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Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2009

## Construction of Silver Spring Transit Center delayed but plodding ahead

by Jason Tomassini | Staff Writer



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Construction on two major public projects in downtown Silver Spring is gradually plodding along about a year after work began on each, although neither will be completed as soon as planners originally expected.

Groundbreaking on both the Silver Spring Civic Building and Veteran's Plaza and the Paul S. Sarbanes Silver Spring Transit Center was held in September 2008.

The biggest construction delays came during work on the civic building and plaza, located at the corner of Fenton Street and Ellsworth Drive. When construction began last September, optimistic residents and planners had hoped the Veteran's Plaza portion of the project would be completed by Nov. 11 of this year, which is Veteran's Day.

But construction was delayed after the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission had to approve the relocation of a water main located at the construction site earlier this year, and after planners decided to open the building and plaza simultaneously, instead of the plaza first.

"To have to work around a completed plaza would have been a real challenge and cost a lot more money," David Dise, director of the Montgomery County Department of General Services, said in a phone interview Monday.

The entire project now has an estimated completion date of June 2010, Dise said.

The 42,000-square-foot civic building will include a large hall available for banquets, performances and meetings, four community-use rooms, new offices for the Silver Spring Regional Center and the Round House Theatre School. Veteran's Plaza will be nearly an acre of open public-use space for festivals and concerts and will include a permanent ice-skating rink.



Brian Lewis/The Gazette

An outline of the future ice rink located at the construction site of the Paul S. Sarbanes Silver Spring Transit Center at Colesville Road and Wayne Avenue in downtown Silver Spring.



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The entire project will replace the popular artificial turf field once located at the site. Estimated cost for the civic building is more than \$17 million.

Delays in construction for the Transit Center have been less significant, but the intensive work on various utility lines beneath the site has delayed completion until February of 2011, Dise said. Completion of the \$91-million transit center, located at Colesville Road and Wayne Avenue, was initially expected for the end of 2010.

This summer, Silver Spring resident Jon Simon, who uses Metro to commute daily to Union Station, walked by what he calls "the pit," wondering why it appeared no work was being done. He said the construction hasn't been much of an inconvenience, but he feels Silver Spring needs a new functioning transit hub sooner rather than later.

"Who wouldn't want that?" Simon said. "But we'll see what happens when it actually gets done."

A YouTube video showing weekly photographs of the construction site between June and September shows little to no change from week-to-week and made the rounds on local blogs to the amusement of many commenters.

But Dise allayed residents' fears about a stall in construction; work was being done, it was just underground and out of plain view. Beneath the site is a complicated web of utility lines that needed extensive work after excavation on the site, Dise said.

Contractors will soon begin building the structure for the transit center, Dise said.

"When we [start building] out of the ground, it's going to pop like crazy," he said.

When completed, the transit center will contain 34 bus bays for various regional bus services, direct access to the Metro and MARC transit lines, 54 Kiss and Ride and taxi spaces and accommodations for bicycle trails. Housing and a hotel will also be constructed on site.

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