

Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee

Online meeting via Zoom

Tuesday June 9, 2020

Members Present: Bill Jelen, Chair; Stuart Amos, Jim Epstein, Chris Pyon, Leah Haygood, Crystal Myers, Omar Lazo, James Mensah, Mariela Garcia-Colberg

Staff Present: Luisa Montero-Diaz, Mid-County RSC Director, Shawn Morris, Aide; Kevin Simpson, Jake Adler, Joe Callaway, WUD Operations Manager

Guests: Dr. Earl Stoddard, Director, Office of Emergency Management & Homeland Security; Margaret Rifkin, Art Boyars, Del. Jared Solomon, Goyer Roberts, Duffie Companies, Andrew Gagliano, Mair-Warner, Neil Greenberger, Judy Tankersley, Mensah Adjogah.

Call to Order: 6:33pm by Chair Jelen

Minutes Review: Both the March and May Meeting Minutes drafts were reviewed. Motions were made and passed to approve both without changes

Presentation: County's Recovery Vision and Plan

Dr. Stoddard, who is leading the recovery effort in the County, led a discussion on the County's plan to recover from the COVID crisis. Reopening is part of recovery but is just a start. We still must monitor cases while dealing with economic impact. Some issues of concern going forward will be child care, evictions, employment, classroom education, telework and weighing health disparities in relation to income and race.

On July 25th, Courts will reconvene and people will start to face the eviction process. Also, decisions must be made about school instruction and the safety protocols involved. Dr. Stoddard shared a County organizational chart related to managing this crisis. He noted that as of June 1st we are in Phase One of recovery. By tomorrow they hope to release what Phases Two and Three will look like. They hope to be able to coordinate this with PG County and DC. The next steps will depend on new case count and acute bed utilization. Down County has higher caseload than Up County. They are working with hospitals to increase beds. Takoma Park Adventist is bringing 75 beds into service. Dr. Stoddard then gave an overview of what to expect in Phase Two but noted caution is needed because 14 States saw new highs in cases. WUDAC member discussion followed. Some areas of concern included changes to dashboard methodology, environmental sustainability, and case management by zip code. Other questions centered around business compliance with guidelines, better coordination between County and State standards and use of WhatsApp or other methods to get information to minority communities. A WUDAC member questioned outreach efforts to small business landlords and potential evictions there.

Dr. Stoddard also mentioned a County website businesses could access to order PPE. Member discussion then turned to the need to draft a letter to the County concerning racial equity with regards to this pandemic. Chair Jelen will work on a draft. Mariela and Leah agreed to assist.

Community Concerns: Del. Jared Solomon gave brief remarks on State level action during the pandemic.

He noted the General Assembly is out of session but trying to do oversight on Governor. They are pressing the issues of housing and connecting residents to County resources. He touched on issues of Unemployment insurance and unemployment case backlog, PPP, and childcare and addressed member questions on testing.

Reports:

a. Chamber of Commerce: Omar Lazo, on behalf of the Wheaton & Kensington Chamber, reported on a meeting earlier in the day. Much of the meeting was spent planning a Virtual Awards Event to be held June 24th. This will replace the Community Awards Dinner that was postponed back in April. He mentioned that they also discussed County efforts to help small business, specifically the closure of streets to promote outside dining and the lifting of bans on alcohol sales to go. He also noted that Tracy Furman was re-elected as Mayor of Kensington. James Mensah, on behalf of the Chamber, detailed efforts by the Chamber to apply for PPP and PHEG funds.

b. Mid-County RSC/WUD: RSC Director Luisa Montero-Diaz gave a brief update on Revitalization. The building is 99% complete, just working on Punch List. The pavers are down and the canopy is up for the performance area. The keys should be turned over in July, move-ins begin in August.

She also touched on food insecurity in the County, especially in zip codes 20902, 20904, and 20906. The BlackRock Center for the Arts has been turned into a consolidation area for community needs, repackaging donated essential items that will be distributed to large communities and homebound individuals. BlackRock partners with several organizations to create greater access to essential items for children, families and seniors impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hughes United Methodist Church has been helping in our area.

Joe Callaway then updated WUDAC on the operations of the Clean and Safe teams. The safe team is not working at all. The Clean team is working reduced hours. They've set up two teams who work alternate weeks, 3-4 days a week and 5 hours a day. Trash, recycle, litter are the only duties authorized. Some contract services are being performed. Joe noted that Westfield has been picking up shopping carts and IHOP has adopted the planters on University Blvd. In response to questions, he noted some gang related concerns about graffiti. Luisa mentioned that there was still no date set to kick off the new Town Plaza but did note that WUD, Park and Planning and the County have been meeting and that those meetings are turning away from construction issues and more towards organizational issues.

c. Wheaton Gateway: Goyer Roberts from the Duffie Companies gave an update on the status of the Gateway project. The mattress building will soon be demolished. They have submitted concept plans to the County and received feedback. The design process is underway and they hope to submit a Sketch Plan later this year.

Old Business:

a. Virtual Taste: Chair Jelen remarked that he liked walking the streets Sunday for the Taste kick off. The Nighthawks have recorded songs for the Taste, Sidney will be releasing one per day. Jim Epstein noted that the Wheaton Arts Parade showed its support through their Yarn Bombs.

b. Chamber Awards Vote:

Outstanding Business Leader: James Mensah

Best Property Improvement: Chuck Levin's

New Business:

a. Nominations for FY21 Officers: Nominations will be needed by our July meeting

Other:

Luisa reminded everyone to not forget the Census and to use your networks to spread the word. House calls to collect info will begin in August.

Adjourn: 8:34pm