

Silver Medal Winner  
Downtown Silver Spring  
& Discovery World Headquarters  
Silver Spring, Maryland



This is an excerpt from:

# Reinventing Downtown

2005 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

ROBERT SHIBLEY, AIA, AICP

WITH

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## Downtown Silver Spring At A Glance

### What is Downtown Silver Spring?

- The mixed-use revitalization of a “first ring” suburban downtown.
- Retail space (more than one million square feet) including movie theaters, restaurants, grocery stores and other retail shops.
- Office space, including the American Film Institute and the world headquarters for Discovery Communications.
- Multi-family dwelling units near existing neighborhoods of single family homes.
- Civic spaces with public art, fountains and greenery that serve as central public spaces for the downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Four reconstructed main streets with extensive new streetscapes for safe and attractive pedestrian environments.
- Safe, attractive and efficient public parking structures.

### Project Goals

- Introduce new development in the context of Maryland’s Smart Growth policies, and with the consensus of major stakeholders.
- Establish a public-private partnership that will revitalize the Central Business District (CBD) for eastern Montgomery County.
- Extend and strengthen neighborhoods close to downtown with housing and retail.
- Create a transit-oriented community, taking advantage of the local Metro station.
- Use an incentive zoning tool that provides significant opportunities for public involvement.

## Project Chronology

**1887** B&O Railroad stop makes Silver Spring an early railroad suburb.

**1938** Silver Spring Theatre and Shopping Center open in downtown Silver Spring.

**1948** Hecht's Department Store opens the first suburban department store in downtown Silver Spring.

**1960s** Regional shopping centers open, drawing business away from Silver Spring.

**1978** Silver Spring Metro stop opens.

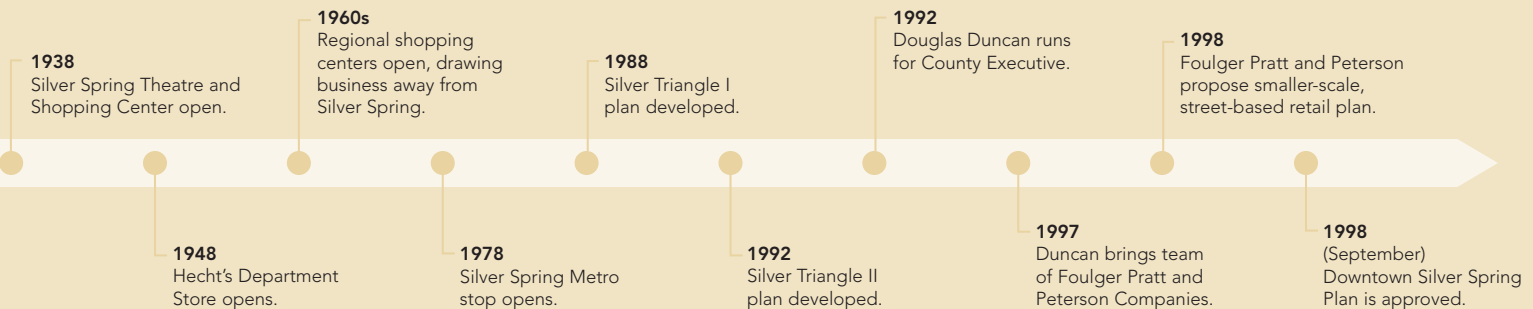
**1988** Silver Triangle I plan for a large enclosed shopping center, office tower, and bridge retail building spanning Georgia Avenue is proposed and generates wide community opposition.

**1992** A smaller shopping center, Silver Triangle II, is proposed but also generates community opposition.

Douglas Duncan runs for County Executive and declares he will cancel the Silver Triangle II plan if elected. He wins and the plan is cancelled.

**1994** The "American Dream" plan proposes a large inward-facing entertainment mall.

**1996** The "American Dream" plan dies for lack of private financing.



**1997** Duncan brings team of Foulger Pratt and Peterson Companies to engage in community discussions to develop a new proposal and generate community support.

**1998** Foulger Pratt and Peterson propose smaller-scale, street-based retail plan that calls for incremental development of the area. The plan receives widespread community support.

(September) Downtown Silver Spring Plan is approved with \$165 million in county funding for infrastructure support.

**1999** (April) Ground-breaking for Downtown Silver Spring.

**2000** Discovery Communications and the American Film Institute agree to come to Silver Spring.

## KEY PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEWED

### **The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission**

JOHN CARTER, *AIA, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division*

GLENN KREGER, *Team Leader, Silver Spring Team, Community-Based Planning Division*

MIGUEL IRAOLA, *ASLA, Urban Design Coordinator, Community-Based Planning Division*

SANDRA TALLANT, *Planning Coordinator, Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan, Community-Based Planning Division*

LARRY PONSFORD, *AICP, Development Review Division*

GWEN WRIGHT, *Preservation Section, Countrywide Planning Division*

### **Office of Montgomery County Executive**

DOUGLAS DUNCAN, *County Executive*

WILLIAM MOONEY, *Office of the County Executive*

GARY STITH, *Silver Spring Redevelopment Office*

### **Foulger Pratt and Peterson Companies – Development Group**

BRYANT FOULER, *Foulger Pratt Development Group*

CAREY JOHNSON, *Peterson Companies*

THOMAS MASKEY, *Peterson Companies*

### **Montgomery County Planning Board**

WENDY PERDUE, *Vice Chair*

JOHN ROBINSON, *Commissioner*

**Montgomery County Government**

JENNIFER BARRETT, *Silver Spring Regional Services Center*  
SUSAN HOFFMANN, *Silver Spring Regional Services Center*

**Designers**

GARY BOWDEN, *AIA, RTKL, Inc.*  
DENNIS CARMICHAEL, *FASLA, EDAW*  
STEVE COHEN, *AIA, SmithGroup Architecture*  
JIM URBAN, *FASLA, James Urban Landscape Architecture*  
JANET KRESLIN, *AIA, Gensler Architects*

**Community Representatives**

SHERYL BRISSET-CHAPMAN, *National Center for Children and Families*  
THERESA CAMERON, *Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County*  
MIKE DEGEL, *Allied Civic Group*  
ELNORA HARVEY  
BARBARA HENRY, *Discovery Communications*  
BOB HICKS  
MARCUS JOHNSON, *Three Keys Music*  
SUSAN MADDEN, *Montgomery College*  
FRAN MEYER, *Silver Spring Regional Advisory Group*  
CYNTHIA RUBESTEIN, *Allied Civic Association*  
WEBB SMEDLEY  
HOWARD SRIBNICK, *Silver Spring Advisory Board*  
LAURA STEINBERG  
DALE TIBBITTS  
CHARLES WOLFF

**Other Contacts**

DONALD ZUCHELLI, *President, President, ZHA, Economic Development Consultant*  
GUS BAUMAN, *Attorney*  
RAY BARRY, *American Film Institute*  
CARMEN CAMACHO, *Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce*  
AURELIA MARTIN, *City Place*  
CHARLES NULSON, *Atlantic Reality*  
PANDIT WRIGHT, *Discovery Communications*  
JERRY MCCOY, *Silver Spring Historical Society*  
ANNYS SHIN, *reporter, Washington Post*



## Project Description

## Urban Context and History



The Silver Spring of the 1950s (top photo) is significantly different than the urbanized center of 2003 (bottom photo).

Silver Spring is an unincorporated area of Montgomery County, Maryland which abuts the northern border of the District of Columbia. It has a long history as a transportation dependent community, although the mode of transportation it has depended on has varied from railroad, to trolley, to the automobile, and finally the subway. Silver Spring was still a rural area when its first post office opened during the Civil War. Only two decades later, it became a stop on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and at about the same time a farm in Silver Spring was sold and converted to the area's first suburban home development. Robert Oshel, a historian of Silver Spring's Woodside Park, writes that "real estate developers began platting Silver Spring's first 'suburban' developments several years after the opening of the B&O's Metropolitan Branch made commuting to Washington possible" (Oshel 1998). By the end of the century there was also trolley service running from Silver Spring to the Washington, D.C. border. By the 1930s, Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring was a thriving commercial district with over sixty retail stores.

The nature of retail business was altered in 1938 when the new art deco style Silver Spring Shopping Center opened at the corner of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road. The shopping center was said to be the second of its kind in the country, and for its debut an entire section of the *Washington Post* was devoted to its wonders. The shopping center was followed in 1945 by the county's first public parking lot

in downtown Silver Spring, foreshadowing the growing dependence of retail business on cars. Shortly after the end of World War II, the Hecht's Department Store Company opened its first branch outside of downtown Washington next to the shopping center. Not long after that, other national stores also came to the area, including Sears and J.C. Penney.

Retail business continued to move outward from the urban core. The downturn for downtown Silver Spring began in 1960, with the opening of the first regional shopping center in suburban Washington in the northern suburb of Wheaton. Not coincidentally, at about the same time the Washington Beltway came to Silver Spring. Within a few years, the Wheaton Mall was one of the most successful in the country, and its success was mirrored by the gradual decline and deterioration of

retail business in downtown Silver Spring. In 1978, there were great expectations and hopes for the impact of the new Silver Spring Metro Station on the Washington subway system's Red Line, but relatively little development followed except for several new office buildings. Emblematic of this decline was the decision to close the Silver Spring branch of the Hecht's Department Store in 1987.

The downtown Silver Spring area saw some office rebound in the 1980s, at least in part because of the new Metro stop, and some retail growth in the 1990s. Even so, most of the Central Business District (CBD), including the area at the "one hundred percent corner" of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road, lay in disrepair. Crime was an increasing problem. Any growth in the area was held up by the inability to put together a successful plan for the revival of the Silver



*The Silver Spring Shopping Center and its context in 1938 (left) is a sharp contrast to the same area in the 1950s, (right).*

Theatre and Shopping Center. The area was, in the words of the *Washington Post*, “a collection of tattoo parlors, pawn shops and Mom-and-Pop discount clothing stores” (June 21, 2004).

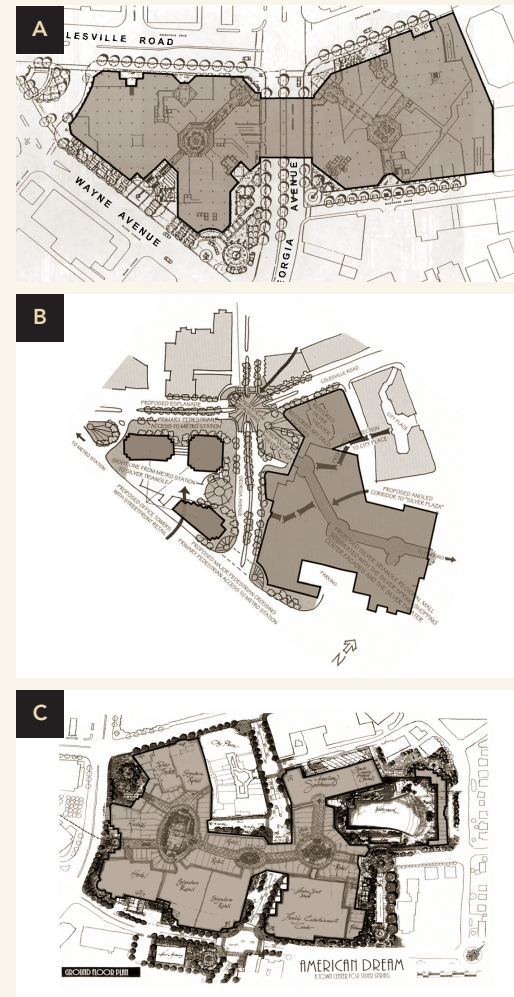
The evolution of the Downtown Silver Spring project goes back almost twenty years to the initial attempts to revitalize the triangle that is formed by the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road. Three failed plans set the stage for the current project. The first, in 1987, was the so-called Silver Triangle plan. That proposal called for the creation of an almost one million square foot mall that would be anchored by two major department stores (Macy’s and Nordstrom’s), hotels and an office tower along with retail shopping in a bridge building that would span Georgia Avenue. There was a strong consensus in the community that this plan was much too large, too expensive and would generate too much traffic, and the community and the county government eventually rejected it. In 1991, a more modest proposal was made which was dubbed Silver Triangle II. In support of this proposal, an urban renewal district was created in 1992 for several blocks of the downtown area. The use of urban renewal by the county was not easy for Silver Spring to accept, because it involved giving up its suburban identity, admitting that the area was indeed urban in character, and that the downtown was “blighted,” a term usually applied to inner-city areas.

The Silver Triangle II plan was smaller than its predecessor, with the retail focus around the area of the historic shopping center. There were also plans for later development of office space west of Georgia Avenue. Community opposition to that proposal was sufficient to make it an issue in the 1992 county election, and helped defeat one county executive and elect the current County Executive, Douglas Duncan. The 1992 recession also helped to doom this proposal. Duncan, during the general election campaign, vowed to defeat the Silver Triangle II proposal, which he did promptly after taking office.

The county then issued a “Request for Expressions of Interest” for the area. The request emphasized the county’s willingness to support and subsidize the selected project with incentives and infrastructure improvements. They settled on a submission from Canadian developers whose résumé included the Mall of America. The past experience of these developers proved to be an accurate predictor of what was ultimately proposed. Their plan, the “American Dream” proposal, called for a large, enclosed mall that included theaters, ice-skating, miniature golf, and a great deal of parking. As the impact statement made clear, it focused heavily on attracting tourists to the area as a means of economic development.

Some in the community were appalled by the scale as well as by the design of the proposed mall – what one observer called “ten pounds of mud in a five pound bag.” Even so, the opposition was never sufficient to kill it. This project had the support of the county government as well as the citizen’s Silver Spring Redevelopment Advisory Board, which in early 1996 voted overwhelmingly to move forward with the proposal, although several expressed continuing reservations. Others commented that many in the county and the community were fearful that this third plan was a last chance for Silver Spring, and that if it failed there might be no successor. Even though the county promised \$350 million in support and subsidies towards the development, the “American Dream” failed because it could not find sufficient support in the private sector. After several delays, when it became clear that private financing for the project was not going to be sufficient, the county executive, Duncan, “pulled the plug.” That was, by all accounts, a particularly difficult time for the community, because the next step was not yet clear.

In several ways, the “American Dream” plan set the stage for the next effort. It had received a tremendous amount of publicity, which helped put Silver Spring on the map for developers. Most importantly, the county’s commitments of \$350 million for infrastructure and subsidies were still on the table. In addition, the community was now acclimated, some say desensitized, to the scale of development that might be possible, and was certainly ready and even anxious to see



Three failed plans: The 1987 “Silver Triangle” plan was replaced with “Silver Triangle II” (B) defeated in 1992 and that was followed by the “American Dream.”

a project finally get started. Also, historic preservation of key elements of the district had become important to the community. (Silver Triangle II developers had insisted that the Armory would have to come down, putting that space “in play” for future plans.)

The county next approached a more local development team composed of Foulger Pratt Development (Rockville, Maryland) and the Peterson Company (Fairfax, Virginia), who had reputations for work in downtown areas. The county executive was surprised when Bryant Foulger told him that they would not offer a design, but rather they would suggest an extended community process toward creating a plan. The developers had observed negative community reactions over the decade to the past proposals and had concluded that no project could be successful unless community support was developed and supported at the outset. The county executive was taken aback, but after several discussions agreed to this process.

For their part, the developers saw a great opportunity in the vastly underserved community in and near Silver Spring. County data showed that there were 500,000 people living within a five mile radius, many with incomes that could support a strong retail plan. Silver Spring is a major transportation hub. Thirty thousand people work within a five minute walk of Downtown Silver Spring and 50,000 mass transit commuters (commuter rail, Metro rail, and bus) pass through the area daily.

The developers spent the better part of the next year meeting with members of the community through a Steering Committee created by County Executive Duncan. The committee included some who had protested previous plans as well as other community groups. What emerged was a plan that relied on smaller scale, street-based retail, with elements that might be considered “new urbanist,” and was consistent with the state’s *Smart Growth Plan*. Duncan commonly refers to it as a strategy for “a series of singles, instead of a home run.” The name “Downtown Silver Spring” symbolizes the goal of this project – to revive street life and commerce in the Silver Spring CBD. County officials were stunned when, with \$350 million in government support available, the Foulger Pratt and Peterson plan called for use of only \$187 million. It was, by comparison, quite a bargain for the county.

The developers and a community group were able to agree on the basic elements of a plan – small-scale, local retail, and rehabilitation and reuse of the Silver Theatre and Shopping Center. Foulger’s plan was to achieve consensus, even unanimity, on basic ideas. At meetings of the Steering Committee, he posed and obtained unanimous votes of support on questions such as “Is it important to revitalize the CBD?” “Is it important to draw people back to Silver Spring?” and “Should the site include a hardware store, grocer, bookstore, and national restaurants?” Foulger promised the Steering Committee that the plan would address all of these goals and told them that when it did he



expected their complete and total support. The plan he brought back several months later indeed contained the elements he had promised. The only serious points of contention concerned the proposed loss of the Armory, which was to be replaced by a parking deck, civic building and new plaza.

Foulger noted that the community process made recruiting retail tenants easier because he was able to tell representatives of national chains that the community had specifically asked for their presence and would support their store. Most observers felt that the community got everything it wanted except for the loss of the Armory, and were especially pleased with the presence of Whole Foods, Borders Books and a local hardware store. An executive at the Whole Foods Market, Inc. national office indicated that opening a store in Downtown Silver Spring when it did was “a little like going out on a limb” since they were the first major retailer to commit to the development at a time when the American Film Institute was still negotiating its terms. To bring a store to an area seen by many as dangerous was unusual, since their stores are often open late at night. Opening this facility was viewed by Whole Foods as an expression of confidence in the plan and the community and was, the executive noted, significantly helped by the support of the Montgomery County government.



While some grumble about the lack of local restaurants, most seem to feel this is not an important issue. Clearly, winning the headquarters for the American Film Institute (AFI) and Discovery Communications was a major success and a vestige of the earlier Silver Triangle scheme. Discovery Communications had been spread among six locations in Bethesda and the lack of expansion opportunities there made a regional search for a headquarters necessary. AFI’s presence in Silver Spring helped influence Discovery to consider this site, since they and Discovery worked together on projects. Also attractive was the ample space in close proximity to both the Metro and proposed new downtown.

Planners of Downtown Silver Spring felt that the development needed a visible presence – an iconic image – that would attract attention and bring people into the area. The American Film Institute (AFI), with its

*The Whole Foods store was one of the first to commit to the new downtown Silver Spring.*

national and international program recognition, was seen as that icon. For that reason Duncan became personally involved in the negotiation to bring them to the old Silver Theatre, beginning initial contacts in the fall of 1997. Duncan apparently said to the directors of the American Film Institute that he would do “whatever it takes” to get them to come. What it took was allocation by the county of \$7.8 million toward the restoration of the theater and the offer of a ten year lease for the Silver Theatre at \$10 per year, with an option for nine additional ten year renewals.

AFI’s mission is to archive, preserve, restore, and exhibit films, as well as using film as an educational and community building tool. The leaders of AFI bought into the urban development model as part of their decision to place this theater in Silver Spring. In the same way that many communities are using entertainment or performing arts centers as a base for community development, AFI’s Silver Theatre and Cultural Center is seen as much more than just a movie theater – it is a centerpiece for Silver Spring’s revival. AFI executives note that films have an advantage in this respect because for many people films are better known and more accessible than other art forms. In addition, they noted, it is much less expensive to change the program of a movie theater than it is for a performing arts theatre or an amusement park.

Advisor Donald Zuchelli has suggested that attracting AFI “broke the whole shell open” and gave confidence to the community and other potential investors. AFI was not the first step, but it came at a key time. AFI, with its \$25 million investment in the theater, was a critical part of the restoration effort. “We needed to catch the imagination of the public.” Many people said, “I cannot believe AFI is in Silver Spring.”

AFI has aspirations beyond simply showing films. They see film as having a role in educational outreach, and believe in using film to bring people together and build “cross-cultural awareness and understanding.” In addition to “Silver Docs,” a nationally known film festival, the organization works with local schools on curriculum, has special programs for families at risk, and offers community education programs. They say that the education component of their mission made locating



*The AFI Silver Theater and Cultural Center is a centerpiece for Silver Spring’s revival.*

AFI in Silver Spring was “a no-brainer,” bringing an important cultural amenity to a diverse community that was cosmopolitan, but needed support. AFI executives note that since their opening in March 2003, their presence, special programs and festivals have had a multiplying effect on the success of Downtown Silver Spring. In addition, synergies have grown out of the theater. AFI’s work with Discovery Communications is a prime example. AFI certainly has brought increased visibility to the community. For example, one local Washington, D.C. television station uses the image of the Silver Theatre marquee as one of its icons representing the D.C. area. “Silver Spring,” one executive said, “is, god help us, becoming hip.” Box office receipts are ahead of projections with 147,000 tickets this year versus 98,000 the previous year, a forty-seven percent increase in sales.

The other key large-scale project for Downtown Silver Spring was the Discovery Communications Headquarters Building. Discovery was



*The Discovery Communications Headquarters opened in 2003*

attracted by the plans to bring AFI to Silver Spring, since AFI and Discovery Communications were partners in a variety of high-tech communications projects. Discovery Communications had been based in Bethesda, but had spent several years looking for another site in the metropolitan area for an expanded headquarters. They became attracted to Silver Spring for several reasons. First, they were heavily recruited by Duncan, who presented them with a vision of what Downtown Silver Spring could become, as well as a public-private partnership that included tax and zoning incentives. Discovery officials note that the top executives bought into the vision and wanted the company to be part of Silver Spring’s revival. As an example of their commitment, the new building was planned without a cafeteria, as a way to get its workers out into the community and at local shops. In return, Discovery employees were provided with discounts at local stores and restaurants. The site was a 3.4 acre triangle of land across Georgia Avenue from the shopping center, and its proximity to the Metro stop was particularly enticing to Discovery. After significant discussions and debates over aspects of the site plan, the design was approved and the completed headquarters opened in 2003.

The City Place project was another pioneer in redeveloping space in Downtown Silver Spring. In 1990, it took over the Hecht’s building that had become vacant when Hecht’s closed its store in 1987. The façade was expanded (with the County Historic Preservation Commission

approval) and the interior was modified to serve a number of smaller retail and entertainment operations. City Place took a significant risk by opening in anticipation of redevelopment plans that were still being discussed. It suffered through a number of years as the lone new retail outlet in the area while various redevelopment plans rose and fell. They hung on and now hope to take advantage of Downtown Silver Spring's success. City Place has remodeled its exterior to fit the new streetscape of Ellsworth Avenue and is adding new tenants.

The *Sector Plan*, created by the Planning Board in 1999 for the Silver Spring CBD, envisioned this area as "the local downtown for surrounding residential communities and eastern part of the county, [and] the community's principal market center..." It identified five key actions to support revitalization: 1) rezone for development incentives and flexibility; 2) construct core projects including Downtown Silver Spring, AFI, the civic building and veterans plaza, and Discovery

Communications; 3) support the area by constructing civic and cultural facilities downtown, such as expanding Montgomery College, adding a new district court building and fire station; 4) begin structured parking and trail systems; and 5) improve circulation on major streets.

Once construction got underway, progress was made quickly. In 2000, Whole Foods and Strosniders Hardware Store opened and Discovery Communications began construction of its headquarters building. In the next three years, the pace of construction was dramatic, and by now over 1,500,000 square feet of new space has been renovated or built (see Table 2).



The 1999 *Sector Plan* created by the Planning Board (right) was preceded by almost a decade by the City Place project (left)

There are several ways in which the state's Smart Growth plan applies to Downtown Silver Spring. First, a basic element of the *Downtown Silver Spring Plan* comes from application of the recommendations of the *Sector Plan* for increased density and building height in the areas near the Metro station. Planners made use of a planning review tool known as the "Optional Method of Development" under which developers are allowed and often encouraged to increase density. In return for an increase in density, amenities and facilities are required such as public art, pedestrian pathways, public space, and affordable housing. Reduced parking requirements support the urban feel and transit-oriented aspects of the plan. This unique incentive zoning tool is a critical feature in the success of the development and the character of public spaces in Silver Spring.

The *Smart Growth Plan* supported the use of existing infrastructure (such as the Silver Theatre and adjacent shopping center), and the use of mixed-use zoning in the CBD. Mixed-use development is seen throughout Downtown Silver Spring. One striking example is the new local public library, which will have residential units above the ground floor library space. The *Smart Growth Plan* also fostered transportation options other than single occupancy cars. Higher density development near the Metro station encourages transit use, which should be enhanced when the major structures at the Metro Station are completed. It will also be supported by the bike paths that are

currently under construction. The Silver Spring Business Improvement District (BID) also provides a van service ("VanGo") that makes a circuit through the retail area and Metro station every eight minutes. At a larger scale, the State of Maryland's corridors and wedges approach to smart growth planning focuses a great deal of attention on the density of the areas bordering on the District of Columbia.

## The Downtown Silver Spring Project

### ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

There are several levels of organization and leadership for this project at the public, business and community levels. There seems to be broad agreement that the leadership of county executive Douglas Duncan was critical to making this process a success. Duncan was personally involved in attracting key tenants, including AFI and Discovery Communications. He worked with the County Council and through the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Direct contact with the community was made through these agencies. Also, special note was made of the input provided by



Bill Mooney of the Office of the County Executive, who was brought to Silver Spring because of his previous countywide experience in dealing with contentious community issues. His expertise, he says, is in listening to the community. Mooney helped to identify community members for the Steering Committee, including many who had been vocal opponents of past projects. Some of these citizens also became part of an informal “kitchen cabinet” that met occasionally with Duncan.

The private sector played a key role in the development of Downtown Silver Spring, largely represented by the partnership of Foulger Pratt and Peterson. They served as developers and planners, and created and supported a process for working directly with the community. They remain with the project at this point, working to complete development as well as marketing to retail and office tenants.

At the community level, there are a number of groups that have had an impact on this project. Preservationists, as represented by the state and county preservation agencies and by the Silver Spring Historical Association, have worked to save the historically significant sites that overlap with this redevelopment area. There are also a number of neighborhood organizations that have been involved in this project. These groups developed over the years in the fight over the high school and the previous shopping center designs. Many members of these organizations were representatives on the Steering Committee



and the so-called “kitchen cabinet” which consulted with the county executive. Later, they created a nonprofit agency, “Celebrate Silver Spring,” to accept donations and provide an ongoing citizen’s advisory board for downtown and in the region.

## FINANCES

Downtown Silver Spring is, as advertised, a public-private partnership. The commercial space of retail, office, housing, and hotel space is privately designed and financed with a total private investment of \$200 million. This investment was made possible because of considerable support from Montgomery County. Over \$187 million has been spent by public agencies for civic buildings, parking, historic preservation, land purchases, demolition, and other infrastructure (see Table 1). Discovery Communications, which is on the other piece of the original Silver Triangle parcel, provides another \$130 million of private investment.

*The Montgomery County Smart Growth Plan includes residential and agricultural wedges, urban growth boundaries, and the 1-270 transportation corridor.*

Total public support then is about one third of the \$517 million total investment for the original project redevelopment zone, and eighteen percent of the estimated \$1.3 billion current total investment in the area.

The investment in Downtown Silver Spring represents about 1,500,000 square feet of built space, of which a little more than half is for office space, about one-third for retail sites, and approximately ten percent for residential use (Table 2). The residential space consists of 1,745 units that have been approved or are under construction. In addition, Montgomery County requires that 12.5 percent of all housing – rental or owned – be affordable, defined as available for people at sixty-five percent median income. If a builder is allowed additional density through the Optional Method, the percent of required affordable units increases on a sliding scale up to twenty-two percent. At present,



*Housing is an important component of the downtown Silver Spring revitalization.*

215 affordable units have been built or approved in the Downtown Silver Spring area.

About 4,700 parking spaces have been created in Downtown Silver Spring (Table 7). County planners note that the parking requirements placed on construction here – 1.6 spaces per 1,000 square feet of office space and one space per dwelling unit – was one-third to one-half normal requirements. The figure was reduced in accord with the state *Smart Growth Plan*, which encouraged full occupancy vehicle use. They noted that attempts to reduce parking below these levels would have met heavy resistance from developers because of the needs of their retail tenants. Without adequate parking, developers said, stores would not have been attracted to the site. The Discovery Communications Headquarters building allowed for one space for each permanent employee in their underground parking. They have many part-time, non-permanent staff, and over thirty percent of all of their employees use public transportation.

The Central Business District of Silver Spring has also been declared an Arts and Entertainment District. These districts are nominated by the county and approved by the state. Artists who buy a building and who live and do remunerative work in the arts in the CBD are exempt from real estate taxes. This district has been in place for two years and as yet no sites take advantage of this option.

TABLE 1 – OVERALL SOURCES AND USES

PROJECT NAME	PROJECT USES	PROJECT COSTS	SOURCE OF FUNDS
Discovery Communications	Office and parking	\$130 million	Private
Downtown Silver Spring	Retail, office, hotel, and housing	\$200 million	Private
<b>Subtotal of Private Costs</b>		<b>\$330 million</b>	
Silver Spring Government Center	Civic building and public meeting space	\$15 million	Public (Montgomery County)
Silver Theatre	AFI movie theater and Round House Stage	\$20 million	Public (Montgomery County)
Public parking garages	Public parking structures	\$63 million	Public (Montgomery County Public Parking Funds)
Downtown Silver Spring	Land purchase, historic easements, and demolition of the Silver Spring Armory	\$89 million	Public (Montgomery County)
<b>Subtotal of Public Costs</b>		<b>\$187 million</b>	
<b>Total Public and Private Costs</b>		<b>\$517 million</b>	

TABLE 2 – LAND USES

PROJECT NAME	RETAIL (square feet)	OFFICE (square feet)	HOTEL (square feet)	CIVIC (square feet)	RESIDENTIAL (DUs)	PARKING SPACES
<b>Discovery Communications</b>	N/A	545,420	N/A	N/A	N/A	800
<b>Downtown Silver Spring</b>	507,340	297,408	151,130 (242 rooms)	48,000	160	3,900
<b>Totals</b>	<b>507,340</b>	<b>842,828</b>	<b>151,130</b>	<b>48,000</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>4,700</b>

**TABLE 3 – SCHEDULE OF COMPLETION**

PROJECT NAME	DATE OF APPROVAL	ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE
Discovery Communications	06/01/00	2003
Downtown Silver Spring	07/22/99	
Retail		2003
AFI		2003
Parking		2003
Office		2004
Hotel		2006
Civic Building		2007
Residential		2007

**TABLE 4 – PRIVATE COMMERCIAL PROJECTS**

PROJECT NAME	DATE OF APPROVAL	GROSS FLOOR AREA (square feet)	PROJECT STATUS
United Therapeutics Headquarters Building	07/15/04	191,636	Under construction
Silver Spring Innovation Center	03/27/03	19,930	Completed
Easter Seals	05/08/00	49,680	Un-built
<b>Total</b>		<b>261,246</b>	

*The revitalization of downtown Silver Spring is important—first ring suburbs are the next inner-city.*  
(2005 Selection Committee)

TABLE 5 – HOUSING PROJECTS – PRIVATE

PROJECT NAME	DATE OF APPROVAL	GROSS FLOOR AREA (square feet)	PROJECT STATUS
The Crescent	10/21/04	150,993 (143 units)	Un-built
The Portico	09/23/04	170,000 (153 units)	Un-built
Williams/Wilste Building	07/19/04	187,060 (135 units)	Un-built
Ripley Street Condominiums	07/29/04	391,125 (336 units)	Un-built
930 Wayne Avenue	04/29/04	151,140 (143 units)	Un-built
Gramax Building	N/A	N/A	Renovation completed
Silver Spring Gateway	02/05/04	526,400 (471 units)	Un-built
Tezzera Lofts	05/22/03	33,665 (24 units)	Under construction
8045 Newell Street Condominiums	02/27/03	136,752 (120 units)	Under construction
Silver Spring Square (Canada Dry)	09/26/02	(220 units)	Under construction
<b>Total</b>		<b>(1,745 units) (Including 215 affordable units)</b>	



**TABLE 6 – PARKING REQUIREMENTS**

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	<b>PARKING REQUIRED</b>	<b>PARKING PROVIDED</b>
Discovery Communications		
Office	1.6 spaces/1,000 sq. ft.	800 spaces (privately funded)
Downtown Silver Spring		
Retail	3.5 spaces/1,000 sq. ft.	
Office	1.6 spaces/1,000 sq. ft.	
Hotel (242 rooms)	1 space/2 rooms	
Civic	1.6 spaces/1,000 sq. ft.	
Residential (160 DUs)	1 space/unit	
<b>Subtotal of Parking</b>		<b>3,900 (publicly funded)</b>
<b>Total Parking Spaces</b>		<b>4,700 parking spaces</b>

**TABLE 7 – PUBLIC PROJECTS**

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	<b>DATE OF APPROVAL</b>	<b>GROSS FLOOR AREA</b>	<b>PROJECT STATUS</b>
Silver Spring Fire Station	03/06/03	N/A	Under construction
Montgomery College Health Science Building	08/06/02	N/A	Completed
Silver Spring District Court House	11/29/01	N/A	Completed

## DESIGN

The project site is a twenty-two acre triangle that begins at the “one hundred percent corner” of Silver Spring (the intersection of Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue), and is within the Silver Spring CBD that encompasses more than 300 acres. Planners noted that county policy and programs provided them with a number of tools that they were

TABLE 8 – PLANNING TOOLS AVAILABLE TO THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

CBD Zone
Optional Method of Development and Incentive Zoning
Green Tape District
Parking District
Urban Enterprise and Urban Renewal District
Arts & Entertainment District
Business Improvement District
Location of civic facilities
Public open space and amenities requirements
Affordable housing requirements
Historic preservation requirements

able to use to support development and design, foremost among them being the CBD Zone and the “Optional Method of Development.”

After the extensive process of meeting with the community to develop ideas and consensus for the basics of a plan, the designers created what they described as a series of “fluffy” images – drawings that were more about place than architecture. In general, except for the Discovery Center and the historic sites, they felt that the buildings in this community were less than noteworthy and that the building facades were less important than the sense of place they could create. New buildings for Downtown Silver Spring were designed for scale and character. Whereas the previous and failed plans had big ideas and created detailed models to show them off, designers said that this design process involved a great deal of healing and community contact.

The main visual foci of Downtown Silver Spring are two striking and contrasting images – the restored historic art deco style buildings of the Silver Theatre and Shopping Center, and the very modern concave lines of the Discovery Communications Tower with its highly lit glass lobby showing an interior faced with Jerusalem stone and stainless steel. Discovery Center architects wanted their building to be “the defining landmark for Silver Spring and the county.” The L-shaped Discovery Headquarters consists of two wings of seven and ten stories respectively, flanking a 150-foot-tall atrium. The facility is designed

so that the wings can be separated into two distinct properties if desired in the future. A significant public garden is provided along Wayne Avenue for use by the employees and residents of Silver Spring.

The most controversial aspect of the Discovery design concerned the hotly debated decision to enclose the “Five Senses Garden” with a steel fence. Using the “Optional Method,” this public space was negotiated by the county in return for increased height and density. County planners argued before the Planning Board that the fence was not appropriate because it made the park less accessible to the community. However, Discovery officials indicated that they were concerned about vandalism and the safety of their overnight employees given the potential for homeless and others in the area late at night. As a compromise, the public garden is only closed after dark. Many still hope that the fence will one day come down, now that Downtown Silver Spring is losing its image as a dangerous place.

The American Film Institute’s home in the Silver Theatre holds three screening areas; the 400 seat Theatre 1, and new 200 and 75 seat theaters. Theatre 1 is the original 1938 screening area that has been carefully rebuilt to replicate the original John Eberson design. The original space could not be restored after so many years of disuse; instead it was reproduced from photographs and included the recreation of original wall fabric, forty of the original sixty colors, plus decorations



and lighting fixtures. It is now, they claim, the most technologically sophisticated film display center in the country and one of seven that can show seventy millimeter films. The original Silver Theatre was a classic art deco style design. On the exterior, a strong horizontal emphasis was created on the parapet that rises above the curved marquee. A tall spire that is visible from blocks away tops the building. The horizontal lines carry over into the lobby with its marble wainscoting, wood panels and shallow barrel vaulted ceiling. The main screening room has lushly colored wallpaper and decorations with repeating geometric designs and gold leaf, as well as dramatic lighting.

*The before and after of the Silver Spring shopping center (above) and the Discovery Center with its “Five Senses Garden” (below) illustrate core elements of the Silver Spring revitalization program.*

The original art deco style Silver Spring Shopping Center was unique for its time, providing off street parking surrounded by a semi-circle of shops, and a gas station along the outer ring off Georgia Avenue. The *Downtown Silver Spring Plan* is differentiated from the previous plans by reorienting the focus of activity away from the original shopping center. It moved the town center off of the busy intersection of Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue to the geographic center of the redevelopment area along Ellsworth Avenue. This focus partially turns its back on these two main streets (AFI still faces Colesville Road while storefronts acknowledge Georgia Avenue). This new corridor funnels foot traffic along the shops on Ellsworth Avenue, across Georgia Avenue, and

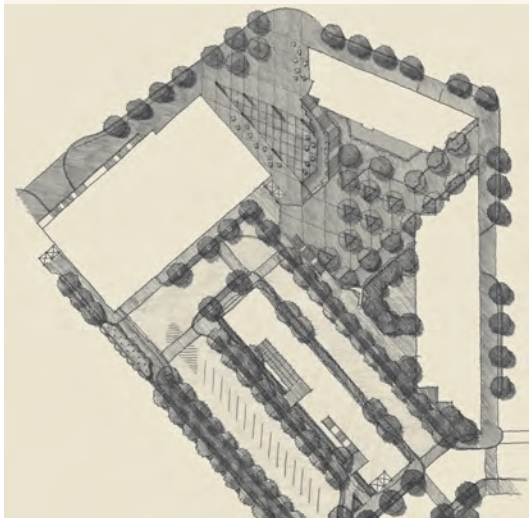


Quality design is a hallmark of both the exterior (left) and the interior (right) of the Discovery Center project.

past the Discovery Center's pedestrian space into the Metro station. While the Ellsworth Avenue spine is largely completed, the two major public spaces and developments that will anchor either end are still in process. Inside Downtown Silver Spring, the new Civic Building and Veterans Plaza are currently under construction, replacing the demolished Armory. On the other end of this spine, planning is going forward for a hotel, residences and multi-level bus and parking area at the Metro station. Downtown Silver Spring is, according to developers, two-thirds complete.

The broad plaza, with its lively murals and wide walkways along Ellsworth Avenue, is welcoming to pedestrians. The *Washington Post* (June 24, 2004) describes the "brick sidewalks and street-level retail reminiscent of the hugely successful Bethesda Row project." Designers said they did not consider creating a pedestrian mall because automobile access is seen as critical to retail success, although they close off the central area along Ellsworth to traffic on evenings and weekends for general use and frequent special events.

The sector plan calls for major improvements to the pedestrian crossing along Georgia Avenue, and walkways have been added to improve access to the Discovery Headquarters entry, although it remains a large and very busy intersection.



The scale of buildings in this district gradually diminishes from very tall current and planned structures at the Metro station, including the Discovery Center, to more modest heights through downtown Silver Spring, reaching the smallest scale approaching the residential areas. The center of Downtown Silver Spring consists of mostly national and regional outlets, with some local stores. The initial restaurants have all been from national chains, largely because of their advantage in obtaining financing. Planners emphasize that most of the residential buildings (especially the new condominiums) and office development would not have happened without the success of the Downtown Silver Spring Plan.

Preservation was a critical issue in the dynamics of rejecting and approving development plans. The coalition that successfully opposed the earlier designs used preservation as a rallying point. Their impact and strength convinced Foulger Pratt and Peterson to address these issues directly, early in the planning process. Historic preservation efforts focused on the Silver Theatre and Shopping Center, and also included moving (rather than demolishing) the Tastee Diner two blocks to accommodate the Discovery Center.

Preservation is a key feature in the image of this project. AFI's presence is critical to Downtown Silver Spring. The potential for restoration and recreation of the once spectacular Silver Theatre helped attract

*The "book ends" of the revitalization effort are the Veterans's Plaza (top two images) and the transit plaza (bottom).*



AFI and is now part of what gives the site its sense of place. Maintaining a large portion of the original Silver Spring Shopping Center also helps give the downtown its own style and panache, as well as resonance with the community.

The key loss for preservationists was the demolition of the 1928 Armory Building. The designers dissected what they felt was important about the Armory – the wooden floor, and the large meeting space – and have recreated these in the new Civic Building, but these features are little comfort to local preservationists. While many in the community came to see this as an acceptable and necessary trade-off to get the whole project underway, committed preservationists remain unconvinced that other options were not feasible. Developers were insistent that the Armory space was needed for a parking garage –

replacing an older and “very unfriendly” garage. Designers for the Walt Disney Corporation were brought in to create a garage that was user-friendly and safe in function and appearance and allowed for quick egress.

Gwen Wright, head of the preservation office for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, feels that the loss of the Armory was difficult but notes that saving it might have had an element of “facadism,” since at best a restored Armory would have been surrounded by a number of large buildings, changing its original context of broad open green space. She also notes that the county was required to provide mitigation for the loss of the Armory, which took the form of funding the publication of a book of historic sites in Montgomery County, a survey of historic properties in the entire



*The new downtown Silver Spring is a pedestrian friendly place.*

CBD, and the creation of a Graphic Information System layer of historic properties throughout the county. Jerry McCoy, president of the Silver Spring Historical Society, is not convinced, but believes that the fear many residents had of losing the potential development made saving the Armory impossible.

Landscape design for the Downtown Silver Spring area includes a bicycle trail that is part of the Smart Growth plan. This trail, which is still under development, works its way through the retail, residential, and the surrounding areas. The trail is not yet complete, but the goal,



*The bicycle trail is planned to ultimately connect the Metro station to downtown.*

upon completion is to use the trail to serve the Metro station, to provide another alternative to automobile use for commuters, and to connect the trail to the larger regional bike trail system.

## IMPACTS

Downtown Silver Spring is locally and widely seen as a successful revival story. The streets appear to be well used in daytime and evening. The site visit revealed that many adults and young people were on the street and in the stores at nine o'clock at night, even on an unusually cool March evening.

Stores are open and seem to be thriving, and the local Whole Foods and Borders Books are very profitable. Sarah Kenney, Whole Foods' Mid-Atlantic Division Director of Marketing, said that sales growth has been "mind boggling" at this store and has exceeded all expectations – it is now in the top fifteen percent of all their stores in sales. She states that "what is most fun about the store is the community's response... we received enormous support." It is also one of the company's strongest community-based stores. Many people come there to meet, mingle, and hang out with friends.

Investment by the county and Downtown Silver Spring developers has spurred significant additional private investment. The *Sector Plan*

sees Downtown Silver Spring as one of many nodes in the CBD. Total investment in the area has reached \$1.3 billion. There are signs that the success of Downtown Silver Spring, as recent as it is, is starting to spread to other areas of the CBD. In particular, properties south on Georgia Avenue towards the District of Columbia border are showing signs of life as new restaurants are moving in and property owners are rehabilitating their buildings. Private office and residential developments outside of the redevelopment zone are springing up. Moreover, residential developments include a significant number of condominium buildings. Previously there were only rental units in the CBD. A reporter for the *Washington Post* warns not to overstate the change south on Georgia Avenue, as there are still many “sketchy” stores and significant improvement is needed.

Tax receipts and real estate values have risen sharply – faster than the rest of the region – and the parking district revenues are in the black for the first time in years. A CNN report lists Silver Spring among the fifty “hottest” zip codes in the country, with a median home value of \$365,000 – a 109.6 percent increase in value over the last five years, and a forecast 12.5 percent growth next year. The area has improved sufficiently so that county planners do not expect the Urban Enterprise Zone status to be renewed once it expires, as the area no longer qualifies as blighted based on revenues and land values.

Transit goals have been met or exceeded. More than fifty percent of workers in the area use modes other than single occupancy vehicles, and more than thirty percent use public transit to get to work. Transportation officials also note that automobile traffic on the streets in and through the Downtown Silver Spring area is well within anticipated limits.

There has also been growth in the capability and competence of local citizens and community groups over the years as a result of this development effort. Members of citizens groups are both interested and knowledgeable, their conversation causally peppered with urban planning jargon such as “activated streets” and “eyes on the street.”

There are some negative impacts of such rapid growth in values and prices. The steep rise in retail rental rates has been the problem most commonly cited, and was also the focus of a *Washington Post* article. Some of the early retailers, those who felt committed to Silver Spring through the bad times and who looked forward to the revival, are concerned about rising costs. Montgomery County has created funds to bolster these early retailers through business training or relocation, but some have clearly suffered. This is likely to be an ongoing problem as the revival continues to spread further beyond Downtown Silver Spring into other areas of the CBD.

There are similar issues with respect to affordable housing, especially given the proliferation of home ownership as compared to rental units. The county has addressed this concern by mandating that 12.5 percent of all new units be affordable at sixty-five percent median income. How effective this provision will be in ameliorating the problem is not clear at this point.

An additional question is what has happened to the homeless and distressed population that formerly inhabited the Downtown Silver Spring area. Two local organizations, Progress Place and the Shepherd's Table, are supported by the county to address these issues, but how much of an impact they have made is not clear.



## FUTURE PLANS

Downtown Silver Spring is about two-thirds finished. While the spine along Ellsworth Avenue toward the Metro station is largely complete (although some retail spaces, particularly on the second level of the shopping center, are still empty), major anchoring projects at either end of the spine are not. At one end of Downtown Silver Spring the Civic Building and Veteran's Plaza are beginning construction.

At the other end of the spine is the Metro station development, which will include a three level area to support car and bus traffic into and out of the station, with a hotel and residential buildings on top. These plans are not finalized, though planners appear confident that work will proceed soon.

The nature of development in downtown Silver Spring will change in 2006 when the Urban Enterprise Zone authorization expires. It is unlikely to be renewed because the success of the effort has increased values and revenues to a point where the area no longer qualifies for this designation. While it is likely that the county government will continue to support future infrastructure, most development in the CBD is likely to be based on the momentum of this project and carried out by the private sector.

## Assessing Project Success

# Success in Meeting Project Goals

→ *Introduce new development in the context of Maryland's Smart Growth policies, and with the consensus of major stakeholders.*

The project worked with Smart Growth guidelines and is used within the state as an example of good Smart Growth development. The major stakeholders from a variety of citizen organizations were significantly involved in developing guidelines for Downtown Silver Spring.

→ *Establish a public-private partnership that will revitalize the Central Business District (CBD) for eastern Montgomery County.*

As discussed above, this project mixed public and private decision-making and funds. Montgomery County supplied the initial parameters for the project and was heavily involved in planning, design and environmental review. The county also provided more than \$180 million in funds, largely for infrastructure improvements. The private sector ran the design process with the

citizen groups, created the final design, supplied the balance of the funding, and has marketed the facilities.

→ *Extend and strengthen neighborhoods close to downtown with housing and retail.*

Residential neighborhoods close to downtown were never weak, but felt threatened by the deterioration of the downtown area. They have been an important beneficiary of this project, both in terms of access to needed stores (Whole Foods, Strosniders Hardware store and others) and for the security and growth in the value of their properties and communities. It is a project that serves the local communities much more than the earlier plans would have.

→ *Create a transit-oriented community, taking advantage of local Metro station.*

The project is heavily oriented to the Metro station and uses the presence of the Metro as a marketing tool. Creation of a true transit oriented community is still a work in progress, awaiting the efforts planned for the Metro station itself that will provide a hotel, more residential units and better car and bus access for commuters.

→ *Use an incentive zoning tool that provides significant opportunities for public involvement.*

The CBD Zone and the “Optional Method of Development” provide a unique incentive zoning tool that allows the community to determine the character of development. Specifically, the “stepping down” of development from the Metro Station to the adjacent neighborhoods, the public open spaces, the preservation of historic structures, the design of the streets, and the pedestrian circulation system were all established by the community through the review process. In general, the character of the entire development was established by this knowledgeable community in partnership with the developers through this flexible planning process in Montgomery County.

## Selection Committee Discussion: What We Learned

### ***No Silver Bullets***

One of the chief lessons learned by this community and by county government officials and planners was to eschew the “silver bullet” or “home run approach” in favor of a more incremental, small scale “series of singles” development plan. The previous, un-built developments were massive all-or-nothing efforts that might have brought in huge revenues, but also could have failed, leaving in their wake a changed and scarred landscape. Duncan has said that he is using this approach as a model for other communities in Montgomery County.

### ***The Wise Use of Iconic Architecture***

Even without the “silver bullet,” the project still needed some iconic images. Downtown Silver Spring needed to claim tenants that brought credibility and visibility in a way that could change people’s perception of the area. For Downtown Silver Spring those icons were the American Film Institute and Discovery Communications.

### ***Community Values, Education and Decision Making***

The county learned the value of community involvement at the front end of the planning process, as taking the time for significant community



input at the outset saved time in the end and made for a better product. Community members educated themselves in process issues and planning models over years of confrontations and protests through three proposed, and ultimately un-built, downtown proposals. In the end they provided important expertise and guidance on the significance of historic resources and the desired nature of the final development. In the case of Silver Spring, “failure” over the years functioned as a community learning mechanism that ultimately led to a better downtown space.

#### ***The Right Tools for the Job***

Montgomery County was able to bring to bear a “tool bag” of resources to support development, including the redevelopment zone, the enterprise zone, the optional method of development, the parking district, and so on. As a group these tools provided substantial support to get development started and to guide it in the desired direction.

#### ***Making the Most of Local Resources***

Ultimately, local resources, both in terms of physical sites and human capital, were more critical to making this project a success than were outside expertise and funding. The historic sites played a key role in attracting important tenants and in providing an image and theme for a development that was uniquely Silver Spring and “not just another suburban mall.” In the final design, Silver Spring was able to tie the

new downtown district to the Metro station, making that key transportation resource an obvious benefit for retail and housing.

#### ***A Reimagination of Place***

An important element of Silver Spring’s success was learning to accept a new definition of itself as less suburban and more urban – with urban problems and solutions that provided urban density.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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## RELATED RUDY BRUNER AWARD WINNERS:

Text taken from <http://libweb.lib.buffalo.edu/bruner/>. See also [www.brunerfoundation.org](http://www.brunerfoundation.org).

### **Bridgemarket, New York, NY; 2003 Silver Medal Winner**

*Bridgemarket is a contemporary urban marketplace with a combination of mixed uses including a restaurant seating 900 people, a high end housewares and furniture store, a twenty-four hour upscale supermarket, and a new public plaza and garden. This project serves as a vital community resource and as a bridge between adjacent neighborhoods that exemplifies imaginative reuse of the landmark space beneath the Queensboro Bridge in Manhattan.*

### **Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco, CA; 1999 Gold Medal Winner**

*Yerba Buena Gardens is an eighty-seven acre mixed-use urban development in the South of Market district of San Francisco. It is a diverse, contemporary development which includes a cultural center with over two dozen museums and galleries, an open space network, housing, recreation, and entertainment facilities. The project has helped to reclaim a rundown sector of the city, and has provided jobs, cultural amenities and open space to residents, while supporting tourism in San Francisco.*

### **Southwest Corridor Project, Boston, MA; 1989 Silver Medal Winner**

*The Southwest Corridor Project implemented a new multi-modal transportation complex, involving the replacement of the Metropolitan Boston Transportation Authority Orange Line, the establishment of four lines of commuter rail, Intercity Amtrak service, and eight transit stations. The project was implemented through the cooperation of public agencies and community organizations in Boston.*