



Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 16, 2025

7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Held virtual via Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89827743604>

Meeting ID: 898 2774 3604, + 1 301 715 859

Call to Order:	Arquilla Ridgell, Chair			Respectfully Submitted by: Meghan Pazmino, Secretary		
Date/Time:	January 16, 2025, 7:00 PM ET					
Attendees:	X	Arquilla Ridgell (Chair)	X	Serge Thomas (Vice Chair)	X	Liza Smith
	X	Carol Kosary	X	Lee Rubenstien	X	Debra Liverpool
		Gary Fellman (Parliamentarian)	X	Ben DuGoff	X	Joan McDermott
	X	Meghan Pazmino (Secretary)	X	Phillip Ardanuy	X	Jonathan Chambers
	X	Rob Fox	X	Rick Gross	X	Irina Norrell
Staff:	Talia Beaulieu-Hains, Luisa Cardona					
Guests:	Hannah Wilcove (Councilmember Glass’ Office), Dianne Whitaker MCPL; David Burch, DPS; Bob Kelly, DPS Steve Neff, MCPS					

Time	Topic	Notes
7:04	Call to Order & Welcome Meeting Protocols Introduction	Chair called the meeting to order and reviewed meeting protocols.
7:06	Agenda Minutes	Chair called for a motion to approve the December 2024 minutes. Carol moved to approve the minutes. Serge 2nd. December 2024 minutes are approved. Serge moved to approve the agenda for the meeting. Carol 2nd. Agenda approved.

7:08	Elected Officials	<p>Hannah Wilcove, Councilmember Glass' office updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● On Monday we received the order from WSSC to reduce water use due to extreme cold weather putting strain on the pipes. There were 190 breaks the week before. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Question-- with colder weather coming, is the county sustaining infrastructure or are we creating a maintenance debt by falling behind? Is this an expected amount of disruption with the cold weather? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We will be able to get more information soon. It's a good question, but I don't have the answer right now. ■ Luisa--WSSC presented to Mid County--they have a plan to replace pipes including what funding would be required. When they submit their budget, piping infrastructure is part of that. WSSC can come to share their presentation on their plan. ■ Glenmont Exchange had WSSC come to a meeting years ago. They were afraid that new piping would have greater pressure that old houses couldn't handle. WSSC was telling people to upgrade their piping because they didn't want to be responsible for replacing them and suggested they acquire insurance. It would be interesting to find out what the plan is, have they fixed issues with buried water meters, where have they fixed pipes so far? ■ Is the level of service where we want it to be? Do they have a budget and a plan to sustain that level of service? ■ They just got a rate increase approved by the county, but without a guarantee of better service. Have they checked the hydrants so we don't have a problem like they did in California? ■ They have a policy that if you complain about a high water bill and you have it resolved, you can't complain about it for another three years. ■ They do have community liaisons. Can we invite them to hear what they are doing to try and change things? ○ Hannah: I don't have all the answers tonight, so please e-mail me if you have specific questions and I'll get the answers for you. That's why I'm here. Hannah.Wilcove@montgomerycountymd.gov ● The County Executive resubmitted his amendments for the Capital Improvement Plan, so now the committee will be working through all those amendments. It could be budgets and schedules that need to be adjusted. In the spring we'll be working on the operating budget. ● Why doesn't the county allow monthly billing for WSSC? If there's a leak we won't know about it until three months when we might get a huge bill. Other counties allow it.
7:31	DPS,	Bob Kelly and Dave Burch, Montgomery County Department of Permitting

	<p>Permitting Services</p>	<p>Services</p> <p>Dave Burch - Manager for residential inspections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normally we have 17 inspectors, we have 2 openings • We cover the entire county, just the residential side. All inspectors look at building, electrical, and mechanical. <p>Bob Kelly - Residential Plan Section</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I've been in the residential inspection field for 40 years <p>We're here to help navigate some of the issues and concerns you have, so don't hesitate to jump in.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of DPS Residential and how does it impact your neighborhood? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our job is to review plans and conduct inspections for the building codes, electrical codes, and mechanical codes. The codes are basically the most dangerous house we'll let you build--they are the minimum. We love it when things are built well above code. If an inspection fails or a plan review doesn't go through it's because it's not meeting the minimum standards. ○ Is permitting for accessory structures under DPS? (Sheds, accessory dwelling units, etc.) Yes, permits are required and we cover that. But the actual licensing for that home is handled by the Department of Housing. We look at buildings before they are occupiable. ○ Does DPS manage height and setbacks? We do check them, but zoning sets those rules. They can be changed, but are not on the normal 3-year code cycle, they can be changed as needed. Zoning regulations are legislative. Zoning is a section of DPS, but every plan that comes in goes through a zoning review. They look at setbacks, height restrictions, lot coverage, what the use will be. After zoning review it passes to the next team and it goes through a structure review. ○ Building codes change on a 3-year cycle. We are moving to the next code cycle--the 2021--effective December 10, 2024. We're in a grace period and builders can submit under old code or new codes until March 31. Starting March 31, they must submit under the new code requirements. ○ We're getting ready to launch some community outreach to help try and educate contractors, homeowners, and builders on the new code changes. The first one should be around the first week of February. ○ How can we make the process more user friendly? It used to be a lot simpler. Prior to COVID we had people who could come into the office and sit down with reviewers. Then it switched to electronic. We are now back to in person visits, you can have a pre-construction consult meeting so there's no surprises. We encourage it, especially if the homeowner is serving as the contractor. A lot of homeowners go down
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		<p>the construction road and realize it's a lot more difficult than they thought it was. We encourage people who have questions to come in and get them answered before construction and before the permit is issued.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We do have something called Fast Track for relatively simple projects like decks, fences, sheds. Anything that doesn't take an extended plan review for simple structures. They can be issued very quickly. ○ By reviewing plans before construction we can save a considerable amount of time and money. Anyone can pull up and see what the turnaround time is for Plan Review. We are set up, for at least the last 10 years, if you call for an inspection before noon, our inspector can be there the next business day. ○ The process is currently very technical, but we have people standing by to assist anyone who needs it. We're revamping the online to make it more intuitive. We're finding that some of the verbiage in previous versions you might not know what those terms mean. We're basically offering concierge services--you get assistance the entire process. To start, you can come in and meet face to face or call in to customer service. ○ What's the threshold for when a permit is required? No permit is required for putting on a new roof unless a support piece is required; no permit for replacing windows and doors unless you're increasing the size of the window; no requirement for replacing siding; painting or drywall repair; no requirement for a retaining wall if it's less than three feet tall and is not on the property line. We just posted a handout for retaining walls less than three feet. ○ Even though a permit isn't required, a contractor still needs to follow code. If you have a question about whether someone is doing something properly, call us and we'll send an inspector by. We can only inspect to code, not to quality of work. ○ We now have a full time employee who is in the website every day, posts informational videos, we're doing podcasts for different things, we get very involved with the building safety month. We try to get as much information out there as possible. If there's something you'd like us to do, send me an email and we'll put it together. ○ Question: Is a permit required for a fence? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Yes, a fence can't exceed 6.5 feet unless it qualifies as a deer fence. The real reason is that we want to make sure the fence is being placed on the property of the homeowner. They need to submit a document showing the property lines and where the fence is going to go. If it's right on the line, the neighbor has to write a letter saying they approve. If it's a few inches off, the neighbor letter isn't required. If you have a fence in disrepair, as long as you are replacing it in
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		<p>the same place and size you don't need a permit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How are we working to integrate attainable housing changes? What would be the permitting process? We have some input but that's a park and planning, county council, county executive process. If it's signed, we get involved in terms of what's involved on what properties and how are we going to fit that housing on a lot. We won't be heavily involved until it becomes a real thing. ○ Do we review if infrastructure can support new housing? No, that's Montgomery County Park and Planning along with utility providers. Legislation passed that all new housing must have an EV charger installed and immediately the builder questions came up because my plans for houses have been in for five years now and the infrastructure can't support that. ○ We do look at water run off issues and we don't always get it right but we do our best to look at it. You can't concrete over your whole yard. ○ Millings--where they grind up the asphalt--that's considered an impervious layer, so it falls under the same limit on how much you can put down on a property. ○ 4302 Knowles--remodel or tear down? All they needed to retain is one full wall and part of another and it was considered a remodel not a tear down. A new home builder must register, include a warranty and post a bond. If it's not considered a demolition, anyone who is a licensed contractor can build a home. This has been going on for a number of years and has become really problematic. We proposed changes to make it more difficult to call something a remodel that is really a new home. Office of Consumer Protection changed it to say demolish means 67 percent or more of first story exterior walls, including conversion of an exterior wall into an interior wall. Since this was passed last year, we've been able to stop a lot of the one wall projects. These can't be listed as new homes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How does the average person know this is not a new home? If someone is doing their due diligence and checking with permitting services, anyone can tell them if it's a new home. ○ If someone doesn't have a permit, we don't have the authority to tear it down, but we can tell them to fix it. If something is built without permits, we're worried about electrical and mechanical and that the house will be safe. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are there penalties or fees? Yes, there can be. We take them to court when we can. There was one guy we stopped, and in front of the judge he said he built 27 houses last year and you caught me on two. ○ Can you report someone? Yes, if you see a house you think is being done without a permit, you can call. The permit must be posted in the front window of the house. Anything adding roof area, they are supposed to post a yellow sign
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		<p>anything this is the permit number and you have 30 days to appeal. If you don't see that, you can call 311 and do it anonymously. We recommend you want to be anonymous but put your contact info so when we go out to look at it we can give you feedback on what you found.</p>
8:18	Montgomery County Public Schools	<p>Steve Neff, Director, Pupil Personnel and Attendance Service, Montgomery County Public Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the definition of chronically absent vs. truant? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Chronically absent: misses 10% or more of days they are enrolled, regardless of the reason, excused or unexcused. That's 18 days a year or 2 days a month. • People were surprised nationally that once the pandemic closures ended, students didn't come back to school in pre-pandemic rates. It's not just a Maryland or Montgomery County thing, it's nationwide. • We realized that not all of our students experience MCPS in the same way. Some people don't see themselves in the community, they don't feel welcomed, they don't see themselves in the curriculum. They don't have a sense of belonging, and when you feel that way, you are less motivated to show up. • Personalized Reengagement--individual conferences, add extra support, do more to account for individual differences, positive activities when not in school, keep making them feel cared about and positively special; We know that not everyone fits into the regular 45-minute class and making sure that there's a reason for them to come. • What resources or support are out there? Everyone in the building does, but we have school counselors, pupil personnel workers--they are available to help families break through barriers. We have a dashboard that helps us dig deeper into trends and what's happening. Who is the most urgent for outreach? • Policies, changes, and enforcement--we really are moving away from punitive measures. We find that they don't work and break any relationship we might have. There are still compulsory education laws and we still utilize that in isolated cases. We aren't being heavy handed about fines or jail if parents don't send their children to school. We do feel very strongly that your grades and credits should be reflective of your grades and academic performance, and not tied to your behavior. • We have a trending grading policy where if a student gets a C in the first quarter, they don't have to show up at all in the second quarter. We are trying to address that in our grading practices. • We are trying to understand barriers--does the student not understand English or has no need for the class they are in • We have devalued the importance of every day attendance. What is it about school that makes it optional for me to go? I think there are safety and family issues. Students don't feel seen, valued, and heard. • We are trying to be creative in the types of academic opportunities

we offer especially for our older students. There are still specific guidelines around credits and submits needed to graduate. We are doing some advocacy at the state level looking at the reasonability of those rules. A 16-year old newcomer to the country that we would like to pour into them as much English as we would like, vs. the law saying 23 credits they need to graduate.

- Not everyone can afford to be in session 7-2:30 when high schools are in session? Can we offer other times so students can get to school?

Questions

- What if students simply don't care about going to school? Maybe it's not stressed at home for whatever reason, or they just don't think school is for them?
 - If we can build a relationship with those students we can ask them where they see themselves at 18, 21, 25. If they have goals or aspirations that are realistic, we can connect them to things in school that would make it easier to do things like that.
- I don't think MCPS is properly preparing students for the real work world, because in the real world you have mandatory meetings and trainings. Management meetings are saying to start getting rid of people who aren't coming to work. How are you preparing them for the real world?
- What is the greatest level of absenteeism? Is it high school or middle school level?
 - It is at the high school level and the lowest is middle school. Our youngest and oldest students miss school the most.
- Who has the highest rate of absenteeism and how does it compare across the state and country?
 - It's not a local issue, it's a national issue. In Maryland, I believe it is Baltimore City and Prince George's County that have the highest level of chronic absenteeism.
- There are about 20,000 students and 20,000 unique situations. We don't want to give up on anyone, but I think we have a lot of students hovering around 10% of absences that we aren't helping because we're working with the ones who almost never come to school. Pick kids with a set number and find out what's going on to see if we can pull them back under the 10% mark. The greatest dent in our numbers can be sharing that we missed students and we're glad they are here.
- How many students are homeschooled in Montgomery County?
 - No numbers off hand, but we do keep the number. Maybe it's 3-5,000, a fairly high number.
 - A lot of families who didn't agree with coming back after the pandemic chose to homeschool.
 - Students who are homeschooled, the state monitors them and we monitor them as a district. We review homeschooling programs so parents share portfolios of the work they are doing with their children so we can do a spot check.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parents who have the time, the skill and the capacity, they create creative and appropriate educational programs for their children. I've seen some where I think kids need to be back in school, but plenty others where I thought if I had the energy and the skill, plenty of children could benefit from that.
9:00	Board Business	<p>The committee that is reviewing the boards e-mailed. Serge met with them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They are reviewing the County's charter and found some issues with the Office of Public Counsel, reform of the Office of Legislative Oversight, and issues regarding the County's usage or non-usage of special tax zones as mandated by the state of Maryland. Should some of these proposals be added to the charter or should the Office of Public Counsel be fully funded by the council. ● Right now the county does not provide full funding for the Office of Public Counsel, and there's arguments for and against it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They don't think the Public Counsel should have any oversight over whether information about land development should be made public. ● He wants to meet with us to give a review of what they are looking for, and they are also looking for a person to join their commission. ● There are issues with updating or fully funding different offices as mandated or required by the charter. So it's just updating charter language and should we fully fund or not fund these offices. ● Question: Is this about changing the county charter? Yes, and it came up that the Citizen Advisory Boards are not involved enough in these discussions. ● This issue has come up before when there was another review. A different county executive seemed like he wanted to decrease the number of advisory boards because he thought there were too many. But this doesn't seem to be the issue here. ● It's reviewing the charter and the questions they sent about provisions in the charter. The County Executive is interested in funding the Office of People's Counsel and the council isn't necessarily interested in funding it, they want to weaken the office and make it like a technical advisory board instead of a fully fledged office with a person representing the people when it comes to land development issues. It's not a big office, maybe 1 or 2 people, but they do represent the public interest of Montgomery County. ● An invitation to join our board meeting has been accepted.
9:10	Mid County Director Update	Luisa shared the update about the Capital Improvement Plan operating budget is now live online so you can explore it and there's an upcoming forum.
9:11	WUDAC	On the agenda was public safety, crime and safety, streetscape, Hispanic Heritage Month report, Kensington Wheaton Chamber of Commerce updates, MidCounty Update.

		Luisa: Main topics under public safety was the uptick of porch pirates during the holiday season, but a general downward trend in terms of crime.
9:12	Community Concerns	None
9:13		<p>Serge moved to adjourn the meeting. Rick 2nd. Vote to adjourn unanimous. Meeting adjourned by Chair at 9:13 p.m.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NEXT MCCAB MEETING: February 20, 2025 NEXT EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING (members only): February 6, 2025</p>