

What's Next for Wheaton: A Community & Decision Makers Forum

Key Take-Aways and Tasks Ahead

On July 18, 2018 the Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee (WUDAC) organized a public decision makers forum that attracted more than 120 officials and community members. To prepare for the forum, WUDAC drafted a statement of key issues, conducted a survey and held a public meeting to get input from the community. The survey results, issue paper, and forum presentation are posted online. This document summarizes key take-aways and points of consensus that members of WUDAC felt were made at the decision makers forum. Together, these documents provide a guide to issues of concern to the Wheaton community and priorities for action moving forward.

CREATING CIVIC SPACES IN THE URBAN CENTER

It was generally agreed that the county should explore the possibility of turning the undeveloped portion of Lot 13 where an apartment building was planned (but will not be built) into a park until a new plan is developed for this prime site in the heart of the urban district. Surface parking will not be needed once the underground lot is open.

The idea of creating pop-up (temporary) parks in and around Wheaton and on Westfield property was met with enthusiastic support from the Parks & Planning Department and the Westfield corporate representative.

Unanimous support was stated for the proposed Wheaton Arts and Cultural Facility, which could be located in the unused part of Lot 13. It was also discussed that this physical infrastructure could provide both a civic/gathering space and space for administrative support for the Arts and Cultural District.

CONNECTIVITY – PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL

There was general agreement that the state highways that pass through the Wheaton Urban District and its current lack of walkability/bikeability are important barriers to creating the kind of community Wheaton residents and business want. Addressing these issues will require coordination with state authorities as well as county agencies. This collaboration is vital to Wheaton's future.

Participants agreed that the new development in Wheaton presents an opportunity to improve the connectivity between Westfield Wheaton and the downtown area. This will also require collaboration between Westfield, WMATA and state and county authorities.

As a result of the recognition of these issues by the decision makers and several pedestrian fatalities in and around Wheaton over the summer, WUDAC is engaging with The Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee (PPTSAC) which is focusing on Wheaton pedestrian safety issues. Elected representatives are paying attention for now.

ADMINISTRATION & ACCOUNTABILITY

Forum participants recognized that there is no sole responsible authority steering the re-development of Wheaton. This need should be addressed by the County, even as citizens and WUDAC continue to keep Wheaton in the forefront of decision makers minds.

Participants also noted that when the office/town plaza project is complete, there will be a need for resources to support programming in the new town center.

WUDAC Members at time of Forum:

Residential Representatives
William (Bill) Jelen
Chelsea Johnson
Dan Thompson
Ali Oliver-Krueger, Vice Chair
Chamber of Commerce Representatives
Mirza Donegan
Omar Lazo
Small Business Representatives
Leah Haygood, CHAIR
Megan Remo
Large Business Representative
William Moore
MCCAB Representative
Ron Franks