

Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement

Office of Legislative Oversight

EXPEDITED WHEATON REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS-LEASE BILL 27-21: APPROVAL

SUMMARY

Based on an analysis of available information, OLO anticipates that Expedited Bill 27-21 could favorably impact racial and social inequities (RESJ) in the County related to revitalizing the Wheaton area.

PURPOSE OF EXPEDITED BILL 27-21

The County Council enacted Expedited Bill 27-21 on July 13, 2021. The bill aligns the County with the State code by:

- Approving the lease of the Wheaton Regional Headquarters for use by the County; and
- Authorizing the lease by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission for more than 20 years.¹

THE PROBLEM: REVITALIZING THE WHEATON AREA

In September 2020 the Wheaton Revitalization project, a 308,000 square foot and 14-story office building, was completed.² As recommended by previous reports, this project supports economic development in the Wheaton Central Business, an area of Montgomery County that has been underdeveloped by bringing government and other private-sector jobs to the area to help revitalize the local economy. According to American Community Survey (ACS) 2015-19 data, residents in the Wheaton area experience lower pay in comparison to the County's overall averages for residents. For example, the average household income in Wheaton is \$85,617, compared to \$108,820 for Montgomery County.³ The purpose of the Bill is to approve the 40-year lease agreement.

ANTICIPATED RESJ IMPACTS

Expedited Bill 27-21 approves a 40-year lease between the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) and the County for office space in the recently constructed Wheaton Regional Headquarters building that is being used for various County departments. Because the term of the lease is more than 20 years, Council approval is required under Maryland State law. The racial equity and social justice impact of the Bill could possibly be positive because the majority of Wheaton's residents are people of color, especially Latinx account for 44% of the population.⁴ Additionally, foreign-born residents account for 43% of the residents in Wheaton.⁵ So economic development in the area should ultimately benefit them, especially if racial equity and social justice provisions are included in the plan to occupy the office space. However, that exploration is out of the scope of this analysis. As such, OLO concludes that the racial equity and social justice impact of Expedited Bill 27-21 in the County is possibly positive.

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CAVEATS

Two caveats to this racial equity and social justice impact statement should be noted. First, predicting the impact of legislation on racial equity and social justice is a challenging, analytical endeavor due to data limitations, uncertainty, and other factors. Second, this RESJ impact statement is intended to inform the legislative process rather than determine whether the Council should enact legislation. Thus, any conclusion made in this statement does not represent OLO's endorsement of, or objection to, the bill under consideration.

¹ Montgomery County Council, Expedited Bill 27-21, Wheaton Regional Headquarters-Lease Approval, Approved on July 13, 2021, Montgomery County, Maryland.

² Wheaton Revitalization Project Update, August 2021, GO Montgomery
https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/WheatonDev/Resources/Files/Wheaton_Project_update_Aug13-2021.pdf

³ American Community Survey, Quick Facts, Wheaton CDP, Maryland.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/wheatoncdpmaryland/PST045219>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid