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Wednesday, June 25, 2008

Leggett scales back funding for Sarbanes transit center

by Agnes Jasinski | Staff Writer



County Executive Isiah Leggett's \$16.7 million supplemental appropriation request for the Paul S. Sarbanes Silver Spring Transit Center introduced to the County Council on Tuesday ignores a number of elements Montgomery County Planning Board members say are essential to the project.

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Planning Board commissioners said after a briefing of the project by planning staff on Thursday that they will be seeking to restore a number of aesthetic features cut from the latest designs of the proposed center. Bids for the project came above the construction budget of about \$50 million, forcing design changes to reduce costs and Leggett's request for the additional funding. The supplemental funding would come out of the county's capital budget, which is funded by current revenue, borrowing and bond sales.

Chairman Royce Hanson said Thursday he would be sending the council a "strong letter" that recommends that the budget be amended to add an additional \$1.1 million on top of Leggett's request to restore the "essential elements" omitted. Those included construction techniques and design elements such as laminated glass panels and stamped modified asphalt that made the transit center a model for other projects, planning staff said Thursday. The transit center also will include a hotel, as well as residential and retail space.

Patrick K. Lacefield, a county spokesman, said Leggett (D) chose not to include some of the elements in question because the project was already well over budget. A portion of the \$16.7 million would go toward increased costs in materials over time, Lacefield said.

A public hearing on the appropriation request will be held July 15, followed by committee discussion and recommendations and a vote by the full County Council, which has the final say.

County Council President Michael J. Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown said at the County Council meeting Tuesday that the council needed to "understand the full costs of the project," and asked the committee that would hear the supplemental appropriation request to "give us some sense as to what that value engineering has been, and whether we actually think is the latest supplemental that will come to the county government."

Valerie Berton, a spokeswoman for the county's Park and Planning Board, said the agency would be sending a representative to testify at the public hearing. Leggett's request only covers three of the nine essential elements listed by the board, Berton said. Those three include a green roof, streetscape costs and shade trees.

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Another cost-saving measure affects the placement of a police station and transit store. The site of that building would move from the entrance to the second level of the center, said Candace Smith, a spokeswoman for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Smith said WMATA agreed with the option to relocate the police station, but will lobby to restore an escalator from the second to the third level of the transit center.

Planning Board members felt more strongly about the move of the police station. Chairman Royce Hanson said building the police station where it had been planned was “important for the security of patrons of the transit center, and it also is an important design element.”

County planner Linda Komes said Thursday the cost of constructing the additional building where it had been planned would be about \$500,000. The police station was not in the list of essential elements, but would be included in Hanson’s letter to the council, Berton said.

In June 2007, the Planning Board had a similar discussion after an update on the transit center. The county said at the time there may need to be some “value engineering” to cut costs. Board members said the design should not suffer and more funding should be sought.

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