



MID-COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

Isiah Leggett  
*County Executive*

Ana L. van Balen  
*Director*

March 21st, 2012

Mr. Roger Berliner, President  
Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Council President Berliner:

I am writing on behalf of the Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) to share our position on the County Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee's (PHED's) review of the County Executive's (CE's) FY13-18 Wheaton CIP budget and subsequent counterproposal to the Wheaton Redevelopment Program. The MCCAB urges the County Council to adopt the CE's redevelopment proposal and consider appropriating funds for future office space development as part of a more comprehensive Wheaton Redevelopment Program.

The MCCAB is appreciative of the Council's ongoing attention and support for Wheaton redevelopment as part of comprehensive revitalization of the Georgia Avenue corridor. However, the MCCAB regrets the PHED's decision not to support the CE's FY13-18 Wheaton CIP budget proposal and are concerned with the PHED's counterproposal which was developed without substantive review or comment by the Mid-County, Wheaton, Central Business District, or Montgomery County residents and stakeholders that would be impacted.

The Wheaton Redevelopment Program proposal as submitted by the CE is characterized by a strong, joint Government/commercial partnership model that has proven very successful for similar programs such as White Flint and downtown Silver Spring redevelopment. The current Wheaton Redevelopment Program proposal also:

- Supports the Council's vision for Wheaton as expressed in the Wheaton CBD Sector Plan passed in November 2011.
- Is a key phase in revitalization of the Georgia Avenue corridor that will enable high density transit oriented development in Wheaton and Glenmont that will help preserve the lower density character of Olney and the north end of the Georgia Avenue corridor.
- Enables revenue generating commercial development of the Wheaton CBD rather than relying on relocation of the Wheaton Regional Library to the CBD
- Provides for smart growth with a low impact, phased construction plan that builds on top of existing industrial and transportation space instead of threatening green space.

- Promotes daytime business activity and opportunities for people to work and stay in Wheaton and take advantage of resources and services throughout the day including Wheaton's many small businesses.
- Positions Wheaton as a viable candidate for Federal investment such as a GSA tenant for new office space available.

The CE's Recommended CIP provides for the construction of the platform above the existing Wheaton Metro station and relocation of bus operations to Lot 13. This initial County-financed construction phase is critical to the success of future phases of the redevelopment project where construction will be funded by commercial partners' investment. The cost of the platform phase estimated at \$41,100,000 is substantially lower than previous County-financed redevelopment projects for White Flint and downtown Silver Spring where the County spent hundreds of millions of dollars in comparison. Based on analysis from Department of General Services (DGS), the current project plan is deemed the most cost effective and any re-phasing or alternative to the platform project will impede significantly the future commercial development in the area.

The CE's redevelopment proposal promotes new business and residential growth, spurring job creation and attracting workers, customers, and new residents ready to work, buy, live and become part of a more prosperous community. It is exactly this kind of growth that also delivers improved tax revenue for a County that has had enough of slashing resources due to budget shortfalls.

The counterproposal to be submitted by the PHED for full County Council consideration is significantly different from the current proposal and replaces the Government/Commercial partnership model with a plan that requires a much greater amount of County resources without any additional private investment. The counterproposal's smaller scope eliminates the platform construction altogether and provides only for one Government building and a town square to be built. This approach will cost the County more in resources, lacks long term vision, and perpetuates the idea that Wheaton remains a "pass-through" or "bedroom" community rather than a "destination" where all County citizens might benefit from what the revitalized Wheaton area would have to offer.

In conclusion, the MCCAB and the rest of the Wheaton community have not been provided an opportunity to consider the new PHED proposal and review its merits within a reasonable period of time. The MCCAB urges the County Council to adopt the CE's redevelopment proposal in its entirety and support the full funding of this critical project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "G. Wijetunge".

Gam Wijetunge, Chair  
Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board