

**PUBLIC MEETING NOTES 2/9/09**  
**Wheaton Large Meeting Room**

Attending: Rita Gale, Parker Hamilton, Fran Ware, Natalie Cantor, Rob Klein, Frank Stone, John Vassalis, Minna Davidson, Sandy Talent. More than 100 in attendance – standing room only in back and on sides.

RENOVATION PROCESS

Rita described the process: Wheaton slated for renovation in 7/08. Report done for Mid County Regional Services Center on redevelopment in Wheaton; suggested library could serve as core for revitalization. Possibility of relocation was discussed as part of the spring CIP meetings with Council; renovation project was removed from CIP budget pending a decision by Executive Branch on whether a new building was preferable.

Library Department generally renovates buildings every 20 years but the projects are now running every 23-25 years. Tonight we want to discuss plusses and minuses of renovation vs. new building for the Wheaton Library community.

If the library is renovated, it will be closed 1.5-2 years. If a new building is constructed, it will take 5-7 years, but the library won't be closed as long (in time for moving i.e.2-3 months). In order to get funding, must know what we will do.

Audience question: What would happen to current building? Answer: The County's policy is to invite other County departments to indicate whether they would be able to use the space. If another County Department does not need the space, then the County would sell or lease it to someone else.

Concern was raised about the amount of time it would take to renovate the current building (1.5-2 years). Suggestion was made that renovation be done in stages and that the Library keep parts of the library open during those stages.

Concern was raised whether the community would know how the current library would be used if a new library was built. The County may or may not be able to provide that information to the community before construction starts on a new building.

The current Sector plan REDEVELOPMENT PROCESS

By the late 1990s, because of the benefits of redevelopment in Silver Spring and the relative stagnation of Wheaton, the community wanted to revitalize Wheaton. The County responded by creating a Redevelopment Program to Wheaton and hiring the National Historic Trust Main Street Program to undertake a visioning study in concert with the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission. This team, with extensive public input, prepared four scenarios of how Wheaton could redevelop. These scenarios were: #1 Fixer Upper, #2 Entertainment District, #3 Residential Village (some 1000 units constructed or in the pipeline), and #4 office Town Center( office space is critical to economic vitality but Wheaton currently does not have quality office space and has not been able to attract new office development.) The Main Street process developed these scenarios as concepts that would entail mixing and matching as opportunities and community desires developed.

In 2005, the Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee built on the Main Street scenarios to create a single vision for the Town Center. This vision had Parking lot 13 as the focal point for a Town Square with mixed-use development helping to define the square. The County now is looking to follow the successful redevelopment approach used in Silver Spring where a Master Development Team was selected and that team worked with the community in coming up with a plan that helped set the foundation upon which significant development and employment came to downtown Silver Spring, resulting in greater economic and social vitality. The Police

Department has assessed crime statistics for Wheaton and Silver Spring from 1995 through 2005. While crime has gone down in both business districts (24% and 42%, respectively), the decline in Silver Spring is so dramatic that redevelopment is likely to be the cause. These Silver Spring numbers would even be more dramatic if we were able to analyze crime rates in terms of street level pedestrian activity. Since the Silver Spring redevelopment, we also have the Rockville Town Center redevelopment as an example. The Rockville Town Center shows how a library and redevelopment can mutually support each other. The County will not be looking at a new Wheaton library in isolation, but as part of a broader concept involving quality mixed-use redevelopment such as what exists in Rockville.

Last year, the County hired the International Downtown Association to assemble an expert panel to provide advice on how government facilities might be used foster redevelopment. After four days of observing and listening to Wheaton stakeholders, the panel recommended that a library be located adjacent to a new Town Square and be developed in combination with an arts/cultural center.

A downtown library for Wheaton is still conceptual. The County does not have a site for a downtown library, nor have the features of new library been studied. That would be determined through the redevelopment and site selection process. Exploring a library in the context of redevelopment presents opportunities to expand a library both in terms of size and function.

NEXT STEPS: With the approval of the County Executive, the Redevelopment Office would proceed with the steps necessary to contract with a Master Development Team. The current economic recession is a good time to plan; Redevelopment would take some five years.

Library Department may propose a capital improvement project for Wheaton Library to either do a mini-renovation (to extend the building “life” 5-7 years) or to get back on the CIP schedule for a major renovation.

There will be public input at each step of the process.

## DISCUSSION BY PUBLIC ON RENOVATION AND RELOCATION

### Renovation Comments:

- Are renovations and library tied together?
- Wheaton goes ahead with redevelopment no matter whether library is moved or renovated?
- Will parking be free?
- New concept: Can we have 2 libraries – in CBD and in current location?
- Combine the Rafferty Center, library, and recreation center in one location
- Quality of life concerns - moving library out and rescue center in is not good.
- Reduce traffic from here to downtown Wheaton.
- Free and good parking lot.
- Site is large enough to renovate.
- Library is close to community center-can walk there
- Tie Rafferty Center, recreation center and library – make it a larger resource
- Comfortable coming here at night; safety
- Don’t sacrifice this area to relocation; don’t know what will be placed here
- Recommend a phased renovation-don’t close it for 1.5-2 years
- School cluster friendly-5 High School clusters serve as extension of schools here.
- Accessibility can walk or drive here, public transportation stops here, 170 parking spaces
- School busses drop off here
- Not safe in downtown Wheaton; safety is a significant concern.

- Parking structures not safe
- Like FOL booksale here
- Would probably not be able to increase the size of the building footprint with a renovation
- Wheaton Plaza is not safe. There is crime there and not at present location. Crime has infected Central Wheaton Business District.
- Residents ride bikes to library, walk with strollers.
- Renovating is cheaper; put money into redevelopment

Relocation/New Building Comments:

- More light pollution
- Bring library to greater range of library users (Mckenney Hills to south of Wheaton)
- Open library to Metro
- Lack of pedestrian activity downtown may offer opportunities downtown, may give us new opportunities; might be a destination piece
- Current library is not accessible to all Wheaton; new library would be a force for change in downtown Wheaton
- Building a new library is a justification to spend money spuriously. There is nothing wrong with the current building. There is a propensity for the County to spend extra money.
- Need to consider future of Wheaton and the fact that children will grow up.
- Circular benefit as new library would decrease crime in Wheaton
- New library could jump start Wheaton redevelopment
- Wants to walk from her house to library
- Possibly reduce crime
- Branch downtown would satisfy both
- Redirect funding to make it child friendly
- Wouldn't have senior using new library in new location
- Library as lynch pin for redevelopment; can meet all community concerns
- What happens here? Concern of what happens to current facility if library is moved.
- Do we want traffic downtown? Yes, advances Wheaton.
- Yes, we want Wheaton redevelopment close to apartment complexes, kids can walk.
- Have had wrong kinds of businesses in Wheaton that attract wrong types of people – has increased crime.
- Good relationship between police and revitalization means drop in crime; safety