

County OKs plan for Silver Spring Park in Fenton Village

Strong neighborhood support for hotel, retail and residential development

by Alison Bryant | Staff Writer

Fenton Village will soon find itself home to a new retail, hotel and residential development that may help reinvigorate the community of independent and small businesses.

The Montgomery County Planning Department has approved the site plan for Silver Spring Park, a hotel, office, retail and residential development at the corner of Fenton Street and Silver Spring Avenue.

The developer, Ulysses Glee of Silver Spring-based Fenton Group LLC, will combine seven lots into one for a multi-building, mixed-use development of 147,888 square feet. The property will include a 110-room Fairfield Inn and Suites by Marriott and an office building, both with ground-floor retail space, as well as a multi-family residential building with 58 units.

Glee worked closely with the East Silver Spring Citizens Association to understand residents' concerns about the development and earn their support, said Karen Roper, an east Silver Spring resident.

"What's important about this project is that the developer worked with the community," Roper said. "That is what makes this project special."

The developer hopes to break ground in the spring or summer of 2011, depending on financing availability, said Ayana Douglas, project manager with Fenton Group. The buildings should open up about 18 months after groundbreaking, she said

Roper said she testified before Planning Board on Oct. 28 in support of the project and plan approval, despite a few differences in opinion between the developer and the community.

"He treated us like stakeholders, and that is the first time we've been treated like stakeholders by any developer here," Roper said. "We didn't get everything we wanted, don't get me wrong. But [Glee] has worked with the community, and ... so we got a lot of what we wanted."

The group wanted to save two Sears catalog model homes from the mid-20th century located on the property, but instead the developer has offered to donate the homes to any individuals or organizations interested, Roper said.

The development should help reinvigorate Fenton Village through the retail space, Douglas said. Fenton Village now consists of a collection of independently owned businesses, including tailors, coffee shops, ethnic restaurants and clothing boutiques.

Because of the rather gloomy retail market, the building will include shells to be filled later by shops. But the developer does want to ensure local businesses have room to move in.

"We would like to include some of the local retailers and the community-owned businesses, because we worked really closely with the community from the very beginning," Douglas said.

Hotel traffic will activate Fenton Village and boost foot traffic for local businesses, she said.

The development will include 8,543 square feet of on-site space open to the public. This space will consist of a "pocket park," a small green space, on Silver Spring Avenue and a pedestrian path along the eastern edge of the site. The path currently ends in a public alley, but future redevelopment of the area could make the path a key connection between different parts of the neighborhood. The park will be easily accessible to the public.

"The entrance[to the park] is immediately from the sidewalk and ... will really integrate with the existing sidewalk to make it, again, more part of the neighborhood than it is part of the building," said Elza Hisel-McCoy, with the Montgomery County Planning Department development review division.

Douglas said the park was specifically designed to appeal to the public.

"We definitely want to have it open so it doesn't look like the front yard of the apartment buildings," she said. "The landscaping and tree-scape will make it open and inviting."

The developer will also provide 8,681 square feet of off-site public use space. A contribution of \$152,728 will go toward the development of a bike station, a secure bicycle parking facility, in Gene Lynch Urban Park, located on Colesville Road and Second Avenue near the Silver Spring Transit Center.

Douglas said she credited working with the surrounding community as a key component to the success of the project.

"We hope to be an example for other developers that the community is not to be feared," she said. "And if you really take time to hear what their needs are, it can be a win-win for everyone involved."