



February 23, 2023

Montgomery County Planning Board
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
2425 Reedie Drive
Wheaton, Maryland 20902

Dear Members of the Planning Board:


My name is Dan Reed and I'm the Regional Policy Director for Greater Greater Washington, a nonprofit that works to advance racial, economic, and environmental justice in land use, transportation, and housing throughout Greater Washington. I'm also a Silver Spring resident living a few blocks from Weller's Dry Cleaners. We ask the Planning Board to reject historic designation for this property.

Mid-century modern design has value; it is considered emblematic of the 1950s and 1960s. But is that value sufficient to warrant historic designation of this property? That's a serious question. Recognizing the consequences of such a designation, we argue that it does not.

The Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan identifies Weller's and several other buildings from this time period as potential candidates for historic designation. The plan notes that Weller's was designed by a "prominent local architect" and operated by the same person for 55 years, and that the building represents the Googie style, which was frequently used for auto-oriented businesses, meaning the parking lot is historic too. The plan also notes that Mr. Weller built his shop at a time when Silver Spring was predominantly white and deeply segregated.

The notable architectural style is not sufficient to justify historic designation of the structure, let alone its adjacent parking lot. We urge the Planning Board to consider the ripple effects of such a decision. Historic designation would undermine the County's goals related to racial and socioeconomic equity, housing affordability, and environmental sustainability.

Mr. Weller was able to build a life, a business, and wealth here, and thus we ask the Board to consider how designating this property historic might harm current and future generations' ability to do the same. We have a regional and a national housing shortage. Home prices in Montgomery County have risen by double digits in the past three years because there aren't enough homes. Downtown Silver Spring is one of the few places where Montgomery County allows new homes today. Designating this property as historic would mean preventing the possibility of developing housing that would enable more families to establish themselves in Silver Spring, as Mr. Weller did.

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This building sits on a block that is owned by a family who rented the building out to a tenant while considering long-term plans to redevelop the entire site, potentially with apartments. As the *Washington Post* reported, historic designation did not factor into their plans. Restricting what they can do with nearly half of their property by mandating it remain a single-story building with a parking lot effectively says, because other people were here first, you suddenly have to work within the constraints of the world they lived in 70 years ago.

It is difficult not to hear some of the conversations my neighbors have had about this building and wonder if that's the point: they want to keep people out, and preserve a place that many of us do not remember and at one time, due to segregation, could not even patronize.

I want to close by asking the Board to consider why buildings like Weller's Dry Cleaners are considered historic and others are not. Next door to Weller's is a high-rise apartment building called Silver Spring Towers. It arguably has a significant history by the same standards as this one: it was built by Jerry Wolman, a prolific developer who built thousands of apartments across the DC area, including Summit Hills and Georgian Towers, the building that caught fire last weekend. Wolman gained national attention for building the 100-story John Hancock Center in Chicago, and as the hapless owner of the Philadelphia Eagles. None of his buildings are recommended for any historic designation, but they are a notable part of our history, and they've given thousands of people the chance to build lives here in Silver Spring and add to our history further.

We want to give as many people as possible the chance to live in and leave their mark on Silver Spring, and sometimes that means other things need to make room for them. We urge that the Planning Board reject historic designation for this building.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. I am happy to discuss any questions or concerns you have by phone at **202/256-7238** or by email at **dreed@ggwash.org**, and we look forward to working with you on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Dan Reed
Regional Policy Director
Greater Greater Washington