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Guest Comment

It's time to get moving on the Fillmore

Washington Business Journal - by [Patrick Lacefield](#)

Silver Spring business, civic and neighborhood leaders already know what Washington Business Journal Editor Mike Mills should know by now — that the Fillmore music hall project is critical to the continued redevelopment of Silver Spring and a great deal for Montgomery County and its taxpayers (Editor's Note, Sept. 5-11 edition).

The Fillmore will create a dynamic new music, entertainment and community-use venue in downtown Silver Spring, a move that will bolster economic development and the music scene for that community and the county.

A conservative economic impact analysis done by the county's Department of Finance shows an annual cost to the state and county on projected bond issues as approximately \$355,000 and annual direct and indirect income to the state and county from sales, income, beverage, fuel and other taxes, as well as rent, of about \$1.07 million. This results in a net annual profit to the public of \$712,000.

When the value of Live Nation's improvements to the county-owned building and its ongoing and structural maintenance work are included — as well as the value of community use and Live Nation community contributions — the net benefit to the public increases by \$951,000, to a total net public benefit annually of about \$1.66 million.

Mills is wrong about a number of facts. The land-use and zoning changes required to make this project happen are exactly the same type envisioned with the original Birchmere project negotiated by the previous county executive. Not a penny of the \$8 million in state and county funds goes to Live Nation (or would have gone to Birchmere) — it goes to build the county-owned facility. Birchmere would have qualified for an \$80,000 arts and entertainment district tax credit, as well as for the exemption to the requirement that eating and drinking establishments get half their income from food.

County Executive Isiah Leggett's negotiated deal on the Fillmore is a much better deal for the county, not worse, as Mills tries to argue. With Birchmere, there was no community use. Fillmore will be required to host a significant number of free and discounted community-use days each year. The Birchmere would have had the option of buying the facility, built with public funds. With the Fillmore, the county retains ownership of a \$13 million asset. With Birchmere, the county

would have paid for capital maintenance. With Fillmore, Live Nation would pay all utilities, maintenance and upkeep. In fact, when these items are added in, the rent for the building is market rate.

Another major distinction is that the Fillmore is ready to roll, where the Birchmere, despite five years of negotiations, never actually settled on a written commitment. An agreement has been signed, funding from the state and county secured, and land-use changes are on the table.

Silver Spring revitalization is far from done. This key property has been vacant for 18 years. Contrary to Mills' column, the project would still require Planning Board input and approval. And the zoning changes affecting arts and entertainment districts in Silver Spring, Wheaton and Bethesda have been carefully crafted to empower only projects that meet certain economic development criteria.

A broad range of local businesses and civic groups have said loud and clear that it's time to get moving on bringing the Fillmore to Silver Spring. This music, entertainment and community-use venue is the right project, in the right place, at the right time — and is a really good deal for the county and the Silver Spring community.

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