SIX IDEAS TO MAKE A GREAT DOWNTOWN
The work in this report is focused on the downtown Silver Spring in the area next to the existing Red Line Metro station and the soon-to-be-completed Purple Line Station. Although new development activity has been ongoing in several Silver Spring neighborhoods over the past 25 years, the station area today is an inhospitable environment, filled with significant transit amenities yet of little value in terms of place-making.

The intent of the work in this report is to reveal the "art of the possible" for the station area and stimulate discussion about what is arguably the most important development opportunity in Montgomery County, MD. Sites like this one, if developed properly, can provide new housing opportunities, raise the value of existing adjacent development and provide quality public space for all members of the community no matter where they live. The work contained herein seeks to show exactly that.

The work of the semester has generously been supported by the National Center for Smart Growth, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and Dean Dawn Jourdan of the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation.

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January 2023

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GENERAL HISTORY:

Silver Spring was founded by Francis Preston Blair and his daughter, Elizabeth Blair in 1840. They constructed their home, Acorn Park, next to a sparkling ‘mica-flecked’ spring, hence giving the community its memorable name.

The first streetcar arrived in Silver Spring in 1888 as the Washington Woodside and Forest Glen Railway Power Company, using the right-of-way on Georgia Avenue up to Silver Spring boundary.

Fast-paced growth characterized the community in the 20th century supported by trolley service to DC, with later suburban style development of the Silver Spring Shopping Center and Silver Theater arriving in the 1930s. The shopping center located at the corner of Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue was the first US shopping center with parking in the front as the community became the second busiest retail market between Baltimore and Richmond in the mid-20th century. The arrival of the DC Metro Red Line metro rail further stimulates growth in the later part of the 20th century, supported by further retail growth in recent years.
BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE

METRO LINES

BUS ROUTES

ALL MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

METRO ACCESS | BUS

METRO ACCESS | AUTOMOBILE

METRO ACCESS | PEDESTRIAN
The urban analysis revealed several important insights:

Neighborhoods near the station can be broken up into three areas: The "downtown" areas adjacent to the station (green) which includes the old downtown and new development; the "Blairs" southwest of the station (tan) and with poor station access; and, a "village" bounded by Colesville road, Georgia Ave, and Spring Street (blue) that includes many different uses and building types, but no real sense of "place".

The analysis also indicated that sites might be considered "opportunities" in that they might be outdated, of little quality, suburban in character or parking decks that could be better used so close to a major transit station. Those sites are indicated in red with a corresponding new figure-ground base map as well.
ANALYSIS

PRECEDEENTS

SIX PRECEDENT OPTIONS ANALYZED

01  ROCKEFELLER CENTER
    New York, NY, USA

02  RENAISSANCE

03  EMERALD NECKLACE
    Boston, MA, USA

04  MEDIEVAL

05  CAMPIDOGLIO
    Rome, Italy

06  HIGHLINE
    New York, NY, USA
This scheme introduces a new plaza defined by the former Discovery Building and a new block located between the station and the square. The square mediates between the upper level and the level of Colesville Road to the west by introducing terraces and arched openings and is conceived as part of the network from the station to Ellsworth Mall and the Veteran’s Plaza. The plaza is also used to treat stormwater and includes other sustainable features.

The scheme also makes a new bridge connection to Blair Gardens on the other side of the tracks and introduces new open space, “DC Line Park” to organize that neighborhood.
EXISTING OPPORTUNITY SITES

PROPOSED FIGURE-GROUND

OVERALL FIGURE GROUND

PLACES DIAGRAM
BUILDING HEIGHTS & WIND

TOPOGRAPHY

SUMMER SOLSTICE

EQUINOX

WINTER SOLSTICE

TOPOGRAPHY NAVIGATION / STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Water Flow
Relative Volume

Topsoil
Bio-Retention Soil
Gravel Bed
Drainage Pipe
This scheme locates the greatest density of the proposed development next to the station with the tallest building next to the station terminating the axis of a long plaza that connects back to Georgia Avenue. This new space, "Wayne Public Garden," is situated at the grade of Georgia Avenue and locates the transit bus and other vehicle access on lower levels. The approach offers a counterpoint to the existing Veteran’s Plaza by introducing a long green area in the center of the space surrounded by retail opportunities.

The plaza next to the station becomes vehicle free and a place where retail, development and transit access all meet.
PERSPECTIVE FROM CENTRAL FOUNTAIN

PERSPECTIVE FROM RETAIL ROW

PERSPECTIVE FROM PURPLE LINE STATION

SECTION A

SECTION B
The overall strategy of this scheme is to introduce green space in all of the neighborhoods adjacent to the transit station area and seeks to clarify connections to the site. The key move is a longitudinal space connecting Georgia Ave. at Ellsworth to the station entry, allowing lower level cross streets to pass through via a network of stairs and bridges. All of those spaces face new green parks, ala Baltimore’s Mount Vernon Place, and the former Discovery building is integrated into a system of streets and blocks. New retail, residential, office and hospitality uses are accommodated throughout.
STREET GRID (BEFORE)

STREET GRID (AFTER)

PEDESTRIAN FLOW
Perhaps more intentionally than other schemes, this strategy seeks to clarify a new “center” in each of the neighborhoods surrounding the transit site and then tries to find ways to prioritize links that make a network of new or improved streets and open spaces. The major connection to the transit center at Colesville Road is achieved via a diagonal sequence of steps and open spaces, linking Georgia Ave. at Wayne to the lowest level of the transit center adjacent to the Red Line entry. This creates an upper level, High Point Plaza, and a small lower level plaza at the beginning of the sequence.
EXISTING OPPORTUNITY SITES

PROPOSED FIGURE-GROUND

OVERALL FIGURE-GROUND

PLACES DIAGRAM
ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN 1:100

TRANSECT DIAGRAM

HIGH POINT PLAZA PERSPECTIVE

TRANSECT DIAGRAM WITH SURROUNDING BUILDINGS
This strategy uses the complex geometry of the site to create a trapezoidal main square that shifts the focal point from the rather bland and ugly station to a focus on new development to the southeast. New development is added to the old Discovery site. Ellsworth and Bonifant Streets connect to the new square and the complex topography allows for a unique urban space that could host a major institution or museum. Neighborhoods to the west and south of the transit site are infilled with small streets and green spaces, and a new metro bridge is proposed to connect the Ripley district with the new development proposed for the Blairs.
This proposal seeks to organize the site via a simple linear arrangement of spaces, from the existing Silver Spring Veteran’s Plaza to a new linear space at the site of the Blairs, renamed High Park Plaza. Key to this strategy is the introduction of a new set of passages and bridges that navigate the various level changes and provide greater access, particularly from the other side of the tracks to the southwest and southeast. New development is proposed at each of the open spaces with the most intense development proposed for the new Gateway Plaza.

The strategy is based upon urban design sequences like the Place Stanislaus/Place de la Carriere in Nancy, France.
DOWNTOWN SILVER SPRING
SIX IDEAS TO MAKE A GREAT DOWNTOWN