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## Aesthetics matter for Silver Spring transit center

Officials at design update caution against cutting costs, altering appearance of \$75M transportation hub

by Danny Jacobs | Staff Writer



Montgomery County should not skimp on the details when building the proposed Paul S. Sarbanes Silver Spring Transit Center, the county's Planning Board said Thursday, offering its support to secure additional funding from the County Council if needed.

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"We really want it to be worthy of the name that is on it," Chairman Royce Hanson said during an update on plans for the transit components of the \$75 million center, which also will include a hotel and residential and retail space.

Hanson's statement followed questioning by Commissioner Wendy C. Perdue on whether the three-level transit center would be "state of the art," as indicated by Bruce Johnston, chief of the county's division of capital development, who presented the update.

Perdue was concerned the transit center's appearance would not attract pedestrians and would discourage the use of public transportation. She also asked about the possibility of "value engineering," or cutting costs at the expense of the center's design.

"I'm disappointed the county wasn't willing to do what is truly state of the art," Perdue said.

One feature discussed was the proposed frosted glass canopies over the transit center's walkways and stairwells, which would appear to be glowing under nighttime lighting. Johnston said the canopies might be made of metal or a less-expensive material if the overall budget of the transit center becomes too high.



rendering courtesy of Montgomery County  
 Members of the county Planning Board said last week that the county should not allow budget considerations to affect the appearance and design of the Paul S. Sarbanes Silver Spring Transit Center.



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But the board said such a feature is important to the overall attractiveness of the transit center and should be kept in the plan, even if that means asking the County Council for more funds.

“Without these glass features, you have a concrete building with very little interest,” Commissioner Meredith K. Wellington said.

The board also asked about giving the entrances to the transit center from Ramsey Avenue and Bonifant Street appearances similar to those of surrounding county streets. Johnston said the Ramsey Avenue entrance was property of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, not the county, while the county could maintain the Bonifant Street entrance if it pays for it.

A projected 97,000 riders will use the transit center by 2025, Johnston said. If the projections hold true, the transit center would still have 15 percent of its capacity remaining, said David Esch of Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Architects, which is in charge of its design. Silver Spring Metro LLC is the developer.

Currently, 60,000 people pass through the center daily, according to a 2002 Metro passenger survey. The entrance on Bonifant would be at the top level of the transit center and allow one-way traffic for taxis and passenger pick-ups and drop-offs. It also would provide access to a hotel and any development on the site.

The middle level, with access from Ramsey Avenue, only would be for buses and allow for two-way traffic. It would also have a connection to the existing MARC train platform.

The lower level, with access from Colesville Road, also only would be for two-way bus traffic. All levels would have crosswalks in the middle for pedestrian crossing.

Outside of the bus area on the lower level, a building for Metro police and transit officials would be built on a brick and tree-lined entrance to the Metro station.

The concrete “jug handle” currently at Wayne Avenue and Colesville Road would be turned into green space, though Hanson said it would not officially be called a “park” in order to allow the proposed Bi-County Transitway link from Bethesda to New Carrollton, known as the Purple Line, to potentially pass through the site.

The transit center will have a “green” environmentally friendly roof, stormwater management, bike racks and access to local trails, but is not scheduled to be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certified, Johnston said, a benchmark designation for a “green” building.

Construction will begin on the site no earlier than November, Johnston added. Bus stops will be relocated along Dixon and Wayne avenues and Bonifant Street in September, he said, and covered walkways would be set up to protect pedestrians from construction.

The board requested to see a draft agreement on the transit center between itself, the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation and Metro at its Thursday meeting.