

Discussion Topic: General Business Support & Economic Development Issues
4Business – Benchmarking to be the Best for Business – December 9, 2019 Public Charrette

	Key Issues Identified	Recent Improvements / Possible Solutions <i>Note: Recent Improvements are printed in BLACK, Possible Solutions from Listening Sessions & Survey in BLUE, Possible Solutions from 11/20 Charrette in PURPLE</i>
1	Very strong sentiment, especially in Survey and Website comments, that the County is either hostile or unfriendly towards business; some referring to perception, but many giving specific examples, citing mainly over-regulations, fees and taxes.	<p>This 4Business Initiative is in direct response to those specific examples. Many changes have taken place as a result of the earlier Listening Sessions, and more are in progress. 4Business is an ongoing effort to assist and encourage businesses, both small and large, to locate, grow and prosper in Montgomery County.</p> <p>Continue to work with County departments to re-examine regulations to make sure they are sensible, fair and efficient; identify streamlining possibilities and performance measures to improve interactions with business; and coordinate with outside agencies and state government to better serve businesses</p> <p>Re-examine current incubators (Business Innovation Network) to serve a broader base of entrepreneurs, and develop an incubator and innovation climate to help local entrepreneurs bring their ideas to fruition</p> <p>Explore major marketing campaign or branding effort to improve perceptions as part of an economic development strategy that will result from this effort</p> <p>Do a better job of marketing the County’s business resources and how to access them</p>
2	Several respondents noted that most county employees have little understanding of business and that some were customer oriented and tried to come up with solutions, but others were more negative and not very helpful.	<p>Business visit opportunities for Department Heads/Staff</p> <p>Improve communications as to the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government and difference agencies (i.e. WSSC, PEPCO, etc.)</p>
3	By far, the greatest request under Business Support, is for more funding sources and better access to capital. These requests included:	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of additional County grants 	<p>The County’s Small Business Development Strategy includes a goal of developing a comprehensive inventory of all sources of grants and financing and will partner with the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) to market as a resource. Clarify current programs, which are largely not grants</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More info & access to grant information 	<p>MCEDC and partners could conduct regular funding workshops or financing breakfasts</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify current grant applications 	<p>MCEDC/Dept of Finance to examine applications for possible revisions</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More grants for non-profits and better treatment of non-profits receiving those grants 	<p>The community grant process (for non-profits) is currently under review to ensure it is fair and transparent</p> <p>The Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) will review contract administration policies for grants to ensure that expectations are clearly set, grants are converted to contracts in a timely manner, and grantees can expect prompt payment upon receipt of an approved invoice</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial assistance with start-ups 	<p>Expand marketing of microloan programs that are funded by the county and administered by the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) and Life Asset</p> <p>Seek additional funding for microloan programs</p> <p>Enhanced financial training for entrepreneurs/startups through existing relationships with business resource partners</p> <p>Increased marketing of Small Business Plus! program and expanded partnerships with banks</p> <p>Better market the resources available through Montgomery County Public Libraries.</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More retail and service company grants like DC’s Great Streets and Robust Retail grants 	<p>Investigate a program that could provide assistance in targeted areas that meet County goals, perhaps in places with high vacancy rates, or around the Purple Line or other places where gentrification is an issue</p> <p>Explore moderately priced commercial unit concept</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater assistance in applying for loans 	<p>The County’s business resource partners are available to assist businesses with preparing for and completing loan applications.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in fees/permit costs to small businesses 	<p>Explore how and if exceptions can be made for small businesses; also determine the definition of a small business</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free grant writing assistance (referenced a program in Virginia that assists in grant writing supports for large federal grants) 	<p>See Virginia’s Center for Innovative Technology (CIT) programs for model</p> <p>MCEDC to explore grant-writing assistance for federal programs</p> <p>Renew Library’s Foundation Center subscription, publicize it better, offer regular classes on how to use it</p> <p>Contract with Nonprofit Village to provide expanded grant writing assistance, publicize this through marketing that goes beyond usual County channels</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want systems in place for financial hardships, like the federal government furloughs 	<p>Explore with financial partners</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Following financial assistance was a great concern about the cost of business space being unaffordable to small businesses:</p>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide low cost incubators for start-ups in all business sectors and/or support shared space 	County to evaluate current incubators and look at other models; procurement underway <i>Use incubators to support additional County economic development goals</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage landlords to include low cost arts space in buildings 	<i>Work with MNCPPC and Planning Board to encourage this as part of development approvals</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better assistance to small businesses in locating appropriate spaces to lease 	<i>Explore providing more real estate training for small business through Business Solutions Group, MCEDC, and business resource partners</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have landlords make vacant space available at lower rates 	<i>Encourage more pop-up stores and activities that generate foot traffic; explore zoning changes to encourage “experiential retail” and artisan manufacturing</i> <i>Work with landlords to create non-traditional, storefront workspace.</i>
5	3rd highest response was the need for better access to information and resources for small businesses, including:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hard time finding information on County website 	Departments like Permitting Services and Procurement have recently revamped their website in response to user feedback. Improvement of County website is an on-going process. <i>Public Information Office is open to suggestions</i> MCEDC is currently evaluating its website <i>Improve Search Engine Optimization (SEO) so that all searches for “start a business” direct you to the Business Portal website as a top link</i> <i>Reduce the use of acronyms on website</i> <i>Provide business specialties more access to finding procurement opportunities</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusion over where to go, or who to call to find business assistance and 	There have been recent improvements to County’s 311 service based on feedback from Listening Sessions and other customer feedback, including focus groups. They have increased

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	more outreach to businesses to let them know what is available	<p>the number of customer service reps, and increased training and performance feedback to customer service reps to improve service delivery</p> <p>The County has initiated an effort to clarify roles and responsibilities of the organizations that support economic and workforce development in the County.</p> <p>Supply 311 staffers with links to County Business Portal and MCEDC, as well as links to Business calendar of training events and other business resources</p> <p>Hold training sessions for 311 staffers on available business resources</p> <p>Better publicize the type of business resources available through Business Solutions Group Business Portal and MCEDC; all the information available on their websites</p> <p>Work with business resource partners to set up meetings with their groups to educate them on all the business resource information available through County and MCEDC channels</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More info on how to start different businesses 	<p>County Business Portal now includes even more business start-up information, including more industry specific lists and resources. It includes on-line Business Starter Kits for Restaurants, Food Businesses, Retail, Child Care, and Group Homes</p> <p>Publicize Business Portal website more widely, and add/update specific information where needed</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More training on how to find funding 	<p>Several financial workshops and on-line courses are currently listed in on the County's Business Portal calendar</p> <p>Work with business resource partners to provide regular offerings</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking for more support systems for those interested in launching their businesses or products in retail 	<p>Provide support through Business Solutions Group and business resource partners</p> <p>Publicize services available through local economic development organizations</p> <p>Create a starter kit for this purpose on Business Portal</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More help with navigating all the regulations 	<p>Publicize online resources, Business Solutions Group, and MCEDC resources</p> <p>Create sample regulation Checklists for different types of businesses, recognizing that each situation is different</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having reps meet with businesses at the business location 	<p>County Business Navigators are now working from Regional Government Services Centers and are currently meeting with businesses at their location on request.</p> <p>Consider adding an on-line information/meeting request tool on the Business Portal, identifying the assistance that is needed so that the response can be targeted</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small business navigator who speaks Spanish 	<p>Identify ways to better communicate with our multi-lingual, multi-cultural business community</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More information for food related businesses 	<p>Work with County’s Food Facility Licensing Group and Permitting Services to develop information guides like Permitting’s Recipes for Success, which outlines information on what is necessary to open or expand a restaurant, with extensive FAQ’s.</p> <p>Better promote the business resources listed in the Business Portal’s guide to opening a food service business and connect businesses with the Montgomery County Food Council</p> <p>Provide sample Checklists for HHS inspections and other requirements for food related businesses, recognizing that each situation is different</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistance in finding State & Federal resources 	<p>Identify funding workshops on state and federal resources on Business Portal and MCEDC website</p> <p>Include links to state and federal program websites that would be helpful to local businesses</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maps showing incentive zones for County, state & federal programs 	<p>MCEDC website hosts a “Map Room” with maps of most County and State incentive zones at: https://thinkmoco.com/maps</p>
6	<p>4th Highest response was to provide more opportunities for businesses to network and collaborate with government and with each other</p>	<p>MCEDC to Partner with Chambers of Commerce/industry councils/other groups, to provide events and introduce these organizations’ services to businesses that are not aware of their resources</p> <p>Need more specific information on types of collaboration with government, so that we can explore opportunities</p>
7	<p>5th Highest response was a concern in finding qualified employees</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not giving young people a reason to stay 	<p>County priority is to focus on providing a growing economy and welcoming community – We welcome suggestions from businesses on what will attract and retain young talent</p> <p>Better publicize the quality of life, support services and many attractions available</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception that business growth in DC & VA is stronger and providing more job availability 	<p>Working to create a more supportive business climate through 4Business initiative and other County priorities.</p> <p>Need better marketing effort focused on the many successful and innovative businesses that are thriving in Montgomery County</p> <p>Partner with business champions to publicize and celebrate local business achievements</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worried that cost of living is driving workforce out of the County. Need more info to employers about affordable housing options like Workforce housing availability and need to provide more affordable mixed use, mixed income housing for employees 	<p>County currently supports first-time home buyers down payment assistance of up to \$25,000, on top of state assistance, and supports homebuyer education and financial counseling for mortgage readiness</p> <p>Explore ways to partner with employers to combine private and public efforts to address workforce housing needs (DHCA)</p> <p>Improve efforts to communicate to and connect with underserved residents regarding opportunities and programs designed to fit their needs</p>
	ADDITIONAL BUSINESS SUPPORT/ECON DEVEL ISSUES	
8	Need more outreach to companies outside Montgomery to find out if they have considered a location, and if not, why not – then formulate a plan to attract’ and share with other businesses. Make them County’s partner.	<p>Implement MCEDC’s data driven marketing and business attraction plan</p> <p>Encourage business members to attend MCEDC’s monthly Board meetings that are open to the public, to learn about current programs and suggest additional ideas to further enhance the County’s economic climate. Board meetings area listed on MCEDC website at: https://thinkmoco.com/about/board-of-directors</p>
9	Need strong business networks by Sector	MCEDC and its partners should work to continually strengthen industry networks
10	County should have central listing of businesses in Montgomery County	<p>Currently there is no comprehensive data source for a central listing. A list of Montgomery County businesses that remit Person Property taxes is available on the Data Montgomery website: https://data.montgomerycountymd.gov/Finance-Tax-Property/Business-Personal-Property-Tax-2019/5a4x-icvi</p>
11	County could do more to promote local businesses, like a Buy Local program	County local preference legislation was recently introduced with the first Council Work Session planned for December 5

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		<p>Encourage businesses to register as local businesses in vendor database</p> <p>Support government procurement efforts for local preference, and encourage County & MCEDC to prioritize buying local</p> <p>Publicize MCEDC current MoCo Made partnership with the Food Council, and expand program and funding</p>
12	Provide subsidized space for Arts partnerships in County housing projects and encourage private developers to do the same	<p>The County has supported development of housing with community space. The Art Space development in Silver Spring will include live/work spaces for artist residences.</p> <p>Investigate the development of a platform where arts and supportive services providers can connect with partners who may have opportunities in existing or planned development (DHCA)</p> <p>Encourage MNCPPC and Planning Board to consider this in development approvals</p>
13	Insufficient childcare, and possibility of County offering short-term childcare vouchers for people who are starting up businesses	<p>In March of this year Montgomery County unveiled its Early Care and Education (ECE) Initiative. This is a four-year action plan to significantly expand child care options for infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and provide greater access to more families and support schools and community-based providers. To support this year’s expansion of 600 seats, the Montgomery County Child Care Resource and Referral Center will aim to recruit 50 family child care homes and provide operators with the necessary supports to operate a licensed child care home. HHS, Montgomery County Schools, and Montgomery College are all partnering In this initiative.</p> <p>Explore the voucher suggestion further with current programs and possible collaboration efforts</p>
14	SBIR seed fund grant writing support is free in Northern VA. There are no plans for support in MD. Chances of receiving a grant are much higher with grant writing support	<p>Explore Virginia’s CIT programs as possible model</p> <p>MCEDC and partners pilot a SBIR/STTR grant support program. Track effectiveness of early investments in grant-writing</p>

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		<p align="center">Enlist state support for establishing a program</p>
15	<p>Need a co-packer facility – Maryland only has a few and none in Montgomery County. Several local makers wo travel out of state for co-packing needs.</p>	<p>MCEDC conducted a study that supports the creation of kitchen incubator/small copacker, and is working with County Executive, County Council and partners to develop a strategy to meet this need.</p>
16	<p>More economic development focus on Germantown area and more attention to Town Center sidewalks, trees and landscaping</p>	<p>MCEDC will continue work with Gaithersburg/Germantown Chamber and Destination Germantown groups to devise appropriate plan that leverages Germantown assets</p> <p>Consider options for maintaining commercial areas that are not part of an urban district</p> <p>Greater attention to public space in commercial areas that ares maintained by the County, such as BlackRock Center for the Arts, Germantown Library</p> <p>Increase efforts to ensure that private property owners maintain any public areas over which they have responsibility</p>
17	<p>Homeless population is affecting the business climate in Long Branch</p>	<p>Link vendors to services to end and prevent homelessness.</p> <p>Explore potential linkage of collaborations with homeless services, shelter providers.</p>

Note: Business support issues that were more specific to areas like Procurement, Permitting and Communication were covered under those tables.

*Montgomery County works with the following business resource partners to provide direct assistance to businesses:
 Impact Silver Spring, Latino Economic Development Center, Life Asset, Maryland Women’s Business Center, SCORE, and Small Business Development Center