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Silver Spring residents question Purple Line redesign

Lyttonsville neighborhood worried about potential traffic, noise and light pollution

By Kristi Tousignant, Staff Writer

Lee Fangmeyer, 85, of Rockville has owned property on Brookville Road in Silver Spring for more than 20 years.

A few weeks ago, he received a notice in the mail telling him he may have to sell it to make way for the Purple Line.

"Up until then, I didn't know anything about it," Fangmeyer said. "I knew the Purple Line was coming, but I didn't know where."

Maryland Transit Administration officials addressed the concerns of property owners like Fangmeyer and other residents of Silver Spring's Lyttonsville neighborhood during a meeting Monday that drew about 60 people.

Plans for the Lyttonsville Metro station include a railyard and maintenance facility, one of two such facilities planned along the stretch of the 16-mile rail line. Redesigns presented by transit administration officials at a September meeting triggered outrage in the community, prompting Monday's follow-up discussion.

"The promise of the Purple Line does not apply to our neighborhood," said Susan Buchanan, member of the Lyttonsville Civic Association.

The Purple Line is a 20-stop Metro rail connecting Bethesda to New Carrollton via Silver Spring and College Park. The \$1.9 billion project is slated to begin construction in 2014 and be completed in 2020.

The plan originally placed the maintenance facility west of the Purple Line in Lyttonsville, running the length of Brookville Road to Stewart Avenue. The Capital Crescent Trail, a biking and walking trail being built in conjunction with the Purple Line, was slated to go between the rail tracks and the Lyttonsville community.

Transit administration officials redesigned the plan this summer and presented them during a Sept. 13 meeting of the Lyttonsville Civic Association.

"We were completely caught off guard," Buchanan said.

The new designs place the maintenance facility on the east side of the tracks, because there was not

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enough room on the other side, said Project Manager Mike Madden.

The Capital Crescent Trail will be switched to the west side of the Purple Line tracks, and a two-level parking garage for workers will be built behind the maintenance facility on the east side.

Madden said the new location of the maintenance facility would provide a larger buffer between the community and the tracks.

The latest design would also move the tracks further away from single family homes on Albert Stewart Lane and the Claridge House Apartments. The new layout also allows for double-ended storage of rail cars, which would make it easier for transit workers to inspect them, according to transit administration officials.

"When we started to look at it closely, we saw the advantages to making this change," Madden said.

Lyttonsville residents were concerned Monday about potential traffic congestion in the neighborhood that would be caused by the cars feeding into the 200-spot parking garage.

Others did not like that they would have to cross a pedestrian bridge over the light rail tracks to access the Capital Crescent Trail.

Some worried light and noise pollution from the maintenance facility would spill over into the community, ultimately driving down property values.

"The eastern option lacks vision and inspiration," said Roger Paden of Silver Spring during the meeting. "It is soulless."

Property owners like Fangmeyer worried about losing their land, which they would have been able to keep under the previous plan.

"The problem is, it's good rent, and it's a piece of property," Fangmeyer said. "If they take the property, they take the rent."

Though Fangmeyer said he only was informed by a letter in the mail, Madden said the transit administration has met with all of the property owners who would potentially be affected.

Madden said it was too early in the planning stages to determine how much these owners would potentially be compensated for their land. But Fangmeyer said the money is not the point.

"They can't make a value that wouldn't make me refuse," Fangmeyer said.

Buchanan said the civic association is not opposed to the Purple Line but would like the transit administration to revert to the original design with the maintenance facility to the west of the rail line.

"This is an economically depressed community," Buchanan said. "It is racially diverse. It is economically diverse. So it requires special review."

Madden said he and his team will take community comments into account throughout the design process, which will extend through the next couple of years. He said as he and his team continue to tweak plans, they will also continue to meet with the Lyttonsville residents and other affected communities.

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6

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