

Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee

2400 Arcola Ave, 2nd floor, Wheaton MD 20902

Meeting Minutes: Tuesday, December 11, 2018

Members Present: William Jelen, Chair; Chelsea Johnson, Vice Chair; Ron Franks, Mirza Donegan, Jim Epstein, Mariela Garcia-Colberg, Leah Haygood, Omar Lazo, Megan Remo

Staff Present: Luisa Montero-Diaz, Mid-County RSC Director; Kevin Jackson, Aide

Guests: Honorable Hans Riemer, Councilmember At-Large; Roland Ikheloa, Chief of Staff, Council President Navarro; Keith Compton, MCDOT; Neil Greenberger, MCPIO; Justin Stone, SBAP, Department of Finance; Peter Wilson, Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board; Sandra Selby, Wheaton Hills Civic Association; Kristy Daphnis, Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee Chair; John Meyers, Office of Delegate Al Carr, Karen Cordray, Kensington Heights Civic Association, Residents: Sallee Garner, Mike Feigeuson, Laura Leigh Palmer, Zoe Ziliak Michel, Tegy Thomas, Danciel Marcin

Call To Order: 6:40pm by Chair Jelen.

Review Minutes: The agenda and meeting minutes draft from November were reviewed. Motions were made and unanimously passed to approve both documents without changes.

Community Concerns: Residents brought the following concerns before the committee:

- Concerns raised on behalf of Greenhill tenants include leasing practices, maintenance and litigation. Luisa Montero talked about County Council discussions and legislation that was introduced by Councilmember Navarro last year. There was discussion of vacant commercial space. Omar Lazo mentioned that properties are marketed at a high cost per square foot and left empty space for use as tax write-offs.
- Kristi Daphnis asked about Metro property on Georgia next to the townhouses. Chair Jelen said WUDAC would look into that. Members raised the question of whether we can advocate for certain types of facilities on the property.
- Concerns were raised over pedestrian deaths and asked what is WUDAC doing to address the issue. Chair Jelen assured the community that it is high on WUDAC's agenda.

Reports:

- a. **County Council:** Council President (and District 4 Representative) Nancy Navarro's new chief of staff, Roland Ikheloa talked about Council President Navarro's passion and goals for equity, early childhood, and elderly issues.
- b. **Chamber of Commerce:** Mirza Donegan, on behalf of the Wheaton-Kensington Chamber, shared that the Chamber has finalized plans for a business expo to connect businesses and nonprofits; local officials will be invited. The Chamber partnered with Kensington Senior Living for Friendsgiving. On Dec 5th, Chamber held an event at Los Chorros and raised \$4,000 for holiday meals; also working on angels for children toy drive.
- c. **Mid-County RSC/Wheaton Urban District Report:**
 - Luisa reported that there was a ceremony to inaugurate the Wheaton Project reaching street level and was catered by Local businesses. The building will go up by one floor every two weeks. After Christmas, crews will commence utility undergrounding at night along Triangle Lane.

- Town Plaza: A meeting has been scheduled with Stonebridge about the Town Plaza with WUDAC and community members. Another meeting will be scheduled with Keith with Michael Paylor to discuss Reddie Drive, including general traffic flow.
- Firm called JLL is marketing the retail space – they are currently in the process of doing market analysis. They have to do a master lease for the building first (County leasing to Parks and Planning and other departments). This will hopefully be done by March and at that point, some kind of notification will go out to the community for potential retail in the spaces.
- Pedestrian Safety: Westfield has begun a new partnership with DOT. Doing pedestrian safety events at the mall on weekends. DOT is there with a VR simulation and playing a game. Will have a Camaro. Will be there all day this Saturday and the following. Also, Candy Cane with a Cop.
- Follow-up to pedestrian barrier: SHA accepted a compromise – it will be similar to the one on Reddie but a little higher. Aesthetically pleasing but will be effective. Brick, vegetation, cables. County will install, and the Wheaton Urban District will maintain.
- Kensington Heights Civic Association mentioned need for walking/bike path around Wheaton mall.
- WUD got small tech assistance grant to complete an ethnographic survey to include Spanish-speaking artists. The report is almost complete.
- MCCAB meeting next Tuesday: an expert on Montgomery County’s zero waste efforts will be speaking.
- New County Executive, Marc Elrich, added a listening session at Einstein High School on Dec. 20
- The District 18 State Delegation is hosting a toy drive on 12/19 at Kensington Town Center.

Business and Action Item Updates:

- a. **Wheaton Safety Task Force** will be discussed next month
- b. **Retreat follow-up:** Mariela, Ron, Jim and Bill did a walkthrough of the urban district, thinking about locations for pop-up parks: they found there are some promising spaces controlled by the County, e.g. the clock tower and stairs between Georgia and Triangle. WUDAC might do spring and winter events, e.g., winter could be S’mores, hot chocolate. Spring might be ping pong, bocce etc. But who will manage, organize, pay for? The ad hoc group is continuing its research by reaching out to people in Parks and Planning etc. and businesses that might sponsor events. There could be multiple events, including artist participation, that would show Wheaton can be a walkable urban environment.
- c. **Other follow-ups:** letter about hot spots; Jim keeping us updated about arts center feasibility. Have followed up on Town Plaza.
 - a. Review of letter: Bill noted the BiPPA Report calls out WUDAC’s priority hot spots.
- d. **Discussion with Councilmember Reimer**
 - a. The Councilmember noted that portions of the BiPPA have been funded and are in construction. He wants to work with WUDAC to identify which projects to move into construction and on what timeline. Projects funded through the BiPPA are typically more modest projects. Councilmember Reimer stated that he is very passionate about

BiPPA because our urban areas need rebuilding to be more pedestrian and bike-friendly but there wasn't a good way to do that. The project applied to a lot of areas in the County and some projects have been done, e.g. Silver Spring bike path. County looking at cycle track on Amherst from Linden to Arcola and a pedestrian crossing at Price and Georgia.

- b. WUDAC members discussed with Councilmember Reimer that WUDAC has been working on a list of "hot spots." There was discussion of whether the sites should be prioritized and how far the funding would go to address the hot spots. WUDAC members and community members present also advocated for a holistic, coordinated approach for issues in the urban district and for greater attention and quicker action by the State Highway Administration on problem areas on state highways. Councilmember Reimer recommended that WUDAC request a Wheaton-specific BiPPA to focus attention and funding on urban district hot spots.
- c. Councilmember Reimer also discussed how the County is going to spark and foster activities to bring people into Wheaton, how to support economic development, especially for small businesses, and how to fund these initiatives. WUDAC members discussed various models for funding support of the Arts and Entertainment District.
- d. Councilmember Reimer stated support for adding funding to the County budget, as well as coordinating funding and programming with Parks and Planning. He also confirmed his support for implementing the findings of the cultural center study, for exploring community-based economic development staff and for studying issues of predatory leasing in retail spaces.
- e. **Letter discussion, continued:** Members discussed some changes to the map and additional language for the letter about advocating with the state. Chelsea made a motion to approve the letter as amended. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The revised letter will be circulated for approval by email.
- f. **Announcements:** Sidney Cooper and Elizabeth Galareusi are coming in January. Also, could invite the new CE, Marc Elrich.

Adjourned: 8:48 p.m.

Minutes taken by Leah Haygood