

Silver Spring Penguin

Development

## Music-hall negotiations still cooking, official says

By Jennifer Deseo | Jun 10, 2009

Photo: Any day now. Credit: J. Deseo/SSP.

Talks are still rolling between Montgomery County and the developer of downtown's music-hall project, but negotiations could wrap sometime this summer, one county official reported.

"I thought there would have been a groundbreaking by now, but here we are, still in negotiations," Steve Silverman, new boss for the county's department of economic development, admitted to the citizens advisory board Monday night.

The ongoing yap deals with whether the future Fillmore music hall on Colesville Road will satisfy public-space requirements for a larger adjacent project, Silverman indicated. That adjacent project isn't yet a twinkle in some architect's eye, and it may not be for up to 15 years, according to current zoning rules.

Still, the Lee Development Group, which will construct the Fillmore and the mystery thing next door, wants assurances that planning commissioners won't quash plans for the adjacent project if they feel the Fillmore doesn't cut its public-space requirements, Silverman explained.

"Montgomery County is somewhat unique in that it has a third player that isn't a signator to this agreement," Silverman said of the planning board. "The county has no control and the Lees have no control over the planning board."

But all this chatter between the county and the Lees had some on the citizens advisory board sweating the details. Phil Olivetti, a board member and Montgomery Hills resident, worried the county would not meet its July 2010 deadline to turn over the music hall's keys to venue operator Live Nation.

The county's lease with Live Nation allows for 30 days' wiggle room if a third party such as the planning board gets in the way of the Fillmore's construction. Up to nine more months can be added to complete the music hall if both parties agree to it.

"We've been working closely with Live Nation," Silverman told the board. "They understand. They get it."

Another board member, East Silver Spring's Kathy Stevens, was concerned that too few details on the negotiations were getting to the masses. "We have this canyon of what was told by the county, and this wasteland of what's not known," Stevens told Silverman. "I hope there's an interim point to have a little more honest dialog."

No dice. The talks were in constant flux and wouldn't be easy to spell out, Silverman said.

"It's been a challenge," Silverman admitted. "And the biggest challenge is in predicting what scenario might happen eight years from now that would make the [unknown] Lee project unviable."

If MoCo exec Ike Leggett gets his wish, negotiations with the Lees could be in the can sometime this summer, Silverman said.