



WHEATON URBAN DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Luisa Montero-Diaz
Director

January 16, 2018

County Executive Isiah Leggett
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Executive Leggett:

In a letter sent October 2016, we requested that you consider how to best manage the Wheaton Arts & Entertainment District. We advised that “the A&E District needs dedicated management” and we recommended that “necessary funding and staffing be provided” in order to implement the A&E District strategic plan and for Wheaton to realize the benefits of its A&E designation.

The County still does not have a plan for managing Wheaton’s A&E District. This has become an unfunded mandate for an understaffed Urban District. The Director of the Mid-County Regional Services Center already had a “full plate” when the A&E designation was granted and without additional staff, funds for contractor support, or some means of tapping the community’s volunteer resources, Wheaton is missing opportunities to develop as an A&E District.

The most important work that is not being done is reaching out to and mobilizing the community’s artists and businesses. Businesses are not aware of the possible financial benefits of being in the A&E District. Local artists need a network to facilitate their communication with each other and with the County. The A&E District needs an up-to-date inventory of artists, arts organizations, and arts and entertainment activities so that they can be promoted. These efforts would assist the county in assessing the feasibility of building an arts and cultural center, and they would have an immediate benefit to our community that lacks A&E venues.

Wheaton has long suffered from numerous vacancies in commercial real estate. If the A&E District had staff it would be possible for the county to reach out to landowners with a campaign to fill these “broken windows” with art. Pilot programs could be initiated to turn hard to rent spaces into studios, galleries, and performance space with rents that artists can afford while generating revenue for the landowners. There are successful models of this approach in other parts of Montgomery County that may work in Wheaton.

WUDAC believes the A&E District needs dedicated management and recommends that necessary funding and staffing be provided. We also encourage you to tap into the interest among Wheaton residents, businesses, artists and arts groups to support the Wheaton A&E District, perhaps through the creation of a volunteer A&E team or the designation of a volunteer A&E director under the Urban District.

WUDAC stands ready to support whatever approach you choose, but we urge you to act without further delay to ensure Wheaton does not waste this opportunity as an A&E District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leah V. Haygood". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Leah Haygood, Chair
Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee