



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMERCE CABINET

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2020

MEETING MINUTES

Attendance

Commerce Cabinet Members:

Tiffany Ward
Marlene Michaelson
Aseem Nigam
Mitra Pedoeem
Christopher Conklin
Avinash G. Shetty
David E. Dise
Jeremy V. Criss
Adam Ortiz
Leonard Howie
Kelly Groff
Brian Anleu
Benjamin Wu
Rich Madaleno (Absent)

Guests:

Jerome Fletcher
Tina Benjamin
Judy Stephenson
Ron Daversa
Brandon Bedford

MCEDC Staff:

Bill Tompkins
Christy Blake

MCEDC President & CEO Ben Wu, the Commerce Cabinet Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm. A quorum of the Commerce Cabinet members was present. Ms. Blake was designated to take minutes.

Chair Update and Inaugural Meeting Recap

Chair Wu opened the meeting by welcoming back the Commerce Cabinet members. Chair Wu gave a recap of the inaugural meeting and the identified suggested initiatives for the Commerce Cabinet that came out of the meeting and subsequent follow-up with members.

Montgomery County Economic Climate 101

Brandon Bedford, Research and Policy Manager at MCEDC, gave a presentation on the County economy from 1999 to post-COVID. The presentation was requested by Mr. Adam Ortiz to provide the members with a fuller picture and historical data regarding the County's standing and economic competitiveness. Mr. Bedford's presentation contained a discussion on key economic indicators including County demographics, employment and job growth, commercial real estate trends, venture capital investment, and anticipated future trends.

There were several questions from the Commerce Cabinet members. Discussion highlights included:

- Mr. David Dise stated that the private sector is reporting that as telework increases they may be reassessing their real estate needs (office space). He noted that these questions are also being posed at the County level as well. Additionally, Mr. Dise asked the question about expected future trends the County/MCEDC may see for big box locations if the retail landscape pivots.
- Mr. Adam Ortiz stated that it is helpful to understand the weaknesses, competitiveness, and gaps between the County and our neighbors and asked Mr. Brandon Bedford for any advice the Commerce Cabinet members can take from his research. Mr. Bedford suggested the Commerce Cabinet members look at the Office of Legislative Oversight's comparative tax policy study.
- Mr. Jeremy Criss noted that the draft Thrive 2050 Report is going to the Planning Board this month. The OAG has recommended that vacant office buildings could be retrofitted into affordable housing units to meet the growing demand for housing. The OAG recommends these new residential units should incorporate the use of both Transferable Development Right TDRs and Building Lot Termination easements BLTs, and suggested we talk creatively about these vacant buildings.

Montgomery County Economic Revitalization Mission Area Update

With several County task forces and groups looking at near and long-term economic recovery recommendations, the Commerce Cabinet will be asked to play a role. Mr. Jerome Fletcher suggested that the Commerce Cabinet not get stuck in simply "admiring the problem" of the pandemic. Mr. Fletcher suggested that we need to tell our own story about our strengths and value. Mr. Fletcher provided an overview of recovery information coordination. Mr. Fletcher also stated that the County 4Business Report covers a lot of information that is relevant to the Commerce Cabinet and asked what the Commerce Cabinet can do to be part of those solutions. Chair Wu wants to see where we can execute those recommendations in the 4Business report and consider the economic recovery task force recommendations.

Potential Montgomery County Economic Development Customer Service Initiative

Improving customer service for economic development is one of the identified Commerce Cabinet priority initiatives. Chair Wu gave an introduction of Ms. Mitra Pedoeem to present on the process and findings of her Department of Permitting Services 90-day workplan to improve constituent services by focusing on the customer experience.

Ms. Pedoeem stated that the Department of Permitting Services knew that there was an issue with customer service perception and shared a presentation on the customer feedback plan for her department. Chair Wu stated that the Office of Procurement's customer service engagement can serve to help guide a greater Commerce Cabinet initiative.

Exploration of Other Potential Initiatives

In addition to the proposal of a customer service initiative, in addition to supporting economic recovery strategies and customer service, Chair Wu said that three additional Commerce Cabinet initiatives have also been raised. They include: developing a streamlined regulatory process for more efficient and effective economic development, highlighting initiatives to better market Montgomery County as a more friendly and successful place to do business, and spotlighting a revolving showcase location for the 14 Commerce Cabinet members to focus on for economic development improvement.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 3:08 pm.