

**Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee**  
**Meeting Summary – September 16, 2009**  
**Mid-County Regional Services – 2424 Reedie Drive Wheaton, MD 20902**

**Members Present,** Mara Baer; Gregory J. Baker; Elizabeth Barksdale Boyle; Melissa Brown; Maureen Carrington; Eleanor Duckett; Jonathan Fink; Sabrina Goris; Rahman Harrison; Manuel Hidalgo; Zoe Lefkowitz; Filippo Leo; Chris Lindsay; Diane Lynne; Thomas Martin; Susan Petersen; Erin Roberts; Morey Rothberg, Dave Taghipour; Fran Ware

**Members Absent:** Robert Schilke

**Staff Present:** David Dise; Gary Stith; Rob Klein; Pete McGinnity; and Sharon Lasswell

**County Staff Present:** Tom Street; Natalie Cantor; Tina Benjamin; Chris Gillis; Sonya Healy; and Richard Romer

**Guest Speakers:** County Executive Leggett; Council President Andrews; Councilmember Ervin; Councilmember Elrich; Councilmember Floreen; Councilmember Leventhal; and Councilmember Trachtenberg

**Guests:** Sylvia Didone; Paula Sternberg; Mike Moore; Janet Yu; Mathew Rosencrans; Holly Olson; Marsha Schmidt; Matt Schmidt; and Karen Cordry

**Meeting Called to Order** by Chairperson Karen Cordry at 7:05 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes – July minutes were approved.**

Mr. Baker, Acting Chair gave opening remarks and welcomed everyone. Introductions of WRAC Members and Councilmembers and County Executive followed.

**County Executive Leggett** – Mr. Leggett reflected on a question that was asked of him several months ago and one that he hopes the WRAC will be able to explore themselves. “*Why is it that Wheaton lags behind Silver Spring, Rockville and Bethesda?*” If you can answer that question, you can get at the heart of many of the challenges and hurdles we have to overcome in order to succeed.

He saw Silver Spring before it was revitalized and heard many of the arguments that confronted them. There was doubt about Silver Spring’s redevelopment, but today they look at it as a success. Silver Spring’s success was not cheap; it didn’t come easy and there many challenges. The question to ask throughout this process is why we’ve not had similar success here in Wheaton. When we answer that question, we will get to the heart of what we must do to be successful. We are in one of the most difficult economic challenges in the history of Montgomery County. Over the past two and a half years, he recommended (cumulatively) budgets to the Council that were over 1.2 billion in gap closing. Today, there is approximately a \$370 million dollar short-fall for FY11. The County’s flexibility is limited. We should be innovative, creative and realistic utilizing all available resources and the plans we have. He wants things people can see now. We need things that have results soon than later to build peoples confidence.

Over time, whether real or not, the perception of crime becomes a reality. There are residents in Wheaton with that perception. Short visible signs of success are one of his priorities to demonstrate not only the short term but the long term for Wheaton. What are we doing and how can we show progress? His goal is to work together through collaboration, working together and being mindful of the challenges we face economically soon than later. We don't have the luxury of time to wait. He encouraged the community to think out of the box. If there is a good idea, he will do what it takes to make it work.

**Councilmember Ervin** – She thanked Mr. Baker and Ms Roberts for their efforts to pull this meeting together. She has been to several meetings in the past and heard the frustration of the community. Over half her colleagues are here to listen and to help. This is not our first meeting we'll have with the County Executive and Councilmembers. We are also reaching out to the State and Federal elected officials. She introduced Rich Romer a new member of her staff. She thanks the members for all they do in the community.

**Ms. Roberts presented the WRAC Power Point Presentation** –

- The Mission to Redevelop Wheaton is – collaborative effort involving residents; property owners, business owners, developers and public departments/agencies;
- Today Wheaton is – ethnically diverse, unincorporated, home to third largest shopping mall, with 3 state highways and is located on the WMATA Red Line;
- Talked about how Wheaton got where it is today;
- Why should the Redevelopment of Wheaton be Successful? We have – enterprise zone, arts and entertainment, and Governor's Smart Site Designation; MOU with WMATA/Master Developer; new residential units; \$6 million in streetscape and façade improvements; Westfield \$149 million in private investment; and IDA's visioning Exercises;
- Dept. of General Services Wheaton Initiatives – shifting Redevelopment to DGS; Economic Analysis Study; ULI Technical Assistance Panel; coordination with M-NCPC; and Master Developer Team Request for Qualifications;
- Wheat challenges we must overcome together – property assemblage; office space; business attraction and retention; economic constraints; and perception of safety issues;
- Our Goal for Wheaton – utilize Metro station; build on current strengths embrace new business opportunities in high density, mixed-use project;
- What the WRAC is asking of the Council and County Executive – support and expertise for Wheaton's redevelopment; open communication; and available resources.

**Mr. Stith** - Mr. Stith talked briefly about the shift of the Redevelopment to the Department of General Services (DGS) under David Dise the Director and Gary Stith the Deputy Director. Mr Stith will be able to apply his 13 years of experience and success in Silver Spring to Wheaton. DGS has resources and expertise available to help Wheaton succeed.

With the State's designation of Wheaton as a Smart Site, the State is financing two efforts coming together this month and next. First is an Economic Analysis Study. A consultant is on board and already collecting data and talking with stakeholders and property owners. The second is the funding of An Urban Land Institute (ULI) Technical Assistance Panel that will present their findings on September 24<sup>th</sup> and will provide a report four weeks later. Mr. Stith and staff exhibited at the ULI Market Place and had an opportunity to talk with many developers about Wheaton.

We're closely coordinating with M-NCPPC on the Sector Plan. At a meeting on September 21<sup>st</sup>, M-NCPPC will talk about the Sector Plan and concepts they will be taking to the Planning Board.

We have partnered with WMATA and by combining WMATA's property and the County's property, we feel we have a critical mass attractive to a developer. We're working with WMATA to put together a Request for Qualifications to look for a development partner. Over the next six to nine months we hope to see things happening and move some things forward.

**Council President Andrews** – He was glad to see so many active long-time leaders and new faces as well. He grew up in Wheaton. Councilmember Ervin and Leventhal championed the expansion of the sobering initiative that was approved in this year's budget.

Broadly, you've identified what you want. Next you need to align that with what will work. Work with your, eclecticism, and diversity. One goal should be no net loss of affordable housing. I'm here to listen to you and to hear what you think are the hardest things to overcome.

**Councilmember Trachtenberg** – She sees Wheaton as the new frontier beyond Silver Spring. We're all committed to making sure we work with the community to provide a resource to you in what ever redevelopment takes place here. She encouraged the committee to talk with her about some of the decisions that will be before the Council and the Executive regarding the redevelopment.

**Councilmember Leventhal** – Wheaton's unique businesses, that are not be found elsewhere in Montgomery County, are critically important and draw people to Wheaton. Wheaton needs to emphasize those things that are unique.

**Councilmember Elrich** – We have to move off the "study" phase and decide the direction we want to go in and move forward. A lesson learned from Silver Spring is, don't run yourself down. Talk about Wheaton's strengths. Wheaton neighborhoods have a lot of spending capital.

**Councilmember Floreen** – Uniqueness is Wheaton's strength. We need to attract more private investment. It's time to stop all the reports. We need to find the constraints. Wheaton has had a lot of accomplishments over the past few years as shown in the Wheaton Redevelopment Annual Report. We need solid Economic advise to evaluate what steps should be taken to encourage private investment and have the government back off some of the constraints that it's put in the way of investment.

**Public Questions/Concerns/Comments:**

- needs to be a distinction between Wheaton and Silver Spring;
- work on perception of crime in Wheaton (high crime, unsafe to shop and walk);
- we heard what the Council doesn't want in Wheaton, but what do they want;
- policy is required to keep local businesses in the area;
- need to organize our 2000 new residents as to what they want;
- business owners need training on customer service and English;
- demographics are changing;
- we need something, a biotech lab wouldn't hurt us;
- FAR needs to be changed; need more density and bigger buildings;
- What about a Wegman's in Wheaton – could the Council consider changing the "one liquor license per shopping establishment";

**Public Questions/Concerns/Comments:** (cont'd)

- practice smart growth – live and work in Wheaton;
- traffic and infrastructure are of concern;
- need public art;
- the community center, Rafferty Center and the Library all need to be looked at;
- comments were made about why moving the Library to the downtown was considered;
- if a County agency isn't coming to downtown Wheaton, then what is out there that will come (a multi-cultural center or a low price conference center);
- what has been accomplished over the past several years is not good enough, the Council needs to do more

**Summary of Elected Officials – Key Themes:**

- need the surrounding community to support development - not just the 2000 new residents;
- need to move past planning and visioning phase;
- need to build on existing strengths (cultural diversity, small businesses, eclecticism, etc.);
- need more of an office/employment base, more density and more people during the day;
- show quick, tangible projects/success through 1 or 2 showcase projects;
- additional and flexible land use/entitlement incentives should be explored (for instance changing the FAR, revisiting the overlay zone, etc.);
- frank and forward discussions need to occur between County representatives and uncooperative or unreasonable landlords/property owners (“talk turkey”);
- the government can only do so much, but need to explore further incentives to lure private developers; and explore possibility of incorporating Wheaton (long term goal).
- the County's number one objective is to look at providing a commercial, office, tenant, etc. located in the heart of Wheaton; and
- Council was ready to bring MCPS to Wheaton, the developer was ready to do, but the Superintendent of Schools wasn't willing.

The November 9 meeting will be with the State Senators and Delegates. We also need the Federal representatives.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Note: The entire proceedings of the meeting are available on digital recording through the Wheaton Redevelopment Program– 240-777-8121.