Fenton Village: How to Preserve & Revive a Struggling Small Business District in Already Developing Downtown Silver Spring

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Abstract
Fenton Village, downtown Silver Spring, Maryland's small business district, is experiencing a marked decline since the once-struggling downtown began its revival. The competition from new development and lack of government action are hurting Fenton Village, forcing small businesses to close, contributing to the decline of its physical infrastructure, and preventing its redevelopment. This study utilizes five different methods to determine Fenton Village's overall state of affairs and to ascertain what course of action would be best for the district. The study: 1) examines Fenton Village's physical infrastructure by studying photographs of Fenton Village and other downtown Silver Spring districts; 2) observes the amount foot traffic in Fenton Village as compared with the rest of downtown Silver Spring; 3) researches retail rents by consulting real estate agents as well as online listings to compare with other area shopping districts; 4) interviews area leaders and business owners to determine viewpoints, opinions, and priorities concerning Fenton Village; and 5) considers zoning regulations to in the end recommend options that may be considered for its future. By applying zoning that will allow developers to easily put together properties, while at the same time requiring them to include ground-floor retail for small, independently-owned businesses, the government can put in place the tools for Fenton Village's redevelopment and help preserve its distinctive small business flavor and small-scale urban fabric.

Keywords
Urban Studies; development; small business

Disciplines
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Fenton Village

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Eric Wrigley

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Abstract

Fenton Village, downtown Silver Spring, Maryland’s small business district, is experiencing a marked decline since the once-struggling downtown began its revival. The competition from new development and lack of government action are hurting Fenton Village, forcing small businesses to close, contributing to the decline of its physical infrastructure, and preventing its redevelopment. This study utilizes five different methods to determine Fenton Village’s overall state of affairs and to ascertain what course of action would be best for the district. The study: 1) examines Fenton Village’s physical infrastructure by studying photographs of Fenton Village and other downtown Silver Spring districts; 2) observes the amount foot traffic in Fenton Village as compared with the rest of downtown Silver Spring; 3) researches retail rents by consulting real estate agents as well as online listings to compare with other area shopping districts; 4) interviews area leaders and business owners to determine viewpoints, opinions, and priorities concerning Fenton Village; and 5) considers zoning regulations to in the end recommend options that may be considered for its future. By applying zoning that will allow developers to easily put together properties, while at the same time requiring them to include ground-floor retail for small, independently-owned businesses, the government can put in place the tools for Fenton Village’s redevelopment and help preserve its distinctive small business flavor and small-scale urban fabric.
Introduction

If today’s newcomers to Silver Spring, Maryland were to travel back just seven years ago, they would not recognize the city as the same. What was previously a ghettoized inner-ring suburb of Washington, D.C., and the center of poverty, economic depression, and despair in otherwise affluent Montgomery County, is now a much-publicized emblem of revitalization and rebirth once unimaginable to its residents. More than $1 billion of investment has been poured into the downtown, including $160 million in initial investment from Montgomery County. The relocation of Discovery Communications’ headquarters from neighboring Bethesda and the American Film Institute from the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC have furthermore helped the struggling central business district (CBD) get back on its feet. Approximately $500 million of that has been spent on a major public-private project dubbed ”Downtown Silver Spring” along Ellsworth Drive, at the center of downtown. For the nearly 250,000 residents of Silver Spring, and the nearly one million who live in Montgomery County, the rebirth of its downtown has been more than welcome. Two new movie theaters, dozens of new restaurants and stores, hundreds of thousands of square feet of new office space, and thousands of new residential units have come online in the last six years alone—and more is planned. According to the Montgomery County Planning Department, more than 3,100 more residential units are set to be built in the coming years, a civic center and public plaza with an ice rink are about to break ground, and many more stores and restaurants are sure to come. Additionally, a new multi-modal transit center is in the planning stages, which will combine a Metro (Washington’s subway) station, MARC (Maryland’s regional rail line) station, a major bus terminal (including both regional and intercity—i.e. Greyhound—buses), a taxi stand, and throughway for the Capital Crescent/Metropolitan Branch (CC/MB) hiker/biker trail, all under one roof.
However, despite the newfound success, an integral part of Silver Spring is having trouble. Fenton Village is a district within downtown Silver Spring south of and adjacent to the new public-private project, and is a hub of small service-oriented businesses like ethnic grocery stores, record shops, cobblers, restaurants, and car repair shops. These small businesses, many of which have been in Fenton Village for decades, are quickly being squeezed out, along with the traditional small-scale fabric of the area. To make matters worse, those in power within the County government seem to be taking haphazard steps, if any at all, to try to help and preserve the scale of development and overall landscape of Fenton Village.

Finding a logical way to save this small business district is important, not only for the well-being of downtown Silver Spring, but for further understanding the dynamics of downtown revitalizations and their effects, both favorable and adverse. To try to do this, I had to come to an understanding of Fenton Village’s current situation by discovering the effects the redevelopment of downtown Silver Spring is having on small businesses, by discussing the feelings and visions of Montgomery County and Silver Spring jurisdictional planning and economic development officials, and by gathering information on county zoning, strategies, and tools that may work for a district such as Fenton Village.

In the end, it became clear that Fenton Village’s malaise, while partly due to market forces, is being prolonged by Montgomery County’s lack of action and planning on the part of government and planning department leaders who have made questionable assumptions about how the market will help Fenton Village in the future. Three processes—the continuing effect of people being channeled into the new public and private developments and away from Fenton Village, the deterioration of physical infrastructure, and rent increases to levels nearly on par with nearby districts—have also been contributing to Fenton Village’s troubles. The end result
has been that the nearby development not only is not helping, but has actually been hurting Fenton Village.

The literature and my study of Fenton Village have converged upon the recommendation that changing the zoning in the Fenton Village Overlay Zone would allow officials to address the needs of developers to be able to redevelop Fenton Village’s small lots, which are difficult to assemble in large amounts, as well as require developers to retain a certain amount of space for small businesses. Adding a zoning amendment specific to Fenton Village to the overall Silver Spring Central Business District and Vicinity Sector Plan, akin to that adopted for the once-struggling Woodmont Triangle small business district of nearby downtown Bethesda would most likely be able to help Fenton Village retain its small business flavor while allowing it to redevelop.

**Literature Review**

As an historically, economically, and culturally important redeveloping inner ring suburban central business district, downtown Silver Spring, Maryland is experiencing many of the same phenomena that inner cities have been experiencing over the last decade. Large-scale public-private projects are being built to jumpstart developments in downtowns across the country and housing is being built at a rapid pace to meet the rising demand of empty nesters and young professionals who want the dense city lifestyle. However, at the same time as these new developments are being built, complete with national chain stores and restaurants, the existing small businesses that remained through Silver Spring’s troubling times are being squeezed out. This trend is due to rising rents, competition from chains, and the channeling of people into particular, revitalized portions of downtowns, which in many cases are away from the struggling districts where small businesses are located. The new problem facing many successfully
redeveloping downtowns, such as Silver Spring, is how to incorporate the new without pushing out all of the positive, high-quality, and distinctive elements of the old.

There are two main literatures regarding the subjects of revitalizing downtown retail districts and nurturing the development of small businesses. One literature focuses on how to spur and manage the economic redevelopment of a downtown through the use of various public and private sector tools. The second literature focuses on how to bring in small businesses as a way of stimulating subsequent development in an already revitalizing downtown district. Few, if any, scholars have regarded these two literatures—these two issues—as intimately intertwined. That is, the issue of how to keep small businesses in an already revitalizing downtown has not been clearly touched upon; surprising, as the case of downtown Silver Spring reveals that the two issues are clearly related.

With a series of public and private investments worth well over $1 billion driving development over the past five years, Silver Spring’s redevelopment and rehabilitation has been swift. This has been extraordinary, considering the geographic size of downtown Silver Spring is on par with that of Center City Philadelphia or Lower Manhattan (see map in Appendix A). It is hard to imagine such a large area being so completely and comprehensively redeveloped in such a short amount of time. The redevelopment has been indeed swift; that is, except for one area, Fenton Village, the district which is the heart of existing small businesses in the downtown.

Downtown Redevelopment Literature

There is an innumerable amount of contemporary literature regarding downtown redevelopment. There are two general types of authors who are writing about downtowns in general. Scholars at universities and institutions (such as the Brookings Institute or the Urban Land Institute) across the country and throughout the world who specialize in urban policy and
urban affairs tend to publish their studies in scholarly journals such as *The Journal of Planning Literature* or *Housing Policy Debate*, which are both referenced in this study. Additionally, journalists who focus on urban issues and former experts or authorities who have worked for the government or consulting firms publish their works in urban policy books aimed more at providing guidance from their experiences. I use both types of authors to describe current literature pertinent to this study’s topic.

Downtown Silver Spring relied on a strong current of entertainment and residential construction to initiate its redevelopment. In fact, Ted Chandler of Fannie Mae states that sometimes “housing works better than office development as a method of urban revival” (482). This has certainly been the case in South downtown Silver Spring, which is directly adjacent to the west of Fenton Village, both of which are south of the major public-private project which contains the national chains and entertainment venues. In South downtown Silver Spring, over 6 large condominium projects have been constructed in the last five years, four even larger ones are currently under construction as of late 2007, and several more are in the planning stages or waiting for a more favorable housing market. Only three relatively small office projects have been constructed within that timeframe: Discovery.com’s headquarters, the American Nurses Association building (part of the public-private project), as well as a small high-tech business incubator. In fact, aside from those three, only one other significant office project has come on line in the entire downtown area; that of Discovery Communications’ worldwide headquarters adjoining the public-private development.

Though Chandler is speaking of trends in America’s Western downtowns, this can be applied to Silver Spring, as well. Housing, retail, and entertainment options have been driving the revitalization thus far, and only now are developers becoming interested in constructing new
office buildings. Norman Walzer, a professor at the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, and Steven Kline, a consultant at The Economic Development Group, Ltd., and Thomas N. Jacob & Associates, add that to help market their locations, downtowns may hold “festivals, parades, and other events on weekends and special occasions” to boost visibility of stores and services. South downtown Silver Spring has been using this technique liberally to help form a sense of community for the thousands of newcomers. Other literature supports this view of redeveloping downtowns, with a concentration not on job creation but on housing, shopping, entertainment, and community-building options.

**Small Business Literature**

General literature regarding helping small businesses seems to trend more towards those authors in the public sector or non-profits—as well as academic scholars—who publish their work in “how-to” books which provide information, tips, and tools for how to help preserve small businesses in failing downtowns, or how to use them in order to help revive downtowns.

Sugie Lee and Nancey Green Leigh, professors at the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs and Georgia Tech, respectively, argue in their article that “investments are needed to solve inner ring suburb problems of aging housing stock, increasing poverty, [and] deteriorating infrastructures…” (341). There is so much concentration on these big picture problems that small businesses, many of which may have been relatively prosperous despite otherwise dismal conditions but are now struggling with new chain competition, are being overlooked. Similarly, Roberta Brandes Gratz, a journalist and urban critic, and Norman Mintz, the Design Director at the Grand Central Partnership in New York City and downtown revitalization consultant, argue that “so much money is spent on marketing and demographic studies aimed at luring a department store anchor or clothing chain store, like the Gap” (274) that
small, independently-owned businesses are being completely disregarded as a method with which to reinvigorate downtowns. Accordingly, they maintain that “locally-owned businesses are essential to any downtown” (275) and “the challenge is to…recognize the potential [of locally-owned businesses], and to figure out what it takes to nurture their growth” (278).

Associated with this challenge is the problem of newer enclosed shopping centers and large discount centers such as Wal-Mart sucking the business away from small businesses that offer the same products. Walzer and Kline argue that this “spells potential disaster for downtowns in communities within 20 to 30 miles of the discount chains” (251). Similar in fashion, small businesses in Fenton Village in downtown Silver Spring are experiencing a decline in business partly due to the national chains and large-scale retailers opening within short walking distance of their doors. Ironically, this can be compared with downtown Silver Spring’s initial decline in the 1960s-70s which was widely blamed on the construction of Wheaton Plaza, a major shopping center, just five miles north.

Lee and Leigh also state that “the inner ring suburbs have few tools available to counter decline” (341), but this may not be entirely true, especially in Silver Spring’s case, given that hundreds of millions of dollars of public money has already been spent on the redevelopment cause. According to the Dolores P. Palma, a principal of Hyett Palma, Inc. (an economic renaissance consulting firm), there are several tools that can be used to strengthen existing downtown businesses. One-on-one business counseling and business visitation teams, both of which concentrate on offering personalized advice and linking business owners to information they may need; seminars, workshops, forums, and conferences to address business owners as a group; and retail and office market analyses to help small businesses understand their markets better, are all potentially useful first steps in helping small businesses compete. Secondly, Palma
notes that financial incentives may be added in addition to the previously mentioned professional assistance. These would help businesses upgrade their façades and signage, provide loans, tax abatements, and other aides.

Fenton Village’s case could benefit from many of these strategies, and indeed, the county has already provided some professional assistance to help businesses compete, however, the overall situation in downtown Silver Spring is different from those being described in the above literature. None of the literature on redeveloping downtowns speaks to the effects on the existing small businesses. The authors’ strategies and suggestions generally speak of downtown districts that are still growing and developing and need help to get their feet off the ground. Likewise, none of the literature on small businesses talks about preserving small businesses that are struggling due to newer competition. Fenton Village is a district that was already well-established, though is now losing its signature small businesses, and needs a way to connect the tools suggested above with the fact that the downtown in which the district is operating is already redeveloping. By studying Fenton Village, its current situation, and the views and priorities of people in power, I hope to help fill a gap in the literature by suggesting a better way with which to deal with the decline of small business districts because of competition nearby from newer, shinier, national chain retailer-filled projects. In the end, I hope to be able to provide a method that can be used by downtowns and districts with situations similar to that of downtown Silver Spring to help preserve their small businesses districts, while still allowing for redevelopment and renewal.

**Methodology**

Four aspects of Fenton Village and related sources are needed which, combined, will paint a complete picture on the state of Fenton Village. Together, these aspects will clearly show
that Fenton Village needs help, that it is wanted and needed, who are the actors within the issue, and what can be done for it. These aspects are: the physical well-being of Fenton Village; the well-being of its businesses; concerns and opinions voiced by nearby residents and area leaders; and potential solutions to any problems Fenton Village is having. To gather data on these four aspects I went about obtaining information on the current state of affairs in Fenton Village, the condition of its retail, opinions and priorities of area leaders, and options Fenton Village could take from several different angles.

I:

• conducted a physical survey of Fenton Village and neighboring district environments;
• took direct observations of foot traffic;
• obtained retail rent data from commercial real estate listings and agents;
• interviewed two area leaders, the Montgomery County Planning Board Chairman, who was able to tell me the priorities of the Planning Board in terms of zoning amendments, any future legislation concerning Fenton Village, among other information, as well as the Silver Spring Regional Services Center Director, who was able to provide me with insight and information on the opinions not only of area business owners, but the residents as well¹;
• and pored over literature on the Silver Spring Central Business District (CBD) and related documents.

Each of these methods is outlined below in more detail.

¹ Together, these leaders provided me with the viewpoints of all those involved in the Fenton Village issue: the government, businesses, and residents in the downtown Silver Spring area.
Physical Survey

To view firsthand and to be able to portray the tangible physical differences between the state of Fenton Village and the rest of downtown Silver Spring, I conducted a physical survey of both environments (see Map A on the following page). By doing this I was able to identify the differences between different areas of downtown Silver Spring in order to specifically delineate what must be accomplished in the physical environment in Fenton Village to bring it up to par with its neighboring districts. Street by street, I took pictures of buildings, streetscapes, skylines, and plots of land that represented most of the physical conditions of Fenton Village, South downtown Silver Spring, and the central portion of downtown where the large public-private project is located. Appendix B displays a map with highlighting over the streets of which I took pictures, while Appendix B shows a very small sampling of 18 of the photographs I took. This survey not only helped me to realize the physical differences between Fenton Village and the rest of downtown, but allowed me to confirm data obtained for my spatial redevelopment map (see Map B).
Map A: Photographed Streets

The streets highlighted in red are those documented on photographs. The central business district (CBD) is outlined in black, and Fenton Village is outlined in blue.
Map B: Spatial Development Map

Red indicates redeveloped properties, dark pink indicates projects approved, under construction, or that are very likely to proceed, light pink indicates projects proposed or are probable, blue indicates properties that have buildings but are not likely to be redeveloped, and white are properties that may or may not have buildings on them, though nothing is preventing them from being redeveloped.
**Observational Study**

In order to determine differences in foot traffic, I conducted an observational study alongside my physical survey. Foot traffic is important data to obtain as it shows exactly where people are congregating at certain times, and implicitly, which places are most popular and most successful. If there are differences between the foot traffic numbers in Fenton Village and the rest of downtown Silver Spring (namely, if foot traffic is less in Fenton Village than the new developments), it will show that Fenton Village is suffering from the effect of people being tunneled into the newer developments and away from Fenton Village.

At different times of the day (around 12 PM, 4 PM, and 8 PM) on a typical Saturday in October 2007, I observed the general number of people in a given location in two locations in Fenton Village (Location A at the intersection of Bonifant Street and Fenton Street, and Location B at the intersection of Silver Spring Avenue and Georgia Avenue), in South downtown Silver Spring (at the Arts Alley near the intersection of Georgia Avenue and East-West Highway), and the Downtown Silver Spring project along Ellsworth Drive. For example, after observing the foot traffic at Fenton Village Location A at 12 PM for five minutes, I walked to Fenton Village Location B and observed again for five minutes. The results can be seen in Appendix C. From my experience I considered these to be typical locations where I could observe people without being disrupted or questioned. This allowed me to observe the differences in the number of customers and potential customers of different areas of downtown Silver Spring. A shortcoming of this method was that I was not able to do observations on a typical workday, which would no doubt display different patterns of foot traffic during lunchtime and during the evening. However, the number of restaurants serving lunch in Fenton Village and South downtown Silver Spring is so little that this shortcoming should not be taken as a major weakness of my study.
Retail Data

Retail rent data is very important for this study so that I can see if it is having an effect, just as the foot traffic numbers, on Fenton Village’s small businesses. High rents can force unsuccessful or struggling small businesses out in favor of businesses that are better able to draw in customers or advertise (such as big brand name retailers). The theory is that rents in Fenton Village are rising to levels that put it into competition with its neighboring districts, while at the same time, foot traffic is not bringing in the number of customers to the existing small businesses for them to be able to afford the higher rents. In order to obtain retail data for Fenton Village, downtown Silver Spring, and other districts within the general vicinity of Silver Spring I consulted two types of sources. I first gathered information from listings on loopnet.com and cimls.com, two popular online commercial real estate listings services. I then called commercial leasing agents (who wished to remain anonymous) at Commercial & Investment Realty Associates, LLC and Site Realty Group (which I had both identified as having listings in Fenton Village from their advertisements on buildings) in Silver Spring to gather further current commercial leasing rates in Silver Spring and other Washington, DC areas. Compiling all of the listings into one Microsoft Excel file, I then determined the average lease rates for retail space per square foot per year for each district as well as the average available space. The results of this compilation are in Appendix D. The districts included are: Fenton Village, the rest of downtown Silver Spring, downtown Bethesda, the Woodmont Triangle district within downtown Bethesda, Chevy Chase (a district stretching across the Maryland and Washington, DC border), Adams Morgan, Dupont Circle, Georgetown, Tenleytown, and U Street, the last four being districts within Washington, DC.
Interviews

To get a grasp on the feelings of Montgomery County and Silver Spring leaders on the issue of Fenton Village, I conducted two interviews: one with the Montgomery County Planning Board Chairman Royce Hanson, and one with Director Gary Stith of the Silver Spring Regional Services Center, an institution designed as a intermediary between businesses and residents of the downtown Silver Spring area and the Montgomery County government. This data is important to obtain as finding out the priorities of the government, as well as the concerns of the small businesses and nearby residents, will help determine if there is a disconnect between what Fenton Village needs or what the residents want and what the government is doing. A sampling of the interviews is provided in Appendix G. Both interviews were conducted over the phone over the course of two days and each took approximately 15 minutes. Only relevant information was recorded by hand as an electronic recording device was not available for use.

Zoning and Project Data

Montgomery County zoning data is important to this study as it can show differences in zoning regulations between different districts in the county. Additionally, project data is important to show as applied to different districts with different zoning to see if that zoning is having an effect on the amount of development occurring. For this study, I gathered data for downtown Silver Spring’s Fenton Village and downtown Bethesda’s Woodmont Triangle for comparison.

I gathered data from several documents from the Montgomery County Planning Department website (www.mc-mncppc.org/planning/index.shtm). I gathered Silver Spring project data from www.mc-mncppc.org/silverspring/index.shtm and from my own knowledge of Silver Spring (having worked for the Planning Department) and applied to a spatial
Data & Discussion/Analysis

Physical Survey

Physical depictions of Fenton Village and the rest of downtown Silver Spring best display the stark differences in their appearances, from the streetscapes, roads, and lampposts, to the shops, plots of land, and the buildings themselves. Overall, Fenton Village appears much older and worse for wear than the rest of downtown Silver Spring, with smaller-scale buildings than the other downtown districts, which are composed of larger and newer buildings, some still or about to be under construction. The overall streetscape in Fenton Village has not been updated, save for Fenton Street, which does have some of the newer lampposts and sidewalks that are shared by neighboring districts. Additionally, the plots of land are much smaller in Fenton Village, stemming from the number of buildings that were once rowhomes or single-family homes.

A first look at the differences between Photographs 1 and 2 (see next page) are telling: each photograph was taken right across the street from each other. I simply turned 180 degrees and took the photograph from both angles. Photograph 1 shows a typical scene along Fenton Street within the new public-private project dubbed “Downtown Silver Spring”. Photograph 2 depicts Fenton Street across Wayne Avenue from the same location, but shows run-down
buildings, though a similar scale of buildings. This photograph depicts the edge of Fenton Village.

Continuing into Fenton Village, Photograph 3 shows one of about three projects that have been built in Fenton Village over the last five years (see Appendix B for further photographs). Notice that this residential building does not contain ground-floor retail which would have put it in line with most other buildings in Fenton Village. This creates a gap or discontinuity in the streetscape and shows the need (discussed below) for more explicit zoning laws to include ground-floor retail in new developments. Just across Bonifant Avenue from Photograph 3, Photograph 4 shows one of many buildings in Fenton Village that are abandoned, falling apart, or in general disrepair. Right next door on Bonifant Avenue are a series of struggling small businesses housed in historic, though derelict rowhomes (Photograph 5). Photograph 6 shows an abandoned plot of land along Fenton Street which has no project in the works, and Photograph 7 depicts a small portion of the ethnic diversity which is a mark of Fenton Village: a Jamaican bakery and eatery is housed in the same building on Thayer Avenue as a Korean American Community Services organization. This eatery is a rare example of a business in Fenton Village that seems to be doing well enough to maintain a clean and well-maintained façade.

Moving west to South downtown Silver Spring, Photograph 8 shows a scene across Georgia Avenue from the Jamaican eatery. The highrise with an addition of nearly 400
Photograph 1: Fenton Street in Central Downtown

Photograph 2: Fenton Street in Fenton Village
condominiums to South downtown Silver Spring is called the Gateway, and is a mark of the residential building boom seen there. Photographs 9, 10, and 11 show some of the scenery from South downtown Silver Spring, where a lively arts and entertainment alley complete with a popular restaurant and lounge called The Gallery, the most popular coffeehouse in the Washington DC area (according to The Washington Post\textsuperscript{2}), Mayorga Coffee Roasters, and a homemade ice cream shop, Moorenko’s, have taken up shop in the last few years. The amount of newly constructed buildings and ongoing construction is evident from the photographs.

Traveling north from South downtown Silver Spring to the central portion of downtown, Photograph 12 shows Discovery Communications’ new headquarters at the corner of Georgia Avenue and Wayne Avenue. This is just across Georgia Avenue from the public-private Downtown Silver Spring project, depicted in Photographs 13, 14, and 17, which spans Ellsworth Drive from Georgia Avenue east to Spring Street. Photographs 15, 16, and 18 display some of the spinoff development directly adjacent to the public-private venture: the American Film Institute’s Silver Theater, an American Apparel clothing store and yoga center, and a street scene depicting a brand new highrise condominium building called The Crescent along Wayne Avenue.

The map in Appendix G gives a two-dimensional viewpoint of what is displayed in the photographs. Photographs 2-7 in Appendix B correspond to the Fenton Village district in the map, photographs 8-11 correspond to the Secondary Development Area according to the map, and photographs 1 and 12-18 correspond to the Primary Development Area according to the map.

For understanding the significance of the differences between Fenton Village, South downtown Silver Spring, and central downtown Silver Spring, there is no better representation

\textsuperscript{2} http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?node=cityguide/profile&id=1087291
than photographs. The photographs of Fenton Village exhibit a disjointed neighborhood of scarce new development, ethnic stores and restaurants, deserted and derelict buildings, abandoned and neglected plots of land, and seemingly little foot traffic. The first two photographs provide the most revealing insight into the “invisible fence” that borders Fenton Village and separates it from the rest of downtown Silver Spring.

South downtown Silver Spring, an area once somewhat similar to the small-scale, ghettoized nature of Fenton Village, is shown as a booming residential and entertainment community. The Arts Alley shows a view of the community coming together on a typical day to experience its restaurants and entertainment venues. The abundant and ongoing construction of four separate highrise condominium and apartment buildings, and the other newly constructed buildings display a neighborhood with growing vitality, very different from that of Fenton Village.

Moving north to the central part of downtown, the glitz and glamour of Discovery Communications’ headquarters, the American Film Institute, and the endless array of chain stores and restaurants provides an even more severe look at the different experiences of Fenton Village and its neighboring districts.

In addition, the map in Appendix G displays the spatial arrangement of redevelopment, ongoing, and future development in downtown Silver Spring. This map, created using information gathered from the physical survey as well as from project information on the Montgomery County Planning Board website shows very distinctly the abundance of development occurring in every section of downtown Silver Spring but one—Fenton Village. The diffusion and pattern of redevelopment is apparent in this map, and the border around
Fenton Village becomes not just a line on a map, but a line dividing districts with very different conditions.

The physical survey does have certain limitations which must be mentioned. First of all, it is always better if a reader can experience firsthand the actual locations being discussed. Additionally, any photographic survey is shaped by the impressions of each researcher and thus becomes necessarily selective and subjective. However, I have covered most sections of the distinct districts within downtown Silver Spring to provide as full and evenhanded an experience as possible through photography.

Seeing the differences between Fenton Village and the rest of downtown Silver Spring not only in pictures but on the spatial redevelopment map is one of the most important aspects and first steps in attempting to explore potential means by which Fenton Village may be redeveloped. However, it also prompts puzzling questions as to how an area surrounded on all sides by booming residential, retail, and entertainment development could not experience more of the revitalization that has taken downtown Silver Spring by storm. Part of the answer lies most likely in the zoning laws (see below) of the different districts in downtown Silver Spring, but for now it is important to continue to learn more of the conditions Fenton Village currently faces.

**Observational Study**

The data shown in the table and corresponding graphs in Appendix C show the differing amount of foot traffic experienced at four locations across downtown Silver Spring (two in Fenton Village, one in South downtown Silver Spring, and one in central downtown Silver Spring) at three different times of day on a Saturday. I have provided two types of graphs to 1) show the different number of people throughout the day at each location with a bar graph (see
Foot traffic in Fenton Village is extraordinarily low compared with the other districts in downtown Silver Spring. At all locations except for Fenton Village Location A, the highest number of people observed occurred at 8 PM, while the lowest occurred at 12 PM for all locations. Overall, Fenton Village Location A had the lowest number of people observed while Central Downtown had the most. In total, central downtown Silver Spring experienced 15 times the amount of foot traffic as both Fenton Village locations combined, and South downtown Silver Spring had five times the amount of foot traffic. This is an extremely significant difference.

Perhaps some of the blame lies with the inferior infrastructure in Fenton Village, as displayed by the photographs in the previous section, but undoubtedly, the channeling effect of people from Fenton Village into the newer developments has had a detrimental effect upon the
number of customers and potential customers which Fenton Village stores can rely on. Thus, it is no wonder that a number of businesses in Fenton Village have had to close over the past few years. It is ironic to think that while the new developments were intended to help revitalize downtown Silver Spring as a whole, yet it is actually hurting Fenton Village, as evidenced by the dramatically lower foot traffic totals found in the district.

Again, it is very important to mention if there are any limitations to the data as I did not conduct observations on other days such as weekdays when foot traffic patterns could be lower or higher. However, as mentioned before, the makeup of stores in Fenton Village probably would not yield very different numbers given that the most probable difference in foot traffic would come during lunch hours on weekdays and there are not a large number of restaurants in Fenton Village.

**Retail Rent**

Reading the data on retail rent per square foot per year is the typical method that real estate agents use to lease retail and commercial space (see graph below and table in Appendix D). The data show that Fenton Village, with an average current asking rent of $28.82 per square foot per year is only 11-23% less than the surrounding districts of downtown Silver Spring as a whole, downtown Bethesda, and Woodmont Triangle within downtown Bethesda. This is significant, given the fact that as noted above, foot traffic in Fenton Village is extraordinarily low compared with the rest of downtown Silver Spring, and is probably lower than the districts in Bethesda (as experienced by the researcher on a day to day basis having lived in the area for 21 years). What’s more, according to the real estate agents who provided this rent data, the numbers are only continuing to rise for Fenton Village.
Unfortunately, due to a lack of resources and time, the change in rents over the last few years was not a part of the data that I could obtain. I heard from real estate agents, through those I spoke with, and through personal experience, that rents have been rising precipitously over the past five years in Fenton Village, but because I have no solid data to back that up, I can only make solid analyses based on current asking rents in Fenton Village. This begs the question, how can landlords ask this much for rent when the amount of foot traffic is so low compared with other downtown districts? The answer probably lies in the nature of real estate. According to C.F. Sirmans and Krisandra A. Guidry, retail rents are determined by a number of factors, including location and market conditions. Where population density is high, income is high, there is the potential for high growth, and general economic conditions are favorable, retail rents
will increase. In downtown Silver Spring, density is very high (15,600 people per square mile, according to the Montgomery County government\(^3\)), median household income is well above that of the U.S. as a whole and rising\(^4\), and it is reasonable to assume that the high amount of development in recent years has fostered a general sense that economic conditions are still favorable for growth. Thus, landlords in Fenton Village probably believe that they can begin to lease their spaces for more in anticipation of growing foot traffic from the nearby development and encouraging area economic trends. However, the effect this has had is to push out the existing small businesses that had stayed with their landlords throughout the bad times before redevelopment occurred, and had done moderately well despite the surroundings.

**Interviews**

Interviews (excerpts of which appear in Appendix E) with Planning Board Chairman Royce Hanson and Director Gary Stith of the Silver Spring Regional Services Center offer a priceless glimpse into the inner workings of both government and quasi-governmental organizations. They revealed some of the priorities of Montgomery County and Silver Spring’s leaders, as well as insight into some of their opinions regarding Fenton Village’s condition and the current state of affairs when compared with other districts such as South downtown Silver Spring and Woodmont Triangle in Bethesda. Overall, the opinions of Hanson and Stith tended towards the belief that the tools already in place in Fenton Village will allow the market to redevelop Fenton Village over time, albeit slowly. However, business owners and residents who have experienced the fact that many businesses are struggling or have already closed claim that

\(^3\)Silver Spring Regional Center - Downtown Silver Spring. <www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Content/RSC/SilSprng/DowntownDevelopment/welcome.asp>.

more help is needed to prevent Fenton Village’s small business flavor from completely disappearing and to help spur new development and infrastructure improvements.

One of the most revealing remarks was made by Chairman Hanson, who claimed that “it is a choice to redevelop, and the market should make those choices”. This is a grand departure from the strategies the county used in just the past few years, and continues to make, considering that over $100 million of county money was invested into the Downtown Silver Spring project, and millions more is being invested in the new multi-modal transit center. Showing again that county leaders do not seem to be interested in Fenton Village, Gary Stith states that County Executive Isiah “Ike” Leggett “doesn’t feel that any amendments need to be made” to help Fenton Village in particular. Stith adds that county councilmember Marc Elrich has actually been kicking around an amendment proposal that would reduce maximum building heights in Fenton Village, an idea that both Stith and Hanson say would probably be counterproductive in saving the district’s small businesses.

Stith says that despite county leaders’ seemingly indifferent stance when it comes to Fenton Village, area residents do sometimes voice their concern. He says that people in the community say things like “we want to save the small businesses in Fenton Village”. Stith usually replies by saying that “the only thing that’s going to save the small businesses is if you go spend money there!” This reflects a fact that foot traffic in Fenton Village is considerably low despite community concern. During an October 29, 2007 meeting between Fenton Village business owners and the County, area resident Bob Colvin stated that Fenton Village’s small businesses are important to keep, saying that “they’re essential to our way of life”.

When pushed to suggest ways in which to help Fenton Village redevelop, both Stith and Hanson agreed that an amendment similar to one approved for Woodmont Triangle in Bethesda,
(which will be described in greater depth below) which would increase allowable density and decrease the minimum lot sizes required to develop a parcel of land, would probably benefit Fenton Village. This would make it easier for developers to redevelop properties, while providing ground-floor retail space for small businesses. Stith states specifically, however, that “we want to encourage small businesses, but we don’t have an obligation to save existing small businesses” furthering his belief that part of Fenton Village’s decline is due to changes in the market. He believes that many of the retail establishments in Fenton Village, such as record shops and travel agencies, among others, do not meet a large demand in the area population. Hanson adds that any proposal to increase allowable heights and densities in Fenton Village would be met with opposition, given that the district borders single family homes on its east side.

Furthermore, in the first week of November 2007, a zoning amendment to increase allowable heights in the South Silver Spring/Ripley district to 200 feet (which directly borders Fenton Village on its west side) was proposed to help more of that area redevelop. Both Hanson and Stith stated that this could indirectly help Fenton Village as, according to Hanson “when the number of residents increases, the amount of retail should increase” and according to Stith, “with new development—new offices—in the Ripley District, you’ll see people going to the other side of Georgia Avenue—to Fenton Village—to the restaurants and stores there” just as you see people going to the other side of Georgia Avenue from Discovery during lunch hours. However, who is to say that this would guarantee a jumpstart to redevelopment in Fenton Village? After all, it was the county that took the initiative and helped finance and build the public-private project that so many office workers frequent during lunch hours. Area leaders don’t suggest any similar project in Fenton Village that could offer the same thing for workers in a future South Silver Spring/Ripley district.
Small business owners also have strong opinions on what is happening to them and to Fenton Village, as noted by Avedis Simon, a cobbler who has owned the Arinas Shoe Repair shop on Fenton Street since 1968. To add, Simon says that he’s “not the only one to say that [the new development is] bringing more problems” than benefits to Fenton Village. Emmanuel Bobga, owner of the Roger Miller Restaurant on Bonifant Street complained during a recent community meeting between Fenton Village business owners and County Councilman Marc Elrich that “the county doesn’t pay attention to small business”. He claims that his restaurant may have actually been busier before Silver Spring’s redevelopment. Jasbir Mongia who leases space for his travel agency on Thayer Avenue said during the meeting that “we are contributing to this county, but because of our situation, we’ve been marginalized,” adding that Fenton Village is doing so badly that they are unable to effectively bring a significant number of jobs to the community, something that might command the attention of government leaders. It is ironic to note again that, according to these small businesses owners, as well as the data laid out in this study, the new Silver Spring developments have not only been unhelpful, but have actually hurt Fenton Village and its small businesses, forcing higher rents, shop closures, and general discontent among the business owners.

Unfortunately, I was not able to interview County Executive Leggett directly. However, Hanson, Stith, and the business owners and resident quoted at the October community meeting do bring up important aspects of what is currently thought about and said regarding Fenton Village. Overall, it seems that while area leaders recognize that Fenton Village is having a problem redeveloping and competing with its neighboring districts, and that there are potential zoning amendments that could be made, there is a general lack of interest in doing anything about it. Resident dissatisfaction is relatively little when compared with the evident contentment

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5 http://www.gazette.net/stories/ 110707/silvnew200638_32356.shtml
with the newer developments, and leaders may be, consciously or not, buying into the negative political reality of proposing anything that could increase allowable density near single family homes (in spite of the fact that Woodmont Triangle in Bethesda also borders single family homes on one side). There could also be an unconscious bias against these existing small businesses, and perhaps they believe that because of their ethnic or lower-class nature, they cannot possibly survive in the changing marketplace in downtown Silver Spring, and it should be up to the market to simply push out what won’t survive, and redevelop what will.

**Zoning Regulations**

Current zoning for Fenton Village was obtained from the *Silver Spring Central Business District and Vicinity Sector Plan* (a map of the zoning can be seen in Appendix F). It calls for a “local neighborhood retail center recharged with the energy of multi-cultural restaurants and businesses” (14) under the umbrella of a Fenton Village Overlay Zone, which attempts to address Fenton Village’s distinctiveness. The report calls for a “better match between businesses and the marketplace”, something which should help tap the “strong, substantial market for…small-scale retail in Fenton Village” (61). It recognizes the district’s disjointedness because of “a lack of significant renovation or infill development in recent years” (61) and proposes several zoning regulations that it believes will help it redevelop properly.

According to the report, there are three levels of zoning within the Fenton Village Overlay Zone which determine density and height of developments. Along the eastern edge bordering single family homes, the report calls for zoning of CBD - 0.5, which is the lowest density zone with a CBD (Central Business District) denotation. This would allow for a floor-area ratio (FAR) of 0.5 under standard method development (another option is optional method development, which requires a minimum lot size of 18,000 square feet, as well as a greater
amount of public space onsite and affordable housing). Most of Fenton Village is zoned CBD - 1, which allows for a standard method development FAR of 2.0. Additionally, a very limited northwest portion of the Overlay Zone is zoned CBD – 2, mainly to reflect already existing development (64). Height limits for Fenton Village are as follows: 90 feet along Georgia Avenue on the western edge, 60 feet between Georgia Avenue and Fenton Street’s western side, and 45 feet or 60 feet for all-residential projects east of Fenton Street (68).

As a comparison, the *Woodmont Triangle Amendment to the Sector Plan for the Bethesda Central Business District* is consulted. This overlay zone (see Appendix F) is of approximately the same size as the Fenton Village Overlay Zone, and attempts to address the issues of retaining small-scale retail while instigating redevelopment near an area of recent successful redevelopment that is redirecting people away from Woodmont Triangle, the key issue Fenton Village faces, as well. In Woodmont Triangle, mixed-use projects can receive greater density and height by including more moderately-priced dwelling units (MPDUs) and ground-floor retail (10). The overall goal of the overlay zone is to encourage redevelopment, but retain small-scale retail by increasing allowable FAR by reducing the minimum lot size to 18,000 square feet for standard method and to 0 square feet for optional method development as well as by increasing maximum allowable heights within the overlay zone. Within the zone, a large portion is zoned CBD – 1, which allows for a mixed-use maximum FAR of 3.0 under optional method development, and large portions are zoned CBD – 2 or CBD – R2, which allow for maximum FARs of 5.0. To encourage mixed-use and commercial development, all-residential projects can receive a maximum FAR of only 1.0. Maximum allowable building heights range from 60 feet at the western edge bordering single family homes, to 174 feet away from the single family housing closer to the center of downtown Bethesda.
J. Terrence Farris of Clemson University identifies urban infill development as a way to help revitalization on its way. He states that current “zoning and subdivision regulations [in most redeveloping downtowns] are not conducive to encouraging infill development, thus necessitating rezoning”. Farris speaks of ways to induce residential infill, but it could very well be applied to any other type of land use, as well. Zoning in Fenton Village was defined well before the current redevelopment, and thus is outdated and obsolete. Because lots in Fenton Village are so small, it is difficult for developers to meet the initial optional method requirement of 18,000 square foot lot sizes except by assembling multiple properties. This already inhibits the ability of developers to redevelop a piece of property even if it is valued highly because developers will only be able to use standard method development, which doesn’t allow for the greatest profits. In Bethesda’s Woodmont Triangle Overlay Zone, the minimum lot size requirement for optional method development was reduced to zero, thus promoting smaller-scale redevelopments. Woodmont Triangle has been very successful thus far, despite the recent real estate downturn, as evidenced by the list of current projects in Appendix G. This would be extremely useful for developers in Fenton Village because of the similarly small average lot sizes. The distribution of heights also makes it easier for developers to increase the amount of affordable housing and retail while obtaining larger profits with its projects in Woodmont Triangle. Each of these tools—decreased minimum lot sizes, increased FAR, and increased maximum heights—works to encourage the development of more affordable housing and small-scale retail, while at the same time recognizing that the small lot sizes in Woodmont Triangle make it difficult to develop otherwise. Thus far, the results in Woodmont Triangle have been highly successful. Several new projects are taking advantage of the increased allowable density to redevelop aging properties while including affordable housing and ground-floor retail. Their
lot sizes are small, but because of the greater allowable density, developers can more easily obtain a healthy profit.

These issues are exactly the same as those facing Fenton Village, and because of their similar nature and because of Woodmont Triangle’s success, it would make sense to amend the zoning for the Fenton Village Overlay Zone to reflect that in the Woodmont Triangle Overlay Zone.

Conclusion

A more in-depth study, replete with further foot traffic and retail rent studies, as well as more interviews from both government leaders and, more importantly, shopkeepers, would reveal more fully the situation in Fenton Village and offer more suggestions to help to fix its problems. However, given the information obtained, it is reasonable to conclude that because of several important factors, including a poor and decrepit physical infrastructure, extremely low amounts of foot traffic coupled with high retail rents, inadequate zoning, and government leaders who are generally indifferent to Fenton Village’s problems, Fenton Village is losing its signature small businesses and is failing to attract redevelopment that is consistent with the goals outlined in the sector plan.

To begin, the stark physical differences between Fenton Village and other districts in downtown Silver Spring show that Fenton Village currently lacks the quality physical infrastructure to bring it up to par with the surrounding downtown. From this, it is not hard to believe that foot traffic in Fenton Village is extraordinarily low when compared with the newly redeveloped parts of downtown, and that business owners have even claimed that their business is doing even more poorly than before redevelopment occurred. Furthermore, because landlords are preempting new development in Fenton Village by raising retail rents, small businesses are
being squeezed ever tighter, struggling to make ends meet. At the same time, because the
owners have to spend so much time on their businesses, a coordinated small business owner
association that could speak to the government on behalf of their community would be difficult
to form, and thus Fenton Village’s businesses have little voice in the County government.
Predictably, those in the power, namely Planning Board Chairman Hanson and County Executive
Ike Leggett, do not seem to see a need for government action to help Fenton Village. They
believe that market forces, trickling down from the success of the Downtown Silver Spring
project, will take care of themselves, and that the tools are already in place to keep Fenton
Village from declining further. However, it is obvious to area residents and business owners that
Fenton Village is far from safe, and that it is in need of preservation—not necessarily the
preservation of everything that exists now—but at least that of its small business flavor, a unique
and precious feature in a downtown otherwise replete with a growing number of chain stores and
restaurants. Literature and experience tells us that the underlying problem that needs to be fixed
in order to help Fenton Village, as well as other struggling redeveloping districts, is the zoning
regulations. Fenton Village’s zoning was created in the early 1990s before any of this
redevelopment occurred. Though those in power do not seem to think so, it is now outdated and
obsolete, substantiated clearly by the lack of government investment in its infrastructure and the
lack of development within Fenton Village.

All of this brings us back to the gap in the literature defined earlier. Studying the effects
that redevelopment is having on Fenton Village, it is apparent that while a large amount attention
is being paid to the new developments, the districts getting left behind are getting little notice.
While small businesses in Fenton Village complain that they are hurting and that nothing is
happening to resolve their discontent because the government is doing nothing because the
government is relying on market forces to correct the indifferences. The literature does the same thing. The redevelopment side does little to discuss small businesses, while the small business side does little to discuss how struggling small business districts fits in with successful redevelopment. My study has shown that it should be possible to preserve a small business district even in a quickly redeveloping downtown by altering the zoning as well as by having the government pay closer attention to the district’s needs. This must happen, even at the expense of the new development, which has been and will continue to be successful now that the government has put in place the tools it needed to initiate redevelopment.

A zoning amendment such as that applied to the Woodmont Triangle district in downtown Bethesda would be a perfect match for Fenton Village, but the political will and a demanding resident and shopkeeper population is necessary. The issue of small lot sizes is one that vexes developers in Fenton Village, and the low allowable density deters them from even trying to assemble multiple lots to meet the optional method requirements. But Woodmont Triangle is now experiencing a renaissance because government planners realized that because of the small lot sizes, it was difficult for a property to be redeveloped without lowering the minimum lot sizes and increasing the allowable density and building heights. Additionally, the existing small businesses need help in the meantime to draw more customers back from the new developments—to help them realize that Fenton Village offers a plethora of retail options, from car repair shops to clothiers, flower shops, and art supply stores. A government-funded publicity campaign targeting the area population through television, newspaper, and outdoor ads would do wonders to increase the amount of visibility that Fenton Village receives, especially due to the large number of people frequenting the new developments now. Many people need just that extra nudge to go exploring beyond what is familiar. Certainly, the County government should
be able to step in to initiate the upgrade of infrastructure in Fenton Village, and alter the zoning in order to help make Fenton Village competitive with other downtown Silver Spring districts. In the end, Fenton Village needs an outspoken voice to reach a broader audience and to create a vision of the future that the resident and shopkeeper populations can grasp onto and fight for.
Appendix A: Downtown Comparisons

Downtown Comparisons:
At the top left the Silver Spring CBD (downtown) is shaded a light blue; the bottom left is downtown Philadelphia; the top right is Midtown Manhattan; and the bottom right is Lower (Downtown) Manhattan.
Appendix B: Photographs

Photographs of Fenton Village, South Downtown Silver Spring, and Central Downtown Silver Spring:

Photograph 3: Fenton Village

Photograph 4: Fenton Village
Photograph 5: Fenton Village

Photograph 6: Fenton Village
Photograph 7: Fenton Village

Photograph 8: South Downtown
Photograph 11: South Downtown Partial Skyline

Photograph 12: Discovery Headquarters in Central Downtown
Photograph 13: Central Downtown Silver Spring Project

Photograph 14: Central Downtown Silver Spring Project
Photograph 15: American Film Institute in Central Downtown

Photograph 16: Central Downtown
Photograph 17: Central Downtown Silver Spring Project

Photograph 18: Wayne Avenue in Central Downtown
Appendix C: Foot Traffic

This table and the corresponding graphs show the number of people observed within 5 minute time periods on a Saturday at several locations across downtown Silver Spring and at approximately the time of day indicated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Fenton Village Location A (Bonifant Street &amp; Fenton Street)</th>
<th>Fenton Village Location B (Silver Spring Avenue and Georgia Avenue)</th>
<th>South Silver Spring (Arts Alley - Near Georgia Avenue and East-West Highway)</th>
<th>Central Downtown (Silver Spring Plaza - Elsworth Drive)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00 PM</td>
<td>5 people</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 PM</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00 PM</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This graph shows the overall total number of people observed during each time period at each location.
### Appendix D: Retail Rents

This table and corresponding graph display the average retail rents in major districts in and around downtown Silver Spring: In the table, the dark pink represents Fenton Village, while the lighter pink represents districts nearby and most closely related to Fenton Village.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Average Availability (in Square Feet)</th>
<th>Rate/Sq Ft/Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fenton Village</td>
<td>Silver Spring</td>
<td>1,233</td>
<td>$28.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown</td>
<td>Silver Spring</td>
<td>1,311</td>
<td>$37.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown</td>
<td>Bethesda</td>
<td>2,839</td>
<td>$32.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodmont Triangle</td>
<td>Bethesda</td>
<td>2,403</td>
<td>$33.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams Morgan</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>1,299</td>
<td>$42.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chevy Chase</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>1,625</td>
<td>$53.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dupont Circle</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>$50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgetown</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>1,359</td>
<td>$71.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenleytown</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>1,604</td>
<td>$26.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U Street</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>2,341</td>
<td>$42.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Interviews

Royce Hanson Interview

This is a sampling of the interview with Montgomery County Planning Board Chairman Royce Hanson:

1. **What are some problems you think Fenton Village faces as it redevelops?**
   a. Assembly is a problem for projects, but it’s more helpful to ask developers and builders than me.

2. **What do you think about the proposed amendment to raise height limits in the Ripley/South Silver Spring district?**
   a. Raising the height limit could indirectly help Fenton Village if it generates more customers.
   b. The 2 or 3 projects in Fenton Village over the last 2 years have included retail at the ground level.
   [Note: this is not true. The project at Bonifant and Fenton does not include retail.]
   c. The quality of design that occurs and attracting retail are most important.
   d. When the number of residents increases, the amount of retail should increase.

3. **Do you think Fenton Village could benefit from a similar amendment?**
   a. The problem with height limits in Fenton Village is that the district is so close to single family housing nearby.
   b. We don’t want heights to overwhelm the neighborhood and it’s unlikely that heights will be raised on Fenton Street.
   c. A proposal to lower height limits, in my opinion, is not a good idea. I don’t see the connection and it may very well discourage redevelopment.

4. **One problem with potential redevelopment is that with the minimum lot sizes in Fenton Village, developers can simply include their public space requirements in front of their buildings, pushing back any street front retail away from the sidewalk.**
   a. Yes, a proposed amendment to allow a payment in lieu of providing public spaces is on the drawing board.
   b. Curb cuts don’t help with the streetscape, so it is important to reduce their numbers.

5. **As leaders, how do you and the Planning Board believe Fenton Village should be redeveloping?**
   a. (Successfully evading my question) I think that the Master Plan shows how it should develop.
   b. It is a choice to redevelop and the market should make those choices. (The County didn’t feel that way before with its public-private project to bring in the chains.)

Gary Stith Interview

This is a sampling of the interview conducted with Silver Spring Regional Services Center Director Gary Stith:

1. **What do you think are the issues that Fenton Village currently faces?**
   a. Retail activity is chopped up. It’s not pedestrian friendly and not good for retail and so it doesn’t function well.
   b. There are also structural problems that need to be fixed to make it work.
   c. The minimum lot size in Fenton Village is 18,000 square feet, which doesn’t give much incentive to developers to use all of their lot for the building itself. Thus, they set it back from the street and put in a plaza to meet public space requirements.
   d. In general, I haven’t heard that anyone wants to fix the problems [Fenton Village faces].
e. There is an amendment…that would allow for a fund that developers would pay into so that the County would create public space off their actual lots…I am concerned that it would be creating a mechanism that won’t be used since the minimum lot size is so big that there is no incentive for developers not to build public space on their properties.

2. **What types of things are you hearing from businesses in Fenton Village about their problems or their successes?**
   a. Businesses are concerned that their rents will go up, redevelopment will dislocate them.
   b. There are some businesses that won’t be successful whether or not Fenton Village redevelops because the marketplace is changing.

3. **What types of things are you hearing from the neighboring communities regarding Fenton Village?**
   a. [People in the community say things like:] “We want to save the small businesses in Fenton Village,” but he says “the only thing that’s going to save the small businesses is if you go spend money there!”

4. **There is a proposal to increase the height limit in the South Silver Spring overlay zone to 200 feet. Something similar was passed in order to help Woodmont Triangle in Bethesda redevelop.**
   i. Yeah, I think this will actually help Fenton Village. If you see the area between Discovery and Ellsworth Drive during lunchtime you’ll see a stream of people walking to the restaurants on the other side. With new development—new offices—in the Ripley District, you’ll see people going to the other side of Georgia Avenue—to Fenton Village—to the restaurants and stores there.
   ii. I think there will be more development in Fenton Village because of the South Silver Spring height limit amendment.

5. **Do you think that Fenton Village could benefit from a similar amendment that would increase the amount of density allowed, while also requiring that businesses displaced be given ground-floor space in new buildings (with similar rents and aid for relocation while the building is being built)?**
   i. Yeah, we want to see a significant amount of ground floor retail [in Fenton Village with any new development].

6. **Do you know what our government leaders believe is the right course of action for Fenton Village?**
   a. [County Executive] Ike Leggett doesn’t feel that any amendments need to be made.
   b. Marc Elrich has been kicking around an amendment to reduce height limits in Fenton Village as some people think it will help preserve small businesses.

7. **What are you feelings on what should be done, if anything? Or is there anything else on the subject that you’d like to bring up?**
   a. We want to encourage small businesses, but we don’t have an obligation to save existing small businesses, do you know what I mean?
   b. The county can work on infrastructural improvements to create an atmosphere that will help small businesses.
      i. Improve pedestrian access.
      ii. Create aesthetically pleasing streetscapes.
Appendix F: Zoning Map Comparison

Fenton Village Zoning

[Diagram of Fenton Village Zoning with legend:
- CBD - 0.5
- CBD - 1 (With Fenton Village Overlay Zone)
- CBD - 2]
Woodmont Triangle Zoning

The map states that this is “proposed” zoning, however, it has since been approved for Woodmont Triangle.
Appendix G: Projects in Woodmont Triangle

This is a list of the projects that are pending, approved, or completed in Woodmont Triangle within downtown Bethesda since the overlay zone was applied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Type &amp; #</th>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>FAR</th>
<th>Property Size</th>
<th>Total SF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WT</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>4851 Rugby Condos</td>
<td>CBD-1</td>
<td>20,258</td>
<td>104,644</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WT</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>The Veneto on Norfolk</td>
<td>CBD-1</td>
<td>12,825</td>
<td>42,974</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WT</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>4900 Fairmont</td>
<td>CBD-2</td>
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Bibliography


