

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMERCE CABINET  
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2021  
MEETING MINUTES**

Attendance

**Commerce Cabinet Members:**

Kelly Groff  
Tiffany Ward  
Adam Ortiz  
Anthony Featherstone  
Aseem Nigam  
Ash Shetty  
Casey Anderson  
Christopher Conklin  
Mitra Pedeem  
Richard Madaleno  
Benjamin Wu

**Guests:**

Judy Costello  
Marlene Michaelson  
Grace Denno  
Melanie Wenger  
Laurie Boyer  
Richard Madaleno

**MCEDC Staff:**

Ben Seigel  
Bill Tompkins  
Nadia Khan

*MCEDC President & CEO Ben Wu, the Commerce Cabinet Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm. A quorum of the Commerce Cabinet members was present. Ms. Khan was designated to take minutes.*

**Call to Order: Ben Wu, Commerce Cabinet Chair**

Mr. Wu opened the meeting by noting that he was pleased that the Commerce Cabinet members were able to gather in- person for the July Commerce Cabinet meeting in Wheaton, hosted by the Department of Permitting Services. For members' convenience, this September meeting and likely the next November meeting would be held virtually.

Mr. Wu indicated that the majority of the day's meeting would be devoted to reviewing the Montgomery County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan being developed by MCEDC, as a result of the County Council passage of Bill 10-21 earlier this year. Mr. Wu provided an overview of the legislative mandate for the MCEDC-led Comprehensive Economy Strategy (CES) to guide the vision for economic development in the county. Mr. Wu provided a timeline for the production of the CES and expressed a desire for the plan to be inclusive in nature. He indicated that he wanted to make sure the

positive work of the Cabinet members would be reflected in the strategy and would like their input to help shape the plan.

Mr. Wu moved to approve the meeting minutes from the prior Commerce Cabinet meeting held on July 9, 2021. Mr. Nigam motioned for approval; Mr. Shetty and Mr. Ortiz seconded the motion.

### **Initiative Update: Montgomery County Comprehensive Economic Strategy**

Mr. Tompkins presented on the core requirements of the CES as outlined in Bill 10-20 including economic development metrics and desired plan outcomes. Additionally, Mr. Tompkins identified government and community partners that will be consulted as the plan is developed. He emphasized that the plan is designed to be comprehensive in nature and will include traditional economic development metrics in addition to broader issues. Additionally, he noted the intention to address racial equity, social justice, and environmental issues throughout the plan as core values and not as stand-alone chapters.

Mr. Tompkins noted that engagement with Cabinet members is already underway with MCEDC having begun to consult with MNCPPC to understand relevant research that has been done, as well as understanding the Planning Department's capacity to conduct additional research as may be needed to support the plan. Additionally, MCEDC met with DEP to understand the economic development aspects of the Department's work on the County's Climate Action plan. Other meetings have been scheduled with the MCEDC Board and Visit Montgomery, and a SWOT analysis is under development. Mr. Tompkins noted that much of the underlying analysis had already been done, and MCEDC has core competency in the SWOT analysis.

Mr. Tompkins said the main request for the Commerce Cabinet is to provide input on the preparation of the report to ensure the plan is credible, actionable, in alignment, and will be supported. He opened the floor to cabinet members to provide any feedback or top-of-mind issues as well as concerns.

A question was asked to clarify whether the CES had a four-year time horizon. Mr. Wu clarified yes but that there would be an opportunity every two years for an update. Mr. Wu reiterated that it is critical to have input from all departments so that their ongoing activities could be included, such as Thrive 2050 report or the Climate Action Plan. There is a desire to capture all of that work.

Mr. Wu requested Mr. Anderson to provide specific comments regarding Thrive 2050. Mr. Anderson stated he was pleased to see that climate change and racial equity will be treated as core values throughout the entire plan, rather than as separate, stand-alone chapters. He noted that the same approach was taken with Thrive 2050 in terms of economic competitive, social equity, and climate change. The most challenging issues identified by Mr. Anderson was synchronizing the timelines for both plans since Thrive 2050 is on a thirty-year timeline while the CES is on a four-year timeline; as such, some thought would need to be given as to how to adopt ideas around land use, transportation, and public infrastructure in the CES timeframe. Mr. Anderson noted that this could be tricky but not that difficult; one way to think about this would be to align the County's economic development plan with the Planning Department's day-to-day work.

Mr. Tompkins noted that the talent component of the CES would be complex; none of the workforce development work will happen quickly. Some thought has also been given to taking advantage of the nearby Amazon HQ2 project. Mr. Wu noted that there are levels of complexity to the issues that will be

addressed in the CES, but the goal is to create as much of a unified consensus document as possible to help with business attraction and answer questions for attraction prospects. If agreement cannot be found, the CES seeks to layout identified options for consideration.

Mr. Madaleno asked for further clarification around the timeline of the plan after the initial year. Mr. Wu confirmed that in the next two years, an update with potential modifications would be presented to the County Council as required by the statute. He also clarified that the initial plan will be presented to the County Executive prior to the deadline to solicit input at an early stage.

Mr. Madaleno asked how the work of the MCEDC-driven Economic Advisory Panel (EAP) will fit with the CES. Mr. Tompkins explained that the EAP looked at a number of past studies and provided short-term guidance in setting priorities for MCEDC, and that while the recommendations from the EAP may be very relevant and consistent with the CES plan, they will not be identical. Mr. Wu further clarified that the EAP and CES are two distinct and separate exercises with different missions. The EAP process began in early 2021 and is chaired by Norm Augustine and DeRionne Pollard. Mr Wu noted that the purpose of the EAP is to review past strategies to create a consensus document on action priorities. The charge for the EAP was not to be comprehensive, but rather to set priorities for MCEDC; meanwhile the CES is broader in scope, takes a more holistic view of economic development, has a statutory requirement, and is designed to be the official document for the county. There could be some alignment between the two initiatives in certain areas, but Mr. Wu noted again that the EAP was not designed to be a comprehensive strategy.

Mr. Madaleno asked if MCEDC is looking at national models of comprehensive economy strategies to incorporate best practices. Mr. Tompkins indicated that other models have been reviewed including Washington, D.C. and Fairfax County to get ideas; many plans are not great and moreover, every local economy is different. Mr. Tompkins noted that the Montgomery County CES from 2016 was fine but that structure and format would probably not be followed. He noted that MCEDC will be adjusting the themes, but if there is one out there, then the organization will look to borrow best practices. Mr. Wu noted that regional peers have established plans including Baltimore City, and that MCEDC has looked at other regional and national plans. MCEDC is bound somewhat by the council legislation but beyond that, there is a lot of latitude to shape the strategy.

Mr. Seigel, who helped support the development of the Baltimore City strategy, noted that many regions are looking seriously at equity within their economic plans and shared a link to the recent Baltimore plan as an example.

Mr. Featherstone noted that WorkSource Montgomery will be drafting and publishing a workforce development plan from January to June 2022 and will look to rely on the CES to help build the plan.

Mr. Nigam noted that his department submits a five-year plan to HUD that accompanies its yearly action plan. Mr. Wu noted that this was an excellent point and if any agencies had existing plans to please share them so that MCEDC could capture the relevant information for use as a baseline.

Mr. Conklin stated that the CIP is a six-year program and is in the midst of being updated. This could be a challenge for the CES because what is in the plan is already developed. He noted that there was not a lot of movement in the investment plan for transportation. Mr. Tompkins indicated that the CIP work can be incorporated into the CES with minor tweaks if necessary. Mr. Wu noted that the CES will not solve all county issues, but the goal would be to create a holistic approach to economic development in the

county. Mr. Wu indicated that he would send out a request to all departments with past reports to create a repository.

### **Initiative Update: Unified Impact Project on Downtown Silver Spring**

Mr. Seigel gave a status update and presented on two of the four activities for the Unified Impact Project in Downtown Silver Spring:

Regarding the Craft Brewery/Food Arts District, Mr. Siegel noted that a budget of \$104,300 was approved through the Department of Transportation. This Phase One funding will go towards sidewalk improvements/extensions and wayfinding signs to better connect the three breweries. Additionally, funding will upgrade lighting for the CSX underpass. Funding for Phase Two improvements is pending per the federal appropriations earmark made by Congressman Raskin. The funding is awaiting final congressional action. Phase Two would support additional sidewalk and wayfinding improvements and also support pop-up space to allow farm breweries to participate in the project, as well as marketing and promotion with Visit Montgomery. Phase Three of this project would involve a Brewery Workforce Initiative with customized workforce training for key hard-to-fill positions; this effort would leverage the capacity of WorkSource Montgomery and create additional customized training positions by potentially tapping into ARPA funds.

Regarding the Climate Change/Clean Tech Hub, Mr. Sigel noted that there were two tracks to this work. Track One is looking at creating a climate-focused business and workforce center at either Inventa Towers or another location in conjunction with NOAA. The hub would be modeled on the Collier initiative in Ashville that is affiliated with NOAA. The center would be a location for Montgomery College-based partnerships around climate related internships and jobs. Mr. Sigel noted that the conversations with NOAA have been very positive and open to collaboration. Track Two is a \$6m pilot program requiring congressional authorization to create regional centers; there will be three climate services hub, potentially including one in Silver Spring.

### **New Business**

Following Mr. Seigel's presentation, Mr. Wu asked if there was any other business. There was a brief discussion of an upcoming confidential business development project and the desire to assemble the planning and permitting teams to fast track a potential retention/attraction effort in Montgomery County.

Mr. Madaleno asked if the meetings could be scheduled for a longer time. Mr. Wu noted that a decision was made to shorten the length of meetings due to concerns about Zoom-fatigue and with respect to the busy schedules of the Commerce Cabinet members; however, meetings could be lengthened moving forward as needed. Mr. Wu noted that a longer meeting might be appropriate for the November Commerce Cabinet meeting which will include the last opportunity for a continued dialogue on the CES.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:10 PM.