

Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee

2400 Arcola Ave, 2nd floor, Wheaton MD 20902

Meeting Minutes, Tuesday January 08, 2019

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

Staff Present: Luisa Montero-Diaz, Director Mid-County RSC; Kevin Jackson, Aide, Mid-County RSC; Joe Callaway, Operations Manager, Wheaton Urban District; Sidney Cooper, Marketing Manager, Wheaton Urban District

Guests: Marc Elrich, County Executive, Montgomery County; MOCO Directors David Dise and Al Roshdieh, Pete McGinnity, Manager, MOCO Dept. of Finance; Richard Cisneros, LEDC; Kristy Daphnis, Chair, Pedestrian, Bicycle and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee; Justin Stone, SBAP, MOCO Dept. of Finance; Keith Compton, MCDOT, Filippo Leo, Filippo's; Javier and Maria Solis, Los Taxes; Sean Corbett, Wheaton Hills CA; Laura Leigh Palmer, ASAP Graphics; Roland Ikheloa, Chief of Staff, Councilmember Navarro; Neil Greenberger, MOCO PIO; Shannon Rush-Locke, Wheaton Studio of Dance, Dan Thompson, WAP; Jose Thommana, MCDOT; Jane Mahaffie, StonebridgeCarras; Lt. Ormsby, 4th District Police, Chief Dempsey, President Wijetunge, WVRS

Call to Order: 6:34pm by Chair Jelen. He introduced new member Stuart Amos, Manager at Westfield Wheaton, who will be a Large Business representative on WUDAC.

Review Minutes: The minutes draft from the December 2018 WUDAC meeting was reviewed. A motion was made and passed to approve those minutes without changes.

Reports:

a. County Council: No report

b. Chamber of Commerce: William Moore, on behalf of the Wheaton & Kensington CC, reported that the Chamber held their monthly meeting earlier that day. They discussed preparations for their Business Expo that they will be holding on January 23rd at the Kensington Town Hall

c. Wheaton Revitalization Project: Manager Keith Compton, MCDOT, updated members and guests on the construction progress. They are now constructing the 2nd floor and the project is 45% complete. They will top out in June 2019. Should be finished in May 2020. There will be 7 tenants and 1000 employees slated to move in over a 2 ½ month period. In response to a question, Keith commented that upcoming utility work on Triangle Lane will mostly be at night and will not affect business operations.

Justin Stone, SBAP Manager from the Dept. of Finance reported on the status of assistance payments to the businesses around the construction area. There have been 32 disbursements to 17 recipients with a total of \$515000. Two businesses have hit the cap on maximum disbursement and 2 to 3 more are expected to hit it soon. 5 assistance requests are still being reviewed.

d. Mid-County RSC/Wheaton Urban District: Luisa Montero-Diaz, Director RSC, reminded all in attendance that they can go to wheatonproject.com to see the progress of construction. She introduced Jane Mahaffie from StonebridgeCarras in the audience.

Luisa went on to mention the upcoming Budget Forums and noted that there was a flyer on the hallway table. There is a forum scheduled at The Mid-County Community Center on Queensguard Road on January 23rd. She also reminded that those wishing to be informed of community events should sign up for the County newsletter on the sheet in the hallway.

Luisa briefly noted that MCDOT is running a pilot program for Micro Transit called Flex. It is an On-Demand bus service test available at a six mile radius around the Rockville and Glenmont Metro stations. Riders use an APP on their phone to request bus service in a defined geographic area

Old Business & Action Item Updates:

a. Pedestrian Safety Letter: Chair Jelen reported that a group of WUDAC members were identifying safety hot spots in Wheaton and he would be drafting a Pedestrian Safety letter

b. Wheaton Safety Task Force: Luisa led a discussion on the task force. She gave a brief history of the group to the audience. They haven't met in over 6 months and wanted to discuss the need to meet again or not. WUDAC members stressed that the concerns haven't gone away but that the public should identify concerns to make any meeting useful. There was discussion about whether the task force should be independent or a part of WUDAC. Lt.Ormsby from the 4th District Police gave a crime update and mentioned an Alcohol Task Force initiative that they deployed in the CBD. It was also noted during the discussion that the public needs better access to crime data. Another big concern was the WMATA garage and that an action plan needs to be developed by WMATA

c. Town Plaza Meeting: Chair Jelen reported on a meeting with StonebridgeCarras on the new town plaza. He turned to Jane Mahaffie of StonebridgeCarras to give details. They met on Friday to go over the design and aesthetics of the plaza, including issues of connectivity, staging, lighting, landscaping and signage. Arts and Humanities Council will be managing the Art. They will be working with Nori Sato and wish to identify local artists to work with Nori. Pope Farms has bid on the landscaping plantings. Discussion followed on connectivity to Westfield, safety and closure of Reddie Drive.

d. Retreat: While waiting for CE Elrich to arrive Chair Jelen updated the audience on our WUDAC retreat and our interest in Pop Ups.

Dialogue with County Executive Marc Elrich: Chair Jelen led a question and answer session with CE Elrich. Some of the topics covered were Pedestrian Safety, Administrative support for Wheaton Redevelopment and our A & E District, the need for an Arts/Cultural Facility, vacant store fronts and increased civic/open space.

Mr. Elrich stated that our tight budget limits some initiatives on safety but there are things we can do now. He noted the need for crosswalks not just at signals but also areas of high pedestrian traffic. Better striping is needed and not just when road repaved. Also need to get State to cordon around central urban district for a 25 mile speed limit. He stated that he has gotten a good response from SHA on cooperation between MCDOT and SHA for road safety.

When asked about an Arts/Cultural Facility he reminded everyone that it was his recommendation that the Strathmore Center should have been in Wheaton. There is no economic benefit to where it was located. As for Wheaton he thought the space behind the Park & Planning building would be ideal

In response to future development Elrich stated that developers take care of their own properties, that there was a lack of commercial property development. Developers are shrinking space and people are holding property for big development. They don't want small projects. Elrich stated that he felt it was a mistake for the County to insist ground floor be retail. Not everything has to be mixed use. Small

businesses can't afford to go into a high rise as the rent per square foot is expensive. You can think about rezoning Wheaton. He will have an incubator program to reimagine space in strip centers. He wants to organize Small business assistance centers where entrepreneurs can go for training and support. He is also working to outlaw predatory leasing. He also noted the big need for affordable housing. Too much is being marketed to millennials at high rent. Millennials won't be millennials forever and will need more affordable accommodations when they start families.

Other comments from CE Elrich included:

Support to close Reddie Drive on weekends to support programs.

Can not endorse opportunity zones as they are a bleed on tax revenue and hurt affordable housing.

Recognizes that Merchants need parking and this may be a conflict with enlarging Green Space.

Pop Ups are a great way for a business to test their concept before committing to retail space.

The need to streamline the Permitting Office. We are going to benchmark our service to other Counties to see what works.

Work more flexibility where appropriate into the Building Code.

Omar Lazo, WUDAC member and owner of Los Chorros, brought to Mr. Elrich a concern that Avalon Bay is charging residents so much for parking that those residents are using space in the County Lot for parking, thus taking away spaces for business patrons. He felt that Avalon Bay was violating their responsibility to provide parking for their residents. Mr. Elrich said he would look into the problem.

Javier Solis asked about the requirements for the rental of the retail space in the new P&P building. Al Roshdieh from MCDOT stated that there will be space for restaurant and retail and specs will be published soon.

Adjourn: 8:44pm