CITY OF ROCKVILLE PLANNING DIVISION
STAFF REPORT
March 7, 2008

SUBJECT:

Map Amendment Application MAP2008-00103

Applicant: Mayor and Council of Rockville
111 Maryland Avenue,
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Property
Location: 99 Maryland Avenue

Planning Commission Review Date: March 12, 2008
Mayor and Council Public Hearing Date: March 31, 2008

PREVIOUS RELATED ACTION:

A Nomination of Property for Local Historic Designation was submitted for the property at 99 Maryland Avenue, the former Rockville Regional Library, on May 2, 2007 by Teresa B. Lachin and Eileen S. McGuckian on behalf of Peerless Rockville Historic Preservation, ltd. On June 21, 2007, the City of Rockville Historic District Commission (HDC) evaluated the nominated property according to the City of Rockville Historic Designation Criteria for Historical, Architectural or Cultural Significance.

The HDC determined that the property at 99 Maryland Avenue qualified for single site Historic District designation as a locally significant example of International Style architecture, an established or familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county, and as the first purpose-built public library in Rockville, reflecting the town's transition from a small county seat to a major satellite community of the metropolitan Washington DC area. The HDC voted 4 – 1 in favor of recommending the Mayor and Council of Rockville authorize the filing of a zoning map amendment to add an overlay Historic District zone at 99 Maryland Avenue.

The request for authorization to file a zoning map amendment to add an overlay Historic District zone at 99 Maryland Avenue was presented at the Mayor and Council's meeting of March 3, 2008. The Mayor and Council voted unanimously to authorize filing for the overlay Historic District zone at 99 Maryland Avenue, changing the zoning from O-1 to O-1 HD.

REQUEST:

The applicant seeks zoning reclassification of the approximately 101,549 square foot property located at 99 Maryland Avenue from O-1 (Office Building) to O-1 HD (Office Building Historic District).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approval of reclassification of the property from O – 1 to O-1 HD, placing a Historic District overlay zone on the property at 99 Maryland Avenue.

ANALYSIS:

Property Description

The subject property has frontage on three (3) public streets, Vinson Street, Maryland Avenue and East Jefferson Street (MD 28). The property consists of four parcels, is irregular in shape due to the curved edge along East Jefferson Street, and is approximately 101,549 square feet in size. The former library building includes approximately 39,248 square feet of enclosed space and contains a rear parking area and a paved entry plaza fronting Maryland Avenue.

The subject site is bounded on the north by East Jefferson Street, a four-lane road with a high traffic volume. Maryland Avenue and Vinson Street are two lane roads. E. Jefferson Street is classified as a Major Arterial, with a current weekday traffic volume of 27,500, according to the 2002 Comprehensive Master Plan. Maryland Avenue is considered a Minor Arterial with a weekday volume of 14,600, and Vinson Street would Vinson is considered a Minor Collection with less than 5,000 vehicles a day. On three sides of the subject property (north, east, and west) the land use is municipal and county government offices. The opposing sides of Maryland Avenue and Vinson Street are zoned O-1, while the north side of Jefferson is zoned TC-3 (Town Center 3). The majority of the parcel across Jefferson Street, containing the Red Brick and Grey courthouses, is zoned TC-3 HD and is part of the Courthouse Square Historic District, but the park area that fronts Jefferson is not part of the Historic District.

Abutting the western end of the subject property is the South Washington Street Historic District. The underlying zoning for this area is CT – Commercial Transition. The South Washington Street Historic District consists of late 19th/ early 20th century Victorian Style frame houses, 2-21/2 stories in height. These buildings are currently occupied by law offices.

The property has approximately 358 feet street frontage along East Jefferson Street, 171 feet of street frontage on Maryland Avenue and 284 feet along Vinson Street. The topography is defined by a central ridge running from the west property line to approximately the middle of the property. The sides of the ridge slope downward toward Maryland Avenue and form a bowl near the corner of Jefferson and Maryland. Presently, there are two large evergreens, a large deciduous tree, and smaller ornamental trees fronting the library on Maryland Avenue, but a 1971 photograph of the site illustrates that these were not present when the building was constructed. The remaining vegetation on the site is mostly shrubbery that was part of a landscaping site treatment.

The subject property consists of four separate tax parcels: N420, (20,158 square feet fronting Jefferson) N445, (24,633 square feet forming an L-shaped parcel with part fronting Vinson) N447, (28,133 square feet at the corner of Vinson and Maryland) and P418 (6,674 square feet at

the corner of Maryland and Vinson). The parcels were part of the John T. Vinson estate and were conveyed to Montgomery County Maryland in 1958, 1959, 1960 and 1963, respectively. The entire property was conveyed from Montgomery County, Maryland to the State of Maryland on May 15, 2003. After 35 years of operation, the Library closed in 2006.

Background

In response to the nomination of the building for Historic District consideration, Montgomery County government wrote a letter of objection, dated June 21, 2007 and signed by the then President of the Montgomery County Council, Marilyn J. Praisner, and the County Executive, Isiah Leggett. The letter states that the International Style of architecture was several decades old when the Library was constructed, the library was not designed by a master, and is similar to many other buildings constructed during the same period. The county also stated that the library was not the first public library in Rockville and was not the first location of a County system library in the City.

Peerless Rockville, Historic Preservation ltd., the property nominator, responded to the county's comments in a letter to the Mayor and Council of Rockville, received July 16, 2007. Peerless's letter states that the library was the first purpose-built permanent library structure in Rockville and the building has become a familiar feature and "touchstone for the community". Based on their research, the library was one of the architect's best designed projects and an outstanding example of site-related design. The International Style was popularized in post World War II America and spread from urban centers to the burgeoning suburbs. The style is evidenced by numerous buildings in the area, and is still in use. The National Register program has determined that there is sufficient scholarly documentation of the International Style to justify examples being considered for historic designation.

In response to a request from the Maryland Department of General Services, the Maryland Historical Trust made a determination regarding the Effects on Historic Properties of the proposed Rockville District Court Building to be located on the site of 99 Maryland Avenue, pursuant to Sections 5A-325 and 5A-326 of the Maryland State Finance and Procurement Article. In the July 12, 2007 letter to General Services, The Maryland Historical Trust determined the library is not considered historic for purposes of state and federal preservation law because it is less than 50 years old and does not meet the test for "exceptional importance" required by National Register of Historic Places, Criteria Consideration G.

The City of Rockville Historic Designation Criteria uses the National Register of Historic Places as a guide, but the City is not required to only consider the National Register Criteria for purposes of local historic district designation. The City of Rockville *Environmental Guidelines*, adopted by Mayor and Council, state: "As a general guide, any structure older than 50 years of age or possessing architectural significance, or a site associated with a person or event of importance to local, state, or national history or development, should be examined to determine significance."

As the owner of the subject property, the State of Maryland is not bound by the City of Rockville Zoning Ordinance. Map Amendment Application MAP2008-00103 will not prevent the State of Maryland from altering or demolishing the building or environmental setting of 99 Maryland Avenue.

Comprehensive Master Plan

The 2002 City of Rockville Comprehensive Master Plan discusses the 1971 Rockville Regional Library in the Communities Facilities chapter, and briefly in the Town Center chapter, which refers to the 2001 Town Center Master Plan. The Historic Preservation Chapter is silent on the issue of architectural and historic/cultural significance of the library.

In the Community Facilities chapter of the 2002 Comprehensive Master Plan, the Rockville Regional Library is described as undersized for the area. The text further states that the new library will be located north of Middle Lane in the Town Center and the former library will be demolished in order to construct a new District Court.

The 2001 plan identifies the 1971 Library and Rockville City Hall as Planned Project areas. In the existing conditions section of the plan, the 1971 Library is part of an isolated town center focal point in a distinctive core area. The 2001 plan references the new district courthouse being located on the site now occupied by the 1971 Library and even suggests closing Vinson Street to create more parking (approximately 700 garage spaces) between City Hall and the new courthouse. The plan's land use recommendation for the site is public/ institutional

NOTIFICATION:

Public notification is required for the public hearing of a local map amendment. Notification letters to the West End Civic Association and Courthouse Walk Homeowners Association, as well as notification postcards, were sent in advance of the Planning Commission meeting. In addition, prior to consideration by the Historic District Commission hearings in May and June of 2007, notice was posted on the site and property owners within a .25-acre radius were notified by postcard.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted, noting that the subject property meets the City of Rockville Historic District Criterion A: Historic and Cultural Significance having character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, and Criterion B: Architectural and Design Significance embodying the distinctive characteristics of International Style architecture and representing an established or familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape. The 2002 Comprehensive Master Plan does not reference Historic District consideration for the 1971 Rockville Regional Library, and identifies the site as the future home for the new

District Courthouse. Historic Designation of the library would not prevent demolition of the building by the current owner, but would be consistent with the Historic District Criteria as defined by City of Rockville Historic Designation Criteria.

/cdc

Attachments
Attachment "1" – HDC Staff Report
Attachment "2" – MHT form
Attachment "3"-- HDC Minutes excerpt Meeting No. 7-2007
Attachment "4"-- Correspondence
Attachment "5" – Site plan
Attachment "6" – Mayor and Council Agenda Item, Authorization to File Map Amendment