

Minutes from WUDAC Meeting

June 13, 2023

I. Call to Order 7:00

Attending: Luisa Cardona, Crystal Ruiz, Jim Epstein (chair), Ali Oliver-Krueger, Karen Cordry, Briana Cole, Nina Tanya Baskin
Attending Virtually: Rob Fox, Dave, Kit Wood, Pedro Matamoro
Guests in person: Chip Py, Elizabeth Gallauresi, Dan Thompson, Lisa Traiger, Peter Kelyman, Paige Friedeman
Guests by Zoom: Dan Obrzut, Michael Paylor, Carl Xu, Tommy Heyboer
Councilmember Fani-Gonzales, Michael Paylor, Jaxon O'Mara (Delegate Solomon), Jeannette Feldner, Vicky Surlles, Barrett S, Krista Brick, Andrew Rollo, Sidney Cooper

II. Review/Approve Minutes

Minutes were submitted in draft form by Karen Cordry. Ali and Jim will submit edits for typos. Nina moved to accept the minutes amended, Ali seconded. Minutes were accepted as amended for typos by unanimous consent.

III. Community Concerns

Chip Py - When will we know what WUDAC's top priorities are? Jim Epstein responded that WUDAC just met in retreat to outline priorities, and formed subcommittees concerning Crime and Safety, Communication and Outreach, Youth Opioid Crisis, Transportation and Pedestrian Safety, Economic Development, Arts and Entertainment. Subcommittees are developing agendas and action plans now. Committees will be posted online soon, but WUDAC is not required to post agendas until a week ahead of each meeting, as has been its practice. We are always open for suggestions of topics, issues, and speakers.

IV. Reports/Updates

a. Elected Representatives

Delegate Solomon: thanked all for joining the Governor on the Wheaton safety walk; follow-up will be essential; areas peripheral to WUD are similar and also similarly impacted. His team has drafted a letter centering on short term and long term solutions and is looking forward to what MDOT has in store with regard to fixes. He followed up with Transportation Secretary Wiedefeld and

is optimistic. From the recently concluded legislative session moneys were obtained as follows: \$1,000,000 for Wheaton Arts and Culture Center, \$250,000 for Dalewood Park, \$200,000 for Wheaton Woods Park . Up to \$30,000,000 per year is set aside for counties with BRT. This year, \$23,000,000 has to go to MoCo and must be bonded, so it can earn more money. Developing Veirs Mill BRT is a priority. Additional funds were also obtained for Holy Cross Hospital.

Councilmember Fani-González: thanked the group for attendance at the safety walk with Governor. She praised the county's cooperation with the state delegation. The Council is sending a letter to Governor Moore to advocate for everything District 18 has on the table, and to set up a 2-year plan. She will follow up with Secretary Wiedefeld regarding development around the Metros. There is a public meeting June 23 regarding Wheaton A&E district and urban district development. Fani-González will meet with David Dise (DGS) soon regarding business commitment for 1st floor of Parks building. Luisa Cardona explained that the County Executive and David Dise toured the space a couple of weeks ago to come up with more possibilities for that space. They are looking at using some of it as an arts space and another part as retail.

b. Wheaton & Kensington Chamber of Commerce

Ali Oliver-Krueger: The Chamber had a successful Lunch Mixer on May 31 with a Montgomery Historical Society speaker on The Top Ten Places “Off the Beaten Path in Montgomery County.” We’d like to note that on Wednesday, July 19 from 5 to 7 PM, there is a Wheaton Arts Reception at the Wheaton Arts Parade Gallery in Westfield Wheaton Mall, an opportunity to see art and hear plans for this year’s parade and festival. Coming up on August 16 is our in-person Annual Awards Ceremony at Hollywood East Café from 6:30 – 8:30.

c. MCCAB - No report

d. *Mid-County RSC*

i. *Crystal Ruiz:* WUD is in Spring/summer cleaning mode—pruning up trees, installing new plantings, painting, and making sure everything is beautiful. DOT has been out painting curbs. They are a little short staffed and are still hiring. They have a Juneteenth event this Saturday 11 – 8 on the plaza, which is WUD supported. Next Saturday the Caribbean festival will be here. There are four weekends of events coming up. If you see something that is needed, please let Crystal know; please feel free to email. In July, the new fiscal year starts and there will be repairs.

ii. *Luisa Cardona:*
CUPF: They were in the process of hiring for CUPF, they had a candidate that they weren’t able to hire, but have a second and third candidate they are looking

at. In the meantime they are hiring a contractor to be in place before the end of the week so the Plaza can be activated. The full CUPF process won't be activated yet, but they want to be able to move forward as soon as possible. The Event Monitors positions are posted.

Taste of Wheaton: RSC takes responsibility for it not happening. They were looking forward to robust restaurant participation. What happened is that they did not have in place on time the contracts required to put on the event. Previously, they had operated without contracts and through different mechanisms, but they were told they couldn't use those mechanisms. They started working immediately on trying to secure the contracts, and it was their first time trying to do so. They attempted to seek an exemption from Legal, and when they didn't get an exemption, they were held up by vagaries in the contracting process. Sidney Cooper began working on the event in January, and they worked very hard to put the Taste on right up until about two weeks before the event when it had to be cancelled. The funding that was set aside for the Taste will go towards the TGIF series and other events and initiatives. RSC recognizes that this event might need to be reimagined. They want a conversation with the community on ideas.

Dan - why doesn't County Council give support needed to bring in contracts? When we proposed the Arts Parade, it was a fall counter to the spring Taste. We need a substantial spring event. Will the greater number of ongoing activities dilute these two big events?

Sydney - Taste of Wheaton has an established brand and will continue in some form. We may go to more artisans and events associated with it to reimagine it.

V. Guests/Presenters

a. MCDOT - Michael Paylor

i. Georgia and Blueridge signal (E-bound) - triple left is difficult for pedestrians; needed changes have not been fully integrated into signal and intersection plan; bike lanes might add to problems. Will coordinate with SHA.

ii. A Viers Mill and Andrew Rd hybrid beacon had been planned, but it would create significant utility impacts. The project probably will not go forward.

iii. Georgia and Price - County's Right-of-Way team is working to get right-of-ways from businesses that could be impacted, including digging to research how to adjust underground vaults, which will cut off access to some of the businesses at that intersection for one week. After that research, a firm timeline can be established and communicated to businesses. Overall timeline for project cannot be known at this point. Tim (Couples?) is lead for utilities

process. Perhaps we should look into right turn only from Price onto Georgia Ave in the meantime for pedestrian and traffic safety. Will discuss with SHA.

iv. Streeterly - The County Executive wants to reopen Price to two directions. They have created a plan for bidirectional traffic flow while trying to create more space for businesses. They are planning to restripe in the next month or so if no one has any fatal flaw problems with the plan. Elkin would remain closed (though perhaps open in winter).

b. Streeterly

Luisa - regarding long-term planning and decisions, in response to questions: The County Executive has said the long term plan and management of each Streeterly is up to each local community. That long term plan is not the topic of today's meeting. Our focus in this meeting is on the short term. Luisa also notes that WUD did not get funding in the county budget for many of the improvements they wanted to make.

Luisa Cardona, regarding Elkin: The conversation around Elkin for tonight centers on requests for Elkin to be open to traffic for at least part of the year, when outdoor dining is not in season. Luisa asks for feedback and input. Luisa has drafted a community survey. Options include closing Elkin to traffic all year long; closing Elkin during "eating season" and opening it up during winter/outside of "eating season"; closing Elkin during eating season and opening it during winter, but allowing restaurants to use the parklets. Luisa will circulate the draft survey among WUDAC members for feedback before wider distribution.

Kit - would like a "No Thru Street" sign onto Elkin from University, but not practical if Elkin will be open seasonally. People coming down Elkin and making U-turns in front of her business are a big problem.

Dan - we should use this conversation as a start to widening sidewalks throughout Wheaton.

Michael - we cannot paint orange barriers. In Bethesda they are using beautiful potted plants. Not sure how permissions for that come about.

Luisa - Many constituents want Elkin open in the winter. Luisa proposes a survey to discern preferred solutions. Please give her feedback!

Rob - how about Elkin being a boulevard, pleasant for walking? Kit agrees.

Crystal - We open Elkin in the winter because with no winter outdoor seating, the area becomes used for storage and trash, which causes sanitation issues.

Kit - don't assume that restaurateurs don't want to buy heaters and tents for winter.

Jim - subcommittees should address all of the issues related to Streeterly.

c. Wheaton Marketing/Events, Overview of the Season, Updates (Sidney and Elizabeth):

Events recap:

- HalloWheaton was successful and is becoming a signature event.

- St. Patrick's Day in Wheaton, coordinated with Limerick Pub, with many other local businesses contributing.
- Spring Fling in May was likewise successful with participation and support by several local businesses.

Coming up on the Plaza:

- Juneteenth Freedom Fest this Saturday
- Caribbean Heritage Month Festival Saturday the 24th

- TGIF events every Friday July - August "powered by Chuck Levin's." First event is Black Masala Band July 7 at 6 pm on Marian Fryer Town Plaza. Events

will have a DJ set from 5 - 6PM and a happy hour with a local distillery, as well as live art demos. Traditional arts demos will be done. Elizabeth is hoping to create a regular after-work hang-out on Fridays and is looking for bars to do an after party.

- Arts organization performances in September

Other things Sidney would like to do in the near future:

- Bring back a shop local loyalty program with a variety of discounts and specials.

- Do a website refresh and focus more on their Instagram page.

- Continue to update and refresh banners and signage.

Elizabeth believes that Wheaton is on the precipice and now is time to engage in partnerships with local businesses and organizations, like the partnership with Chuck Levin's. Elizabeth also discussed expanding HalloWheaton into a weekend event involving a variety of activities, including adult activities, with local businesses and organizations. Social media promotion should be increased.

- September Fridays on the Plaza will feature local artists, including Luis Garay.

- The Objective is to keep plaza full

Riana - will there be street signs to advertise these?

Elizabeth - not at first; waiting for Levin's to approve press release.

Sydney - there will be banners.

Several people expressed a desire to know the TGIF acts well ahead of time for planning purposes. Elizabeth said that they would publish these soon.

Dan - what is the business model for these? Do we give away food? Do businesses have to donate, or does county buy the food?

Tanya - It is not practical for the bigger events, though it happens at the smaller ones (county buys food).

Jim - We can address that in committee and go to Fani-González with it.

Chip - we need to do much better at advertising events in Wheaton. *Jim*

- agrees. Wheaton needs to better utilize the resources that exist. *Luisa* - it is the responsibility of every committee member here to spread publicity about Wheaton events.

Dan - we should know how many followers we have on social media. We should have a data base of artists.

VI. NEW BUSINESS -

a. Wheaton and Kensington Chamber of Commerce Awards:

i. Best Property Improvement of the Year: The Caramelo Bakery Mural by the Art and Walkability Project was nominated and approved. Ali Oliver-Krueger will connect with the Art and Walkability Project to get information about the building owner/people who approved the mural so they can be recognized as well.

ii. Business Leader of the Year: Lene Tsegaye of Kefa Cafe was nominated and approved.

VII. Adjourn: Meeting adjourned at 8:48 pm.