



WHEATON URBAN DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Isiah Leggett  
County Executive

Luisa Montero-Diaz  
Director

December 14, 2017

Honorable Hans Riemer, President, Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: Support for Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan for Parks

Dear Council President Riemer:

The Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee (WUDAC) recommends that the County Council approve the “Energized Public Spaces (EPS) Functional Master Plan for Parks in Mixed Use and Higher Density Residential Areas” that was approved by the Montgomery County Planning Board.

In making this recommendation, WUDAC expresses its support for the goals of the EPS Master Plan to “create outdoor spaces in the highest populated areas of the County where people of all ages and incomes can meet, play, relax, exercise, enjoy nature and more in a range of parks and open spaces.” Wheaton is such an area and would greatly benefit from the implementation of this plan to improve existing and create new parks and public spaces.

WUDAC notes that the construction of the new home of the Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) eliminates one of the largest public open spaces in Wheaton, Parking Lot 13. While this development will create a much needed town plaza, the plans call for that plaza to be cut in half by Reddie Drive. WUDAC has written Council in the past to request that Reddie Drive be closed where it intersects the town plaza and we hope that the approval of this Master Plan and the presence of the M-NCPPC at that very spot will help county officials to recognize that this precious remaining piece of public open space in Wheaton should not be divided by a street.

There are three other long-standing park issues that may be resolved with this master plan. The Wheaton Veterans Urban Park needs to be renovated. Its limited grassy areas are on steep inclines and are not conducive to public use. Wheaton already is activating this park, due primarily to the construction in the Wheaton Triangle. We have used the park for our summer concerts, the Wheaton Arts Parade, and the Jazz Festival. These successful events have made us aware how underutilized this park had become and how much it needs to be

improved. WUDAC hopes that the county will allocate funds to the Parks Department so that renovation of this park can begin as soon as the new town plaza opens.

Secondly, the Wheaton CBD is sorely lacking play-space. This is amplified by the addition of hundreds of residential units in recent years. We would support the inclusion of formal and informal play-spaces, such as play equipment, art and other features designed to activate public urban spaces for children and adults alike.

The third issue that Parks Department officials also have recognized is connectivity to the Wheaton Regional Park. This expansive park and recreation area also houses a major regional attraction, Brookside Gardens. The park is cut off from much of Wheaton by the river of cars driving on Georgia Ave. We urge the county to address this problem as well as improve connectivity to the Urban District. In addition to creating walkways and trails leading to the park, WUDAC recommends that the county create bus links from the park and Brookside Gardens to the Wheaton and Glenmont Metro Stations and we urge you to change the park policy that requires visitors to the "Garden of Lights" to arrive only by car. This requirement excludes local residents who are able to walk to the park and for some whose only means of getting there is on foot or by bus.

Lastly, in endorsing this Master Plan, WUDAC calls attention to the Plan's strategy to "create new parks and open space through dedication, purchase, and creation of privately owned public space (POPS) through the development process." There is available real estate in Wheaton that the county needs to invest in now before prices rise even higher. The strategy to use privately owned space provides an important opportunity for the county to engage and enable local landowners who need to be part of planning Wheaton's future development. There also are numerous inadequately developed "park" areas on the perimeters of local schools that need to be activated and renovated to make them accessible and safe.

WUDAC would like to offer its services as a means to reach out to businesses and residents in the Wheaton Urban District by making the Master Plan a topic of one or more of its monthly meetings where residents and park officials can exchange ideas and address concerns regarding its implementation.

In conclusion, WUDAC recommends that the County Council approve the EPS Master Plan and requests that the council direct the Parks Department to address as soon as possible the long-standing issues that are presented in this letter.

Sincerely,



Leah Haygood  
Chair, Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee

cc: Honorable Isiah Leggett, County Executive