

Council approves money for Silver Spring music hall

BY JANEL DAVIS
STAFF WRITER

The County Council agreed Tuesday to allocate \$2 million for a live music venue in downtown Silver Spring, securing the remaining portion of county funds for the project.

"On balance, I think this is in the public interest," said Councilman Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 1) of Gaithersburg. "I think it will help continue the redevelopment of downtown Silver Spring."

Most of the council members approved the decision. Councilman Roger Berliner voted against the funding, and Councilman Marc Ehrlich abstained.

Berliner continued to question figures associated with the project as well as the process by which county officials used to secure the deal with music promoter Live Nation and land owner, the Lee Development Group.

"I think it is a bad deal, a bad process. ... I fear that it will not be what people thought it would be," said Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac.

The funding is part of the construction budget recom-

mended by County Executive Isaiah Leggett (D) for fiscal 2009, which begins July 1.

"Best of all, it will benefit our bottom line from the start through more business for Silver Spring restaurants and shops. An economic impact analysis done by the County's Department of Finance shows an annual profit to the public of \$712,000," Leggett said in a statement after the decision Tuesday.

The Lee Development Group would donate about \$3.5 million in land at the J.C. Penney site for the project. Live Nation would outfit and renovate the building, opening a Fillmore venue, estimated at about \$2 million.

County officials said they hope to recoup their investment in six years.

"If the council votes this down, it will have a negative effect on the rest of downtown Silver Spring," said Councilman George L. Leventhal, before the council's decision.

Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park admonished the pessimism of some of his colleagues, and said he had been letting the Leggett administration

"dangle" for a few months awaiting his decision.

A few weeks ago, a council committee had asked for more details about the deal between the county and Live Nation before signing off on the funding the following week. The county and state already set aside \$2 million each toward the project in the current budgets.

Ehrlich (D-At large) of Takoma Park, who voted against recommending funding during committee discussions of the project, con-

tinued to express reservations with the project, especially with the county's characterization of it as an economic redevelopment project for downtown Silver Spring.

He also recommended that the council and administration rethink how future economic development projects are completed.

Since the county broke off discussion with Alexandria, Va.-based Birchmere last summer for project and begin negotiations with Live Nation, D.C. promoter Seth Hurwitz has lobbied state and

county officials to be considered for the project.

"The council put all of these questions aside for now, for fear of losing state money," Hurwitz said in a statement following the council's decision Tuesday. "... Apparently they are under intense pressure to pass this through no matter what the deal is."

The Fillmore venue is scheduled to open in 2010.

Staff Writer Agnes Jasinski contributed to this report.