

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMERCE CABINET
FRIDAY, JANUARY 14, 2021
MEETING MINUTES**

Attendance

Commerce Cabinet Members:

Aseem Nigam
Mitra Pedoem
Richard Madaleno
Benjamin Wu
Jeremy Criss
Kelly Groff
Christopher Conklin
Ash Shetty
David Dise
Anthony Featherstone
Casey Anderson
Richard Madaleno

Guests:

Judy Costello
Adrianna Hochberg
Jake Weismann
Laurie Boyer
Grace Denno
Marlene Michaelson
Tom Lewis
Brian Anleu
Gene Smith

MCEDC Staff:

Bill Tompkins
Nadia Khan
Ben Siegel
Phil Singerman

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.

Mr. Wu opened the meeting with a request to approve the minutes from the prior meeting. Mr. Dise made a motion to approve which was seconded by Mr. Madeleno.

Initiative Update: Montgomery County Economic Development Strategic Plan

Mr. Wu provided a brief timeline for the approval of the Economic Development Strategic Plan which was confirmed by Ms. Michaelson. A draft of the plan was submitted to both the County Executive and

the County Council on December 31, 2021. The County Executive will review the draft and offer comments by January 31, 2022. Thereafter, the Council will have until April 15, 2022 to ratify the plan.

Mr. Wu thanked the Commerce Cabinet for providing input during the development of the draft plan. He then turned the meeting over to Mr. Tompkins to delve deeper into the working draft.

Mr. Tompkins provided introductory comments about the Strategic Plan. He indicated that it focused on four main categories of recommendations: (1) jobs and entrepreneurship; (2) education and workforce attainment; (3) transportation and housing, and (4) an inclusive economy.

Additionally, Mr. Tompkins drew attention to the Appendix which references source materials. Mr. Tompkins noted that MCEDC intentionally sought to create a source guide that would allow a reader to reference other County strategic plans that had already been created on specific economic development components to allow a reader to find additional information. Mr. Tompkins also noted that in the Recommended Key Stakeholders section that the RACI (Responsible/Accountable/Consulted/Informed) chart was MCEDC's first attempt at determining which partners would help implement the plan. Mr. Tompkins confirmed that the chart would be updated during the review period and as partner buy-in is solicited.

Mr. Wu noted that the Economic Development Strategic Plan was designed to be complementary to the Economic Advisory Panel's Connecting the Dots report and other action plans. Mr. Wu also noted that per the legislative intent, MCEDC focused on a holistic approach recognizing that economic development is not the work of just one department; but rather it requires all departments to work together along with non-profits, businesses, and academic partners. The Strategic Plan will allow all these entities to have a roadmap to engage economic development at a higher level.

Mr. Tompkins advised that just because the Strategic Plan identifies certain target industries, that does not mean that other industries would not be pursued. For example, non-profits are important and will have a path of their own. Additionally, MCEDC had had early discussions with Ms. Groff about travel and tourism, which is incredibly important; however, it was determined that sector needed its own plan because it is that important, and if it was addressed in the current plan, MCEDC would not have done it justice. Instead, the plan highlights areas that the County can focus collectively on, while acknowledging that other industries will be addressed in other ways. Having said that, if there are specific things left out of this plan that would make a big difference, those should be raised. With that, Mr. Tompkins opened the floor up to further comments from the Commerce Cabinet. There was none.

Mr. Madaleno noted that Jake Weissmann would be leading the effort to consolidate comments from the County Executive.

Introduction of Tom Lewis, Office of the County Executive

Mr. Madaleno introduced Tom Lewis as the County's newly hired business development ombudsmen. Mr. Wu noted Mr. Lewis' past Montgomery County work with Johns Hopkins University, from expanding the JHU Medical System and working to support educational collaborations in support of the Amazon HQ2 bid. Additionally, Mr. Wu noted that Mr. Lewis served as Chief of Staff to the Speaker of the House and was a Peace Corps volunteer. Mr. Lewis will also work to develop a life sciences research corridor at the newly named North Bethesda Metro station. Mr. Wu noted that he had worked with Mr. Lewis for

over twenty years, was delighted with the news about the County Executive's hire, and offered the Commerce Cabinet as a resource to Mr. Lewis in his new position.

Initiative Update: Unified Impact Project Downtown Silver Spring & Selection of Future Location

Mr. Wu noted that the Commerce Cabinet had been working diligently on a showcase location project in downtown Silver Spring. He wanted to provide a Silver Spring update and begin the conversation about transitioning to a new location for Commerce Cabinet attention. With that, Mr. Wu turned the meeting over to Mr. Siegel.

Mr. Siegel noted that good progress had been made on the downtown Silver Spring project. The Arts and Brewery District effort, which is a focused partnership with DOT that includes sidewalk, signage, and lighting improvements to better connect the three breweries, has progressed. Phase One funds have been allocated within the MCDOT budget to begin the initial phase of this work. The first phase included the Georgia Avenue CSX lights (under tunnel) upgrade which is completed and has resulted in a much more well-lit area. The first phase also includes extending the Astrolab sidewalk, design work to enhance outdoor seating capacity, and establishing new wayfinding signs. Phase Two funds is currently awaiting congressional approval. Congressman Raskin has requested a \$300,000 appropriation, which has passed the House and is before the Senate.

Additionally, Mr. Siegel provided an update on the NOAA climate tech hub effort. He noted that conversations were taking place with Senator Van Hollen's office to create a hub that would incorporate NOAA's climate data to inform local redevelopment projects. The next step is to put together a more comprehensive strategy and business plan.

Mr. Wu noted that even as the Commerce Cabinet transitions its attention to another location, it will not abandon its efforts in downtown Silver Spring especially as the federal \$300,000 Phase Two request is ongoing through the congressional appropriations process.

Mr. Wu noted that as the Commerce Cabinet considers a second location, there has been a general consensus from members to select Wheaton as the next site. Mr. Wu requested that Mr. Siegel do some preliminary groundwork to provide a sense of potential projects in Wheaton that could generate impact.

Mr. Siegel then provided a brief overview of Wheaton in terms of its economic development designations, downtown business district, and business statistics. Mr. Wu opened the floor for comments about the Wheaton site.

Mr. Anderson noted that a better understanding of the Wheaton Westfield redevelopment plan would be helpful considering several changes in control of the mall. Additionally, Mr. Anderson mentioned a forthcoming meeting with WMATA to better understand the real estate development potential for several Red Line sites.

Mr. Dize mentioned the housing development project at the intersection of Veirs Mill Road and University Boulevard. He noted that the County is considering adding a 20,000 square foot facility for arts and culture as part of the development effort intended to highlight Wheaton's diversity. The County is attempting to find a place for this project within the CIP.

Mr. Conklin mentioned several transportation efforts that could be considered in Wheaton including the eastern terminus of the BRT line, preliminary engineering work with WMATA on shorter term bus priority, and pedestrian safety. Mr. Madaleno noted that traffic patterns in Wheaton make it difficult to develop a pedestrian-friendly environment; though the area is phenomenal, it has not been fully activated. Mr. Madaleno noted that it would be great to activate the space near the parking garages to benefit County and MNCPPC employees while also improving the environment along Triangle Lane.

Mr. Anderson mentioned the additional need to address homelessness around Wheaton Plaza and requested clarification of the County's posture. A discussion about County's abilities to address this issue fully during the pandemic ensued.

Mr. Wu requested that Commerce Cabinet members voice any objections they may have to proceed with Wheaton as the next showcase location. There no objections were raised.

Other Commerce Cabinet Initiatives

The Commerce Cabinet reviewed their other initiatives, including Customer Service, Marketing and Branding, and Regulatory Reform. Mr. Wu also noted an interest in utilizing the County' diversity and international population to increase global transactions in support of economic development. One recent successful Maryland model was Koreatown in Howard County. Mr. Wu indicated there is a desire to create a similar marketing and branding initiative in Montgomery County to highlight the significant presence of Asian businesses, specifically restaurants, with Visit Montgomery utilizing the launch of their MoCo Eats website. A proposal will be presented to the Montgomery County Executive for consideration of how to engage the community as an international destination.

Mr. Wu noted that the next Commerce Cabinet meeting will be in March.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 2:15 PM.