. Today, Silver Spring competes with numerous retail/commercial centers throughout the region, including Wheaton Plaza, Montgomery Mall, White Flint Mall, Rockville Pike, Prince George's Plaza, Friendship Heights, and the Bethesda CBD.

Many workers and residents in and around the CBD generally consider themselves suburbanites. Silver Spring is not the primary downtown for the region, but rather a secondary downtown to Washington, D.C. Developers, residents, merchants, and businesses are influenced by Silver Spring's suburban location outside of downtown Washington, D.C. This perception affects private and public sector land use decisions and sets up expectations for service, convenience, and appearance.

Silver Spring today is neither urban nor suburban. It is a hybrid of the two, evidenced by its physical attributes and the desires of its populace. In some places, sites are designed with an urban building line that creates a well-defined street edge. Silver Spring also displays many suburban characteristics, such as suburban-style shopping centers with private parking lots fronting retail establishments.

Data from the 1994 Census Update Survey showed that Silver Spring's population increased since 1990, but changed from elderly and older families to more younger households and singles. Recently built apartments complexes attract younger singles.

New residents will need retail services, may seek jobs and entertainment in the CBD, and will use park and recreation facilities. This Plan offers an opportunity to shape Silver Spring to meet a new market population and serve long-time residents.

Silver Spring's 265-acre CBD has a prime location in the Washington metropolitan area. It is situated inside the Capital Beltway in the southeast corner of Montgomery County, sharing a boundary with Washington, D.C., along Eastern Avenue. The CBD is roughly bounded by Spring and Cedar Streets on the north, Fenton Street on the east, Eastern Avenue on the southwest, and 16th Street on the west.

Montgomery County is...

- The third largest office market in the region.
- One of the wealthiest counties in the U.S., with a median household income of \$66,800.
- Home to federal government offices including the National Institutes of Health, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Energy, National Institute of Standards and Technology, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (located in the Silver Spring CBD).
- One of the nation's top locations for high-tech workers.
- Home to the third largest concentration of biotechnology firms in the nation.
- Home to major corporate, education, and research organizations including COMSAT, IBM, Lockheed Martin, Marriott International, AT&T, and Hughes Network Systems.

Silver Spring History

First settled in the mid-1840s, the area now known as the Silver Spring CBD was one of the first commercial centers to develop in Montgomery County.

Beginning with the Silver Spring Shopping Center and Silver Theatre, Silver Spring experienced early success as one of the region's first suburban comparison retail shopping destinations. Hecht's department store, J.C. Penney, Jelleff's, Peck and Peck, and Hahn Shoes were all major retail attractions and major land users in Silver Spring.

The building of Wheaton Plaza Shopping Center drew both retailers and shoppers away from the CBD and is often cited as the beginning of Silver Spring's decline.

Map 2 Regional Location

