



## **EAST COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD (ECCAB)**

### **Wednesday November 7, 2024 Meeting Summary**

**Board Members Present:** Fisseha Adugna, LaTonya Brooks, Radwan Chowdhury, BJ Dawkins, Rachel Evans, Roberta Goldberg, Metassebia Kefelegn, Len Newman, Mark Pharaoh, Susan Price, Calandra Tate Moore, Tina Oyeniya, Kimberly Price-Evans, and Dan Wilhelm. **Board Members Absent:** George Brown, Sheala Durant, Ken Flemmer, and Peter Myo Khin.

**Guests Present:** Police Commander Jason Cokinos, Commander David Smith, Police Lt. Gregory Chmiel, Erik Copeland, Eileen Finnegan, Councilmember Kristen Mink, Ed Weiler, Chris Wilhelm, Sisan Farag, Erik Coopeland.

**County Regional Office Staff Present:** Jewru Bandeh, Cicero Salles, and Ayanna King.

**Welcome and Introductions:** Since Chair Peter Myo Khin was not able to attend the meeting and Vice Chair Radwan Chowdhury arrived late, Secretary Dan Wilhelm chaired the meeting. The meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m. by acting chair Dan Wilhelm. Board members, government officials, and public members introduced themselves.

**Approval of Meeting Summary:** The meeting summary for the October 2, 2024 meeting was approved without any objections.

**Presentation/Discussion.** Susan Farag, Montgomery Council Legislative Analyst dealing with public safety, provided an updated presentation she had provided on October 28 to the Council Public Safety Committee entitled “Crime and Policing Update.” The presentation included the following information on a county-wide basis:

- For 2023, Maryland’s statewide crime rate is 4310 per 100,000 people but the rate in Montgomery County is lower at 3235. The highest rate occurred in Baltimore City (10, 515) and lowest in Kent County (359).
- During Covid and afterward violence increased across the nation. Much of that related to guns. Nationwide the increase started in 2020 and has returned to pre-pandemic levels. Montgomery County is running a year behind the national pattern and has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.
- So far crime is lower in 2024 compared with 2023 (-3% for crime against persons, -3.9% against property, and -21.3% against society, which includes drug offenses).
- Violent crime is down in 2024 so far: homicides down 46% (to 17 so far); aggravated assaults down 4%; rape down 13%; sex offenses down 19%;

carjacking down 44% (to 41 so far); and commercial robbery down 22%. While violent offenses have decreased, firearm rates have increased.

- For property crime, auto thefts and theft-from-auto are down in 2024 so far, but shoplifting is up by 18%.
- District 3 has the highest crime rate in the county at 5110 while the Rockville and Bethesda Districts are in the mid-upper 2000's. The Wheaton and Germantown districts are just above 3000 and the Gaithersburg district is just above 4000.
- Residents in Equity Focus Areas (EFAs) experience more crime. Some 44% of the dispatch calls go to EFAs, but they only make up 8% of the land mass and 27% of the population. A large percentage of District 3 is made up of EFAs.
- Countywide, police officer staffing is at 84.7% (701 vs 828) but when officers on "no duty" or "light duty" are factored out, the level drops to 77.5% (642). Police staffing is a well-known problem nationally and for the county. The county has taken steps to address the shortage. However, many police officers could be retiring in February 2025, after the improved benefits package kicks-in during January. The number who will retire is not known. The council will be asked to fund a staffing study to identify additional steps that could be taken.

Three Police officers followed Susan Farag's county-wide presentation with district-specific information. The officers were Commanders David Smith Police (District 4), Jason Cokinos (District 3), and Lt. Gregory Chmiel (District 3).

**Policed District 4:** The biggest issue is Fentanyl use and the effects from its use. Typically, users stay close to their supply source. Police know that which makes it easier to find the dealers. The department uses data to help identify problems and thus where to focus their limited resources. Capt. Smith indicated they had put more focus on issues at the Landmark Apartments to address the Fentanyl problem and, as a result, usage has been reduced by 80%. They have strategies for interacting with the community. However, the public still needs to call when it observes something that looks out-of-place.

### **Police District 3:**

- Crime rates vary by sector within the district: homicides are down 70%; shootings are down 50%; robberies are up 9%; carjackings are down overall by 60%, but up in White Oak and Briggs Chaney; burglaries are down 21%; car thefts are down 26%; theft of auto parts are up 19% (especially for wheel rims and airbags); and shoplifting is up in White Oak, Briggs Chaney and Hillandale, especially at small pharmacies.
- Arrests have been made in all murder cases.
- There continues to be a wide range of issues at the Enclave with management there not willing in all cases to take the action needed, like locking outside doors with the result that homeless people enter and sleep in the stairwells, bringing with them crime and drug use. Councilmember Mink also spoke on this ongoing problem area.
- A high percentage of crimes are committed by residents from outside the County.
- Officer Brandon has been retained as the community engagement officer.
- The police camera at the White Oak Shopping Center has resulted in reduced crime.

- East County should work to obtain funding for a dedicated drone. There will be a Council session on December 2, 2024 to address drones and other police needs.

**ECCAB’s Review Board Survey:** As reported last month, the ECCAB had received a Committee Evaluation and Review Board Survey (questionnaire) from the County Executive’s Office. Peter Myo Khin collected input to each of the questions at the meeting of the two ECCAB committees on October 9. Based upon the suggestions, he drafted a response to each of the questions and had the executive committee review them and provide comments. The questionnaire was submitted to the Executive’s Office before the end-of-October deadline. It was submitted to the ECCAB for ratification at this meeting and it was approved without comment.

Report from Jewru Bandeh, East County Gov’t Center Director:

- The ECCAB needs to present recommendations to the Executive for the 2026 Operating Budget and CIP Budget. Since the normal scheduled meeting date for the Planning and Economic Development Committee is Monday November 11 and that date is a federal holiday, Dan Wilhelm Chair, concurred with Jewru to move it to Wednesday and join the Quality of Life/Services Committee, chaired by Mark Pharaoh. The first part of the meeting will be a joint session where we will have a presentation by the Planning Department on their Strategic Plan (2025-2030) that includes Vision, Mission, Results, Values, Priorities, Strategies and Actions. The second part of the meeting will be split so each committee can develop five or so recommendations that each committee wants in the budget. These recommendations will then be presented at the December 4 full ECCAB meeting to develop a single list for each budget. The Board concurred with this proposal without objection.
  - Issues at the Enclave were discussed further.
  - Jewru reported that Senator Ida Ruben passed away on November 1 at age 95. She became one of Montgomery County’s most powerful delegates in Annapolis, representing District 20 (Silver Spring, White Oak and Takoma Park) in the legislature from 1974 to 2007. She used her longtime position on the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to bring funding to key projects in her district and in the county.
- Cicero Salles, White Oak Planning Director, reported that:
- At the White Oak Town Center, the First Watch restaurant has opened and shortly Dave’s Hot Chicken and Jersey Mikes will open.
  - Stores continue to open in the Burtonsville Shopping Center.
  - The Planning Staff is reviewing the sketch plan that MCB submitted for Viva White Oak.

Erik Copeland, with the Recreation Department, reported:

- There will be a fair on Jan. 11 at the East County CRC, where families can start planning for the 2025 summer camping season.
- There will be a Strathmore concert at the Good Hope NRC on Saturday December 14. A free spaghetti and meatball dinner will be provided at 6:30.

Old and New Business:

- Rachel Evans reported that the Friends of White Oak will hold a community meeting on November 12 where MCB will give a presentation on the Viva White Oak

Development.

- A member of the audience asked whether the Viva White Oak Developer will sign a Section 3 agreement (Preference for employment, training, and contracting opportunities), which would require a percentage of the employees they hire to be low-income individuals from the area. Jewru indicated that such a requirement may not be applicable in non-federal government funded projects. Nevertheless, the regional government center holds job fairs as businesses open in new developments so that area residents can be considered for available jobs. Over the last few years, these job fairs have been very successful. Also, Worksource Montgomery and Montgomery College are actively engaged in the area to ensure low income and area residents have the skills employers need.

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 9:05 pm.