



MID-COUNTY REGIONAL SERVICES
WHEATON URBAN DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Luisa Cardona
MCRS Director

MEMORANDUM

December 12, 2023

TO: Mark Elrich, County Executive

FROM: Jim Epstein, President, Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: FY 25 Operating Budget and FY25-30 CIP Request

On behalf of the Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee (WUDAC) and the residents and businesses of the greater Wheaton area, we appreciate the opportunity to advise you regarding the Wheaton Urban District FY25 Operating Budget and FY25-30 CIP requests.

Highest Priority: No Reductions

In consideration of the anticipated tight budget constraints for FY25, we want to take this opportunity to emphasize the significant impact on the Urban District's functions when all departments are requested to propose 3% cuts to the Operating budget. Whereas the Bethesda and Silver Spring Urban Districts achieve a large percentage of their funding through their Parking Lot District revenues, the Wheaton Urban District must rely to a much greater extent on the General Fund and is adversely impacted when across the board cuts are made. While we were pleased at the increased PLD revenue transfer this past year, it did not increase the total funding to the UD. In line with the County's stated prioritization of equity considerations, we cannot state strongly enough the importance of funding WUD's priorities, especially in comparison to the County's other existing Urban Districts. As one of the lower income population centers in our county, and one with the greatest cultural diversity, Wheaton merits "catch-up" investments in its infrastructure, arts commitments, and commercial vitality.

We ask for your consideration and renewed focus on our Wheaton Urban District's needs and priorities outlined below. Many of these items, if implemented, will promote more equity with similar projects in other parts of the County. As you are aware, the UD team has made the following requests, which WUDAC supports:

- \$50,000 –Events, Marketing, and Promotions. WUDAC asks that the county fully fund monthly events/commitments to the Marion Fryer Plaza. To that end, we fully support and endorse the

budget priorities prepared by UD Director Luisa Cardona. Coordination with CUPF and the UD will require support for this unique set of functions.

- \$200,000 –Streetscape Maintenance: Reasoning: Materials and service costs have increased by more than 20% since the pandemic (sidewalks, fencing, porta johns, tents, concrete, plants, etc.)
- \$25,000 –Lighting/Façade: Reasoning: This is the chargeback MCDOT requests based on increase in lighting pole damages.
- \$25,000 –Website Redesign: Compliance with procurement and county contracting policy requires we issue a new solicitation for web hosting. This will be an increase our yearly maintenance fees.

In addition to the above requests from the Urban District team, WUDAC also requests consideration of the following priorities:

FY25-30 CIP

- **High-Priority** | **“Retail Space” buildout**: WUDAC urges the inclusion of up to \$4M to convert the currently unleased ~12,000 sq. ft. ground floor space of the M-NCPPC HQ building into a safe, “white box” space. The determination of the utilization of this space should allow for public input and as well as short-term and long-term usages. Potential preferred options include restaurant, brewery, arts maker/fabrication or visual arts, incubator, and community usage. It should not be used as a component of the 4D Police station (see next item).
- **Police 4D building**: The current condition of the existing 4D Police station requires significant upgrades. WUDAC supports the temporary relocation of administration activities to an upper floor of the M-NCPPC HQ building. However, WUDAC supports a recommendation to build a new 4D police station, either at the existing location or next to existing Park offices on Layhill Road. Funding should be included to determine whether replacing the HVAC system or a complete rebuild is the most appropriate solution.
- **Amherst bikeway**: Funds have been allocated to the construction of this project as well as the Grandview bikeway. We urge the continuation of the progress of these projects by MCDOT and request the funds continue to be authorized, even while MCDOT is requested to prioritize their FY25+ projects.

FY25 Operating

MCDOT:

High-Priority | As departments are requested to propose 3% decreases for FY25, there are several priorities in the Wheaton Urban District that remain priorities and have not been addressed after several years of advocacy. We urge prioritizing and funding these items within the MCDOT budget including the following projects:

- Blueridge/Grandview/Georgia Avenue intersection. There have been multiple competing proposals for this stretch of heavy vehicular traffic including adding additional left hand turn lanes and/or dedicated bicycle lanes. No action has occurred; this needs to be funded to finalize the plans and coordinate with SHA.
- Installation of a full signal at Georgia and Price Avenues
- Sidewalk replacement/repairs on Blueridge between Georgia and Grandview
- Planning and implementation of an enhanced and functional Streetery including tables, chairs, canopies, planters, and traffic barriers (approx. \$100,000).
- Georgia Avenue as a boulevard

- Vision Zero pedestrian improvements

Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District:

High Priority | WUDAC is supportive of the new Arts and Cultural Center project in coordination with MHP, DGS and Planning. We also support the creation of the Wheaton A&E District Advisory Board. There are several areas of funding requested to support the emphasized branding of Wheaton as an Arts destination. We request funding for projects including:

- Support for the re-designation of the Wheaton A&E District. This project is required by the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) and additional funding is needed to develop the application. It is estimated this should be approximately \$50,000 for each of the next 2 years.
- Development of arts utilization in the unleased ground floor of the M-NCPPC HQ Building. (See CIP request)
- Marketing, Branding and Event Management: as noted in the UD Director's request, a minimum of \$50K funding is necessary to support the ongoing efforts related to the Marian Fryer Town Plaza, the Wheaton Veterans Park, and other facilities as well as coordination with CUPF.
- Development of the appropriate governing and oversight model for the A&E District, like BUP or other successful national arts districts.
- Implement an Arts Walk and Mural program to enhance the desirability and marketability of Wheaton A&E District.

Youth in Crisis/Opioid addition support:

High Priority | WUDAC held a Youth in Crisis forum this summer to highlight the issues families and youth are facing in our area. While this is a County-wide issue, there are 2 items that impact Wheaton significantly that need support to help provide resources for these families:

- Providing a Spanish speaking outreach individual to communicate with youth in the Wheaton Urban District. While there are multiple agencies supporting efforts, there is NO current Spanish speaking resource available. This means a majority of youth that may benefit from County and third-party support are unable to learn about these programs or get assistance.
This is an urgent need.
- Provide a local pilot program to distribute Narcan kits, test strips and other resources on a regular basis, like programs in Rockville and other areas.

We appreciate your support and willingness to discuss these issues and welcome your feedback as the budget process continues over the course of the next few months. We look forward to more specific and further dialogue related to the FY25 Budget as it affects the Wheaton Urban District, the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District, and the greater Wheaton Area.

Thank you,



Jim Epstein, President

Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee

