

Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes, Tuesday Jan. 10, 2023
Online Via Zoom

Members Present: Jim Epstein, Chair; Nina Koltnow, Karen Cordry, Pedro Matamoros, Ali Oliver-Krueger,

Staff Present: Luisa Cardona, Mid-County RSC Director, Crystal Ruiz, Wheaton Urban District Operations Manager

Guests: Natali Fani-Gonzales, MoCO Council Member and Jose Ortiz (staff member); Captain David Smith, MoCo Police Department

[Other persons –Chip Pyon, Andrew Rollo, Krista Brick, Julian Olin, Monica _____, Wheaton Arts Parade Dan]

Call To Order: 7:03 pm by Chair Jim Epstein

Chair Epstein announced that WUDAC has 11 members and they are still recruiting for 1 additional resident member, 1 small business (less than 10 employees) member and 1 large business member. The announcement of the vacancies is available through Ms. Cardona and on the county website.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- Guest Chip Pyon asked about what was happening with the 20,000 sq. ft. retail space proposed for the ground floor of the new Park and Planning (PP) building in Wheaton. Ms. Cardona reported there had been 4 proposals but none are moving forward now. The space is not currently usable but they are working on build-out proposals. The proposed costs to date are a good bit higher than expected (\$3-4 million versus \$1 million). There are a lot of open issues so this topic will be added to February program for DGS to address.
- Mr. Pyon also asked about the holiday decorations. Ms. Cardona noted there had been a dispute with those holding them but they are working to fix that for next year.
- Dan _____ (WAP) stated that Elbe's had approached them about getting a mural. WAP put in a grant request to the State Arts Council and it has been approved. They are moving forward on that and also to restore mural on the wall facing Lot 13.
- Glenmont Forest CA – Georgia and Randolph got some more funding for public art project there which will be installed in late summer/early fall.

REPORTS AND UPDATES

Natali Fani-Gonzales: A work group dealing with the Wheaton Arts and Culture project will be gearing up. She wants to do a broad-based Town Hall Meeting on Pedestrian/Bike Safety issues with food and child care. They would pull in state officials in light of the state highways like Georgia Ave. and do an inventory on existing plans and new proposals and also have businesses and nonprofits involved with a goal of creating a vibrant and safe community. Jim Epstein noted there have been long-term safety issues so this is a needed event.

- Ms. Fani-Gonzales also noted that she was working with Jared Solomon and the Parks Div. Director on Dalewood Park to prepare a MOU on acquiring land from St. Laboure church.
- The first Economic Development Committee Meeting will be on Jan. 23 at 9:30. Jim Epstein noted WUDCA would provide input on budget proposals

Ali Oliver-Krueger – Chamber of Commerce. The holiday gifts for kids toy drive went very well and got lots of donations. They will have a mixer in late January and a business expo/networking event in May.

Luisa Cardona

- Some new tables out on the plaza for people to lunch, play games.
- Working closely with police to address safety concerns, real or perceived and with Silver Spring to also look at how to better deal with and serve homeless population.
- MoCO Business Center. Looking to bring them in to talk to us about what they do, what services they provide, etc. The MoCo BC will assign one person specifically to Wheaton general area and they will have an office in this area
- MoCo is recruiting someone to work in each of Regional Service Centers and they have a lot of good applicants. They are still looking for more applicants for the WUDAC members.

PRESENTATION

Montgomery County Police Captain David Smith was the presenter. He began with a report on year-end statistics. While crimes against person were down slightly (3.5%), property crimes are up about 27%. He reminded everyong to share message to keep cars locked to cut down on crimes of opportunity.

They do have some special assignment teams including more plain clothes and District Community Action teams who are in uniform but detached from general patrol and assigned to specific problems. They will have a popup table at Wheaton Mall on Feb. 2 to present information on these topics. They are working hard on community engagement and involvement. Patrol officers are working on crime deterrent in the neighborhoods by putting more officers into high-crime potential areas and are having people specifically assigned to work with the cameras and other high-tech measures they have. They have staffing challenges but are trying to make the best use of what we have.

Jim Epstein asked about coordination with the Metro/Mall security people and what is the overall picture. Chief Smith said they do talk and they don't seem to have large gaps but willing to talk more – maybe we should identify people there to invite to WUDAC meetings. We do want to get a sense as to whether there are any problems at Metro that cut across those boundaries. MoCo does handle most above -ground incidents at Metro in any event.

Monica ____ noted that she works with child care providers and there are concerns about drug dealers around schools. Captain Smith noted that they have Community Engagement Officers who are assigned to a cluster of schools and a Special Investigations Division that has drug issues within its scope. They would send out detectives to look at these issues. They do have one very active investigation that they expect will be showing results soon and he will give her contact information. People can use this link to seek more information from Captain Smith: 4DCommander@montgomerycountymd.gov

BUDGET DISCUSSION –

Jim Epstein noted that WUDCA was charged with providing budget recommendations to the County Executive and Council for the upcoming year. The published budget shows the original appropriations, what changes we requested, and what adjustments were made.

Ms. Cardona began by noting that school enrollment was going up which pressures the overall budget. We make our recommendations and the County Executive reviews the entire proposal to decide what to support and then the proposal goes to the Council. Sidney Cooper, Marketing and Events Manager will present next month on what is being planned. Taste of Wheaton is usually set for June and they are trying to reconfigure to help restaurants that are still coping with short staffing.

Summer concert series – they are working with Chuck Levin for a new concert series based on using it as a draw as this is its 50th anniversary in Wheaton and we want to leverage its popularity.

The County's overall budgeting site for the Urban Districts is available at:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/basisoperating/Common/Department.aspx?ID=16V10>

Crystal Ruiz next reported on the operational side budget issues. Primary areas of funding needs are for the Wheaton Streeterly, the plaza across from the Park and Planning (PP) Building the area in front of the building itself, and Veterans Park. We are looking for more funding for operations and staff to support those four areas on an ongoing basis. These areas were under the Parks Dept. before but we have now been given responsibility for maintenance, plantings, etc. The Plaza and PP building get a lot of activity and require a lot of clean-up after. They have installed more cameras and done work on the stage area. We also have to keep up with the bus areas and fences on Georgia, Veirs Mill, and Univ. Blvd. all out of out budget now, not Dept. of Transportation's.

Ms. Cardona noted that she had added funds to the budget to cover items we are paying for now – others may do the repairs but we are billed wherever we push to have something done. We are also required to provide an "equity review" for all projects going forward. We usually fare well on that since we have very high numbers of low income, non-English speaking, younger residents, etc. which help us make our case for the \$992,000 requested. We are seeking additional staffing positions, a wayfinding sign package and an increase in events budget to start the Chuck Levin Summer Concert set-up. They are looking for potential Social Media contractor and an A& E contractor as well as adding clean team staffing for the new parks we are taking over and a short-term person to help with getting the Streeterly up and running. The County will be paying separately for some significant upgrades for that project.

There was general discussion about various aspects of proposed budget items. WAP Dan ___ noted that the topic needed a broader discussion with the public and more time to consider a number of aspects. Jim Epstein stated that we could schedule more discussion as part of February meeting so we can get our letter out in a timely fashion. One point noted was that the website had not been redesigned in 15 years and could use an update.

The meeting adjourned at _____.