

Council President Friedson and Councilmembers,

On behalf of the Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee (WUDAC) and the residents and businesses of the greater Wheaton-Glenmont area, I am Jim Epstein, the current chair, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony to you today.

We want to thank the County Executive, and encourage your support, for including a few of Wheaton's long standing priorities in this proposal which will help to provide multiple long term benefits for the community. These include the Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center, the buildout of the Park & Planning HQ retail space and the Amherst BIPPA bikeway.

In line with the County's stated prioritization of equity considerations, we cannot state strongly enough the importance of funding WUD's priorities. As one of the lower income population centers in our county, and one with the greatest cultural diversity, Wheaton merits "catch-up" investments in its infrastructure, arts commitments, and commercial vitality.

We also want to mention a few other projects in the 6th District that are nearby and integral to the area. They include Wheaton Regional Park improvements, the Glenmont Shopping Center development and the renovation of the 4D Police Department building.

Specifically,

- the proposed **Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center** was cited by the RESJ as "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." They continue, it "received five stars, indicating the project *strongly* aligns with Montgomery County's policy to reduce and eliminate racial disparities and other inequities." Additionally, the State, championed by our incredible District 18 delegation, supports this project by appropriating an additional \$1M to speed up the process.
- **"Retail Space" buildout**: WUDAC strongly applauds the inclusion of \$4M to convert the currently unused ~12,000 sq. ft. ground floor space of the M-NCPPC HQ building into a safe, "white box" space. This valuable space has remained an unused asset in the heart of our CBD for way too long and needs to be made safe for usage. The determination of the utilization of this space should allow for public input and as well as short-term and long-term usages. It should not be used as a component of the 4D Police station.
- **Police 4D building**: the current condition of the existing 4D Police station requires significant upgrades. WUDAC supports the temporary relocation of administration activities to an upper floor of the M-NCPPC HQ building. However, we do recommend a more robust conversation regarding the longer term renovation of the entire space, in addition to the HVAC replacement. This issue will continue to linger and the community and our police force deserves a better, healthy police station. Funding should be included to determine whether replacing the HVAC system or a complete rebuild is the most appropriate solution.

We appreciate your support for these issues and look forward to further dialogue related to the FY25 Budget as it affects the Wheaton Urban District, the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District, and the greater Wheaton Area.

On behalf of WUDAC, Thank you