

Residents embrace new hotel project for Silver Spring

Mixed-use complex that would include Marriott to go before planning board

by Jason Tomassini | Staff Writer

Plans for a new mixed-use hotel project are moving forward in the Fenton Village neighborhood of Silver Spring, almost two years after zoning was changed to make way for the project as part of a compromise with nearby residents.

The complex, once called Moda Vista but now known as Silver Spring Park, will include a 110-room hotel, 58 multi-family residential units, a 30,000-square-foot office building and street-level retail at the corner of Silver Spring Avenue and Fenton Street. The hotel, which will be operated by Marriott as a Fairfield Inn, is 60-feet tall, a result of a zoning-text amendment passed in 2008 allowing mixed-use projects involving hotels to build to that height on the east side of Fenton. Previously, the maximum height for non-residential developments was 45 feet.

In 2007, the Montgomery County Planning Board approved plans for the Moda Vista project, at the time an all-residential condominium project that would cover most of the block and drew opposition from residents. But the developer, Ulysses Glee of Silver Spring-based Fenton Group LLC, made a compromise with the community that if they supported the zoning-text amendment that would allow a hotel on the site, he would lower the height of the residential building and include much-desired street-level retail.

Residents agreed, and the zoning changes were passed by the Montgomery County Council. Current plans call for a 45-foot-tall residential building, 15 feet below the maximum.

"It was not an easy process, but they worked their tails off working this out between the county and what we wanted," east Silver Spring resident Karen Roper said Monday night as Glee presented plans for Silver Spring Park to the East Silver Spring Citizens Association. "We want this to be a model in the county, because they let us be stakeholders at the table."

Plans for Silver Spring Park will be reviewed by the planning board March 4 with groundbreaking expected in spring 2011 and an opening for the hotel following a year later.

Of the 58 residential units, seven will be moderately-priced dwelling units and five will be work force housing. There will be 123 parking spaces with two levels of underground parking. The developer will push the Planning Board to prohibit right turns coming out of the parking garage and onto Silver Spring Avenue to limit traffic in the surrounding neighborhood, but planning staff has recommended against it, said Todd Brown of Bethesda-based law firm Linowes and Blocher LLP, which is representing the developer.

Three thousand feet of open space will be located on-site just off Silver Spring Avenue, and Glee will provide part of the planned Fenton Street Urban Park as an off-site public amenity.

The project will require the removal of two Sears catalog model homes from the mid-20th century, but Glee has offered to donate the homes to any individuals or organizations interested. There is an office building and surface parking lot currently on-site as well.

Glee is reviewing tenants for the street-level retail that has been the linchpin of the deal, but as has become customary with the project, "it will take awhile to figure all that out," Glee said.

Silver Spring Park joins several other projects planned for Fenton Village, a neighborhood surrounding Fenton Street in east Silver Spring, including the new Silver Spring Library planned at Fenton Street and Wayne Avenue; Studio Plaza, a roughly 130,000-square-foot mixed-use project proposed for the entire block between Silver Spring and Thayer avenues; The Adele, a 52-unit residential development at 814 Thayer Ave.; and Bonifant Plaza, a 72-unit residential project.