

## Fillmore Music Hall To Be Built In Silver Spring Under County Deal

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Live Nation, the world's largest producer of live concerts, has sealed a deal to build one of its Fillmore clubs in Silver Spring, bringing a hallowed name in rock history to the entertainment district in the city's revitalized downtown.

Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett said he would join officials of Live Nation at noon today to announce they have signed a letter of intent to build the facility at Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue, the location of the old J.C. Penney department store, whose historic art deco facade will be preserved and incorporated into the club's design. The Fillmore, which would accommodate audiences from 500 (seated) to 2,000 (standing), will be across the street from the AFI's restored Silver Theatre and the Round House Theater.

Ted Mankin, a Live Nation executive, said the club would offer a wide palette of programming -- rock, folk, blues, jazz, country, comedy and children's entertainment -- while also hosting local talent nights and community events. "It's not going to be just another rock club," he said. The Silver Spring Fillmore's interior will be patterned after the original San Francisco venue once owned by Bill Graham, the late promoter, including crystal chandeliers, dark red walls and historic rock posters.

Parties to the deal said the Fillmore is expected to open in late 2009 or early 2010.

Leggett said yesterday that Live Nation's willingness to open the venue for public and private events -- from graduations to receptions -- was "a key thing" in reaching a deal. "Given the public investment, their ability to bring a wider array of people into Silver Spring was part of it."

The project's roughly \$10 million budget relies on \$4 million each from the state and from Montgomery County. The balance would come from private parties in the deal.

In late July, the county ended negotiations with the owners of the Alexandria-based Birchmere Music Hall. The administration of former county executive Douglas M. Duncan had approached the Birchmere in 2002 about opening a second venue in Silver Spring, and Duncan announced a tentative deal last year. But the county and the Birchmere ultimately could not agree over what Leggett described as "a host of critical issues."

Duncan, now an administrator at the University of Maryland, announced a new plan yesterday to open a Birchmere venue in College Park. The 500-seat music hall would

partner with the university's school of music and be part of its major redevelopment project to bring more restaurants and stores to the campus.

County Council member Valerie Ervin, who represents Silver Spring, expressed confidence that Live Nation would not require ongoing taxpayer subsidies because of its "reservoir of funds." She also said that the Fillmore would bring "an enormous amount of cachet to Silver Spring."

The Fillmore is a new brand of nightclubs that Live Nation has introduced in six cities to complement its 11 House of Blues clubs. Live Nation, when it was a part of SFX, purchased Bill Graham Presents in the late '90s. In the '60s, the legendary Graham-owned Fillmore in San Francisco launched the careers of rock, soul and jazz icons including the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and Santana.

Most of the Fillmores are renamed older facilities, including New York's Irving Plaza and Detroit's State Theater. The Silver Spring venue would be the first Fillmore built from the ground up, although the facade will remain. It would occupy the empty J.C. Penney retail space and parking lot as part of proposed \$110 million redevelopment plan that will include offices, a hotel and shops.

Lee Development Group is contributing \$3.5 million in land for the music hall and for public improvements, said company president Bruce Lee. Under terms of the agreement, LDG will construct the music hall as a major public amenity before building the balance of the proposed development, he said.

Lee said the swift agreement with Live Nation was made possible by "the music operator agreeing to the business terms, which was a major problem in dealing with the Birchmere."

Live Nation was approached when negotiations with the Birchmere began to break down. Live Nation was spun off in 2005 from Clear Channel Communications, which (under the name SFX) acquired many concert production companies around the country, including Alexandria-based Cellar Door in 1999.

It owns, operates or books more than 160 venues globally, including 39 amphitheaters and 58 theaters. Locally, the company operates Nissan Pavilion (which it owns) and the Warner Theatre, and books shows at Verizon Center, Constitution Hall and other locations.

On Monday, Seth Hurwitz, head of Bethesda-based IMP, which owns the 9:30 club (the nation's busiest in terms of ticket sales) and operates Merriweather Post Pavilion, sent a letter to Leggett expressing his "sincere interest in the proposed music facility in Silver Spring." Hurwitz said he had held off, hoping the county and the Birchmere "would all get back to the table because it's probably what belongs there. . . . As a lifelong Montgomery County resident, and with 28 years of experience in the music business, I would have liked to be considered for this opportunity."

The Fillmore would likely pose major competition to the 9:30 club, a District venue long celebrated for booking important rock bands and ranked as one of the nation's best places to hear music.

Leggett said Hurwitz's letter came "sort of at the last minute" and too late. "We've been out there and some people have come and talked to us, but this was the first I heard from them."