

Knapp: Move Planning Board to Rockville 3-24 GAZETTE

■ In wake of Clarksburg mess, councilman says central location would help

BY JANEL DAVIS
AND MEREDITH HOOKER
STAFF WRITERS

Montgomery County Councilman Michael J. Knapp — whose constituents uncovered planning debacle in the Clarksburg Town Center development — is calling for moving the headquarters of Park and Planning from its current location in Silver Spring to a more central location in Rockville.

Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown said his proposal was based on accessibility for most county residents and stemmed from discussions in council committee on use of county office space, master plan implementation and future development.

Three council members support studying Knapp's proposal. Four others, including Council President George L. Leventhal and Thomas E. Perez, who represents the area, are opposed.

Councilman Michael L. Subin (D-At large) of Gaithersburg, the possible swing vote on the issue, seemed to be leaning toward a study.

Subin was council president in 2000 when the Planning Board studied relocation, though not to Rockville. Following an 18-month study, the board recommended the headquarters remain in downtown Silver Spring.

"A lot has changed since then," said Subin. "With all the issues swirling, I think [Knapp] has a good point, to take another look before everything is finalized.

Moving the headquarters could kill a planned development approved in fiscal 2004. The new Park and Planning headquarters site is scheduled for completion in 2009 in downtown Silver Spring as part of a mixed-use development, known as Silver-Place.

Montgomery council may pick planning chief after elections
■ Page A-5

PLANNING

■ Continued from Page A-1

In addition to the agency's consolidated headquarters, the project will include workforce and affordable housing and an urban park. A committee has selected three development teams to design the project, with construction scheduled to begin next year.

"We just passed this accessible legislation [making Park and Planning documents and proposals more open to the public] three weeks ago. If we want to be more accessible, we need to ask where is the population center of our county," Knapp said Wednesday.

"It's the one agency that is not in the Rockville core and it's the one agency that everyone has to interact with. From my perspective Rockville makes sense, it's the county seat."

Opponents said moving the offices to Rockville would hurt Silver Spring's economy, send a negative message to its residents and be unfair to Park and Planning staff.

"This issue has been studied to death. The message it sends to the community to have a government anchor pull out is dangerous," Perez said Wednesday. "You're talking about a delay of years to find a new location."

Perez (D-Dist. 5) and Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park said they have been meeting with Silver Spring community and

business leaders since the Tuesday meeting at which Knapp broached the idea, all of whom oppose such a move.

"This is a betrayal to Silver Spring. Our redevelopment is not finished by any means," said Carmen Camacho, chairwoman of the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce. "I think our County Council members who are seriously considering this need to look at the facts. All that time and money has already been spent on the process."

During the council meeting, Planning Board Chairman Derick P. Berlage told council members that some employees at the agency's three overcrowded Silver Spring locations are working in closets, hallways and at makeshift desks. "To upset the apple cart now would be enormously disruptive," he said.

Marcie Stickle, a Silver Spring resident and member of the Silver Spring Historical Society, frequently testifies at the Planning Board. She said she feels the headquarters should remain at its current location, where it was originally built.

"M-NCPPC has represented a vibrant division of Silver Spring since 1927," she said. "[It] represents a forum and a place where



Knapp

Accessibility is the key

we all can actively participate in the evolution of Silver Spring and the county. It's an anchor. ... It belongs where it was founded."

Moving Park and Planning to Rockville would not necessarily mean an end to the SilverPlace project, nor the county's commitment to the accompanying affordable housing component, said Councilman Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Kensington.

"There are other agencies that are looking for space like the Housing Opportunities Commission and the Board of Education which could use the space," she said.

"One of the important parts of this conversation is about the council having oversight of Park and Planning as with other departments, and better coordination with other agencies," Floreen said. "It's a lot easier to work closely together when people are in the same building. For them to keep us updated on things."

A move to Rockville would not necessarily solve problems with the planning agency, but could be a good idea, said Amy Presley, Clarksburg resident and co-founder of the Clarksburg Town Center Advisory Committee, which uncovered the town center violations.

"At face value this does not seem like an adverse approach to a discussion on expansion. I don't know if proximity to the council would change procedures at Park and Planning. A policy change needs to help

WEIGHING IN

Council members opposed to Knapp's proposal:

- George L. Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park
- Thomas E. Perez (D-Dist. 5) of Takoma Park
- Marilyn J. Praisner (D-Dist. 4) of Calverton
- Steven A. Silverman (D-At large) of Silver Spring

Council members supporting consideration of Knapp's proposal:

- Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg
- Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park
- Howard A. Denis (R-Dist. 1) of Chevy Chase

that," she said.

Presley estimated members of her organization traveled 52 miles, roundtrip, from Gaithersburg to Park and Planning offices in Silver Spring doing research each day during a two-week period.

"The location didn't affect our work, but it did affect the way the [planning] board dealt with other agencies," she said.

Staff Writer Margie Hyslop contributed to this report.