



WHEATON URBAN DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Ana L. van Balen
Director

October 15, 2013

Al Roshdiah
Deputy Director
Department of Transportation
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Mr. Roshdiah,

The Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee (WUDAC) is writing to submit the following letter and urge a timely and thorough consideration on our thoughts on the community's collective vision of Wheaton and the redevelopment of Lot 13 and the Regional Services Center (RSC) site. Specifically, WUDAC offers comments on: 1) the location and layout of the town square, 2) traffic, and 3) ensuring that the final product is a warm and thoughtful development that capitalizes on Lot 13's location as the heart of a redeveloped Wheaton.

WUDAC consists of a representative cross-section of the Wheaton community, including homeowners, small businesses, and large businesses. The story of the Wheaton redevelopment effort has extended for well over a decade. At the center of the community's redevelopment effort has been the push for a new town square on Lot 13. As the chapter with the B.F. Saul development closed in early 2012, the Wheaton community advocated for a commitment from the County to ensure that any future development provided for a vibrant town square on Lot 13. The Wheaton community received this commitment, evidenced in the 2012 Montgomery County's Wheaton Redevelopment Program CIP – N. 150401, which states that "the [Wheaton Redevelopment Program] provides for a town square on Parking Lot 13 that is at least 1/3 the area of the site." The May 2013 Amended Wheaton Redevelopment CIP also includes this commitment.

Throughout the redevelopment process, WUDAC has expressed continued concern with any proposal that creates a town square not located on Lot 13. During the September 18, 2013, presentation by StonebridgeCarras/Buzzuto, the developers explained that the elevation change of the RSC site made it difficult to utilize the area for the park and planning building. WUDAC feels that this is not a sufficient enough of an explanation to not have the town square on Lot 13. A town square on the RSC site will be surrounded by an active bus transit area to the south, the WMATA-owned land patch to the east, vehicular traffic on Reddie Drive to the north, and a garbage staging area to the west. This option is not in line with the look and feel of an attractive space for a town square. **WUDAC cannot endorse the current rendering and any other proposal that does not provide a comprehensive explanation as to why a town square on Lot 13 is not possible.**

Of equal concern is the current proposal's design to have Reddie Drive bisect the town square while remaining open to vehicular traffic. **WUDAC strongly advocates for a continuous town square that is uninterrupted by a street and vehicular traffic, regardless of its final location.** There are a number of advantageous reasons for a continuous town square, including pedestrian safety and the opportunity to connect the town square to the retail along Grandview and Triangle Lane. To this end,

WUDAC urges developers to consider eliminating Reddie Drive between Grandview Avenue and Triangle Lane. Not only would this solve the issue of having a town square split by vehicular traffic, it could also generate creative ideas for the use of additional land space made available by removing this portion of Reddie Drive.¹ For example, one can consider construction of the Park and Planning building² on the RSC site that includes the additional land from Reddie Drive and parts of Lot 13, and placing the town square entirely on Lot 13 between the Park and Planning Building and the Buzzoto development.

WUDAC understands that this new chapter for Wheaton redevelopment is only beginning. We also know that the renderings presented to the community are not final. At the same time, the decisions made in the coming months will alter Wheaton's landscape for decades. WUDAC's message has been consistent throughout the entire process, and the comments above are not only reflective of WUDAC, but also come from the countless informal sessions and comments received from the community. In turn, WUDAC adds the following three requests:

- 1) That the Wheaton community continue to receive timely project updates;
- 2) Honest and thorough explanations on final decisions and the deliberation process with regards to all aspects of redevelopment; and
- 3) For the developers to sincerely engage the community to understand what components will make this project innovative and one that is true to Wheaton's character.

Community engagement in the redevelopment process has always been a top priority and WUDAC insists on continued and open dialogue. We encourage and urge developers to seriously take the suggestions outlined in this letter under consideration. We also invite you to utilize WUDAC to assist you with your outreach to the community. Please contact me or Ana Lopez van Balen if you have any questions or want to begin a dialogue with WUDAC. We also invite you to our monthly meetings on the second Tuesday of the month at 6pm. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,



Henriot St. Gerard
Chair
Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee (WUDAC)

¹ Another intriguing option that was discussed was to close Reddie Drive between Grandview Ave and Triangle Lane, while simultaneously creating the underground garage access points at the terminus of the "new" Reddie Drive. This could help alleviate some of the traffic concerns with the current proposal's utilization of Grandview Avenue and Triangle Lane to access the new "alley" that would be created to access the underground garage.

² While much of this letter focuses on the town square, WUDAC also urges the Wheaton redevelopment team to ensure that this project serve as a catalyst for future private development. For example, many members of WUDAC have expressed concern that the park and planning building proposal has no additional commercial space that would house private firms that desire to be located next to park and planning.