



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

March 22, 2023

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-56 -
Amendment to the FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program for Wheaton Arts and
Cultural Center

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #23-56 – Amendment to the FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program for Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center – has a strong likelihood to advance racial equity and social justice in the arts and cultural sector, while also providing equitable access to a public good that is enjoyed in other parts of the County. This project will also increase the availability of affordable housing in and around the Wheaton Central Business District plan area.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center project provides funding for site evaluation and design to build a new arts and cultural facility that will sit within the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District. The mission of the project is to create a center to serve the artistically varied and active arts community and to cultivate the diversity of the arts in Wheaton by enhancing the cultural and educational opportunities for community participation in the arts¹. The new arts and cultural facility will be co-located with an affordable housing development. Supplemental Appropriation #23-56 will fund the County's share of the schematic design and the sketch plan submission to M-NCPPC. Montgomery Housing Partnership (MHP), the County's affordable housing development partner will be submitting a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) application in May

¹ RESJ Template Responses. January 2023.

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-56—
Amendment to the FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program for Wheaton Arts and
Cultural Center

March 22, 2023

Page 2 of 4

2023 and design is required prior to submitting the LIHTC application. A project amendment has also been requested in the FY24 budget submission². The updated project schedule shows construction of the facility occurring in FY27 and beyond.

- III. **ANALYSIS:** ORESJ developed a Capital Improvements Program Budget Equity Tool (CIP BET) and Guidance Manual³ to help stakeholders in Montgomery County incorporate a racial equity lens into CIP project development and resource decisions. Best practices for using a racial equity tool, such as the CIP BET, suggest that the tool should be used early and often in project development and involve a diverse set of project stakeholders—including community members and intended beneficiaries of the project. The Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center project was reviewed during the FY24 review process using the CIP BET framework and received five stars, indicating the project *strongly* aligns with Montgomery County’s policy to reduce and eliminate racial disparities and other inequities. Within the context of the CIP BET framework, we offer several observations for consideration:

What racial disparities or inequities in Montgomery County does this project seek to reduce or eliminate?

In 2018, the County engaged a consultant to conduct an arts and cultural feasibility study. The first phase of the feasibility study produced preliminary findings and recommendations for a new arts and cultural center in Wheaton⁴. The second phase of the feasibility study produced a programming and business plan for the envisioned center⁵. During the study, the consultant engaged the community in a robust engagement phase. Activities included one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions, town hall meetings, e-surveys, arts organizations engagements, and site visits⁶. Many of the engagement activities were conducted in English and Spanish. More recently, the Department of General Services (DGS) provided the Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee with a project update⁷.

² Recommended FY24 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program Transmittal Memorandum from County Executive Marc Elrich. Available at:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OMB/Resources/Files/omb/pdfs/fy24/ciprec/CEMemo.pdf>

³ Office of Racial Equity & Social Justice. Guidance Manual, FY24 Capital Improvements Program Budget Equity Tool. Available at:

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ORE/Resources/Files/CIP_EquityTool_101322_PS2.pdf

⁴ Gotesman, V. and Koberstein, T. Arts and Cultural Facilities Feasibility Study, Findings & Preliminary Recommendations. Available at:

<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/DGS/Resources/Files/OPD/WheatonArtsFacilityStudyFindingPreliminaryFINAL.pdf>

⁵ Gotesman, V. and Koberstein, T. Arts and Cultural Facilities Feasibility Study, Programming and Business Plan. Available at:

<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/DGS/Resources/Files/OPD/WheatonArtsFacilityProgrammingBusinessPlanFinalJune%202019.pdf>

⁶ Project page, including a record of community outreach activities: Available at:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DGS/OPD/WheatonArtsandCulturalCenter.html>

⁷ DGS presentation to WUDAC on February 14, 2023. Available at:

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DGS/Resources/Files/OPD/Wheaton%20Arts%20Presentation%20WUDAC%2023_02_14_23.pdf

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-56—
Amendment to the FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program for Wheaton Arts and
Cultural Center

March 22, 2023

Page 3 of 4

The study found that while many spaces exist throughout the County, there was no dedicated space for arts or cultural activities or performances in Wheaton. The results of the study indicated the following needs: an arts facility; space to professionally develop artists and arts organizations; studio space, performance space, creative space; and space where the community can gather and participate in the arts. Family programming, programming for children, teens, and young adults were also identified as a need. The study was used to produce a program of requirements (POR), which was completed in FY20.

ORESJ has previously analyzed racial inequities impacting the public arts field. The full analysis can be found in REIA 22-67 Public Arts Trust, available here: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-67.pdf>. The REIA points to research suggesting that a focus on empowering oppressed groups and redistributing resources has the greatest potential of advancing racial equity. By deploying resources to Wheaton to develop an arts and cultural center, the County will provide both resources and opportunities to reduce racial inequities in the arts for an underserved population.

This project also will increase the number of affordable housing units in the County as MHP will partner on the project to create affordable housing on the premises. The County Council recently passed Bill 33-22 – Capital Improvements Program – Affordable Housing Feasibility Study – Required. DGS is now required to provide the Council with an affordable housing feasibility study for certain capital projects. Although the Wheaton Arts and Cultural center project was initiated before the Bill was enacted, it illustrates the potential for co-location of County facilities and affordable housing to reduce racial disparities in housing insecurity, such as rent burden and homelessness for Black and Latinx residents⁸. ORESJ has previously reviewed housing policy, including the historical and contemporary racial inequities shaping housing insecurity and homelessness in several REIAs. Our work can be reviewed in REIA 22-60 – Affordable Living Quarters, available here: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-60.pdf>.

How does this project address the racial disparities and inequities you described?

The Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center will be located in the Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan area—placing the center within a central transportation hub and crossroads. The Wheaton population is diverse, with over 75% of residents being non-white and 45% of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latino⁹. The study also found income disparities in

⁸ Peña, J., *Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement, Office of Legislative Oversight, Bill 33-22: Capital Improvements Program – Affordable Housing Feasibility Study – Required*. Available at: Available at:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/2022/Bill33-22.pdf>.

⁹ American Community Survey. 2021 Demographic and Housing Estimates – Wheaton CDP. Available at:

<https://data.census.gov/table?q=DP05&g=160XX00US2483775&tid=ACSDP5Y2021.DP05>

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-56—
Amendment to the FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program for Wheaton Arts and
Cultural Center

March 22, 2023

Page 4 of 4

the area, with 61% of residents within a 20-minute drive time radius earning less than \$75,000. A link was noted in arts participation levels and available discretionary money, highlighting the need for subsidy programs to bridge the gap between arts activities and audience affordability.

Does this project (including its development, construction, or implementation) have the potential to create any unintended consequences?

Once the project nears completion and an operator is selected, there are several considerations that could affect the center’s ability to reduce racial inequities in the arts. These challenges were identified during the planning stages by the consultant¹⁰. The challenges identified include:

- Identifying a qualified facility operator with programming experience to activate the goals of the arts incubator
- Establishing a philanthropic program for the facility to cover the operating expenses and to fulfill the annual budget requirement
- Maintaining an active calendar of events
- Creating an equitable and inclusive use-policy that will allow access for a diversity of users
- Establishing and implementing methods for measuring the impact of the facility on Wheaton artists and the community overall

The consultant noted, that as the project progresses, the facility “must consider Wheaton’s Spanish-Speaking population and explore opportunities for reaching the target audience base when developing new programming”. While outside the scope of this REIA, a racial equity lens should continuously be applied throughout the development process, especially during the RFP process for operator selection and for arts and cultural programming and operations of the facility.

cc: David Dise, Director, Department of General Services
Robin Riley, Director, Department of Recreation
Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive

¹⁰Gotesman, V. and Koberstein, T. Arts and Cultural Facilities Feasibility Study, Programming and Business Plan. Available at: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/DGS/Resources/Files/OPD/WheatonArtsFacilityProgrammingBusinessPlanFinalJune%202019.pdf>.