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Leggett plan would benefit donor of land in Silver Spring

Council News | Janel Davis

County Council members are set to consider a series of zoning amendments that would give the company donating land for a Silver Spring music venue up to 15 years to develop nearby land for a separate project.

The amendments were introduced Tuesday and would benefit the Lee Development Group, which donated the land at the former J.C. Penney site on Colesville Road in downtown Silver Spring for the county to use to develop a Fillmore music venue.

County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) completed the deal with for the \$13.5 million music hall in January after several years of negotiations with another company dissolved.

If approved, the changes would change county laws to allow the company to “bank” its future development for up to 15 years under certain circumstances.

The council did not discuss the proposals on Tuesday.

Bruce Lee, president of the Lee Development Group, said his company is still looking to build a project that could contain about 350,000 square feet of office and mixed-use space.

“We’re being very cautious. We’re not going to build a speculative building because we’re not in the speculative building business,” Lee said. “The risk for us is that we’re committing to a future timeframe, for a future development, for a site which we don’t have a project for ... Unfortunately, at this point and time, we don’t have a project.”

Public hearings are scheduled for July 29.

A separate property tax credit for arts and entertainment districts passed the council on an 8-1 vote, with Councilman Roger Berliner casting the dissenting vote.

The bill would allow credits for new buildings as well as renovations.

The Silver Spring music venue stands to receive almost \$800,000 over 10 years, the largest tax credit under this provision. The tax credit was factored into a finance department financial analysis of the hall in January.

The tax credit is not new, said county spokesman Patrick K. Lacefield.

“Currently the site is unoccupied and basically undeveloped as it has remained for the past 18 years,” he said.

The site will generate about \$9.6 million in tax revenues for the county over 10 years after the \$800,000 credit, Lacefield said.

“Enough,” said Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac, explaining his vote. “I have said from the beginning that this was a project that I felt did not need economic development subsidies and assistance. I have said it all along and I don’t think the project needs this credit.” Staff Writer Agnes Jasinski contributed to this report.