



EAST COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD (ECCAB)

Wednesday, December 6, 2023 Meeting Summary

Board Members Present: Fisseha Adugna, Bill Bentley, LaTonya Brooks, George Brown, II, Radwan Chowdhury, Sheala Durant, Rachel Evans, Ken Flemmer, Roberta Goldberg, Gertrude Jones, Metassebia Kefelegn, Peter Myo Khin, Dr. Calandra Tate Moore, Len Newman, Mark Pharaoh, Kimberly Price-Evans, Susan Price, and Dan Wilhelm

Board Members absent: Calandra Tate Moore

Guests: Brad Stewart (MCEDC guest speaker), Brad Stewart (Montgomery College), Daniele Moxley, Captain David McBain, Lt. J. Innocenti, Chris Wilhelm, David Lorenzo-Botello, Margarete Deveaux, Dianna Whittaker, Claire Iseli, Ed Weiler, Margie Georgen-Rood, Nick Over, Femi Mustapha

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

Welcome and Introductions: The meeting was called to order at 7:06 p.m. by Chair Peter Myo Khin. Board members, government officials, and public members introduced themselves.

Approval of November 2023 ECCAB Meeting Summary: The meeting summary of the November 1, 2023 meeting was approved.

Presentation: Brad Stewart with the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) gave a presentation, which was emailed to the Board and thus incorporated in the minutes by reference.

- Brad indicated that there are many economic development corporations around the country, but each differ since they address different aspects of economic development. MCEDC is under contract to the county to provide certain functions but not others. Other organizations within Montgomery County that support economic development are the Executive Branch, Regional Service Centers, Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Planning Board/Staff, Office of Agriculture, WorkSource Montgomery and Visit Montgomery. The third chart identified the responsibilities of each organization.
- MCEDC focuses on the following target industries to help them grow and expand: Life Science, Technology, Nonprofit HQs, Hospitality, and Real Estate. In addition, MCEDC supports Corporate HQs that are not in these target industries. They also manage funds from the State's Video Lottery Terminal Fund for small, minority and women-owned businesses who have been turned down for a loan by a bank.

- Montgomery County is losing higher paid residents and gaining more who earn less than \$50K. This trend means a reduction in tax revenue on a per capital basis. The typical life-science salary is \$140K and thus the county needs to increase the number of employees in this category. Since June 2019, the labor force in the county has dropped by 17,486 (to 555,531 in June 2023). The number of employed individuals has also dropped by 8702 since June 2019. The unemployment rate is now 1.5% which means there are too few people available for employers to hire. The unemployment rate needs to be at least 3% to account for people transferring between jobs.
- The office vacancy rate is high at 16.1%, which compares with 11.6 in 2Q 2018. Vacancy rates in DC and Fairfax County have been also increasing. Only PG County has a slight improvement. The vacancy rate in Eastern Montgomery County is low (at 5.3%) because there is so little office space here. The vacancy could substantially increase in the next several years since many more people are working from home.
- Brad also spoke about Viva White Oak. He didn't expect development to occur there because of all the infrastructure that needs to be provided. Jewru Bandeh took exception indicating that an agreement to proceed with development is only a month or so away.
- Brad also indicated the Sears building will likely be empty for some time. BF Saul owns the ground and is getting paid by the company who took over the leases from the bankrupt Sears Corporation. That company owns the building, which is very large. Eileen Finnegan had a number of questions on this topic. Jewru indicated he has been in contact with BF Saul.

Montgomery County Police Update from District 3, Captain David McBain

- Staffing: District 3 is 15% understaffed while District 4 is 22% understaffed. Capt. McBain has his officers working more hours, which can lead to burn-out. The current recruitment class for Dec 2023 has only some 25 officers, while not too long ago it would have been 60. It is much harder to find people who want to be police officers. He indicated that some 50% of the District 3 officers do not live in the County.
- He has met with the residents in the Fairdale area – the November minutes explain the issue.
- Most crime is associated with commercial property, not residential.
- BF Saul is cleaning up the plant growth behind the closed Sears store to help deter crime. That building has been broken into and vandalized.
- Automated vehicle license plate readers are helping to reduce auto thefts.

Lt. J. Innocenti with the Montgomery County Police Department's Community Engagement Unit reported:

- They had responded to bomb threats at nearby High Schools. Blair received threats every day one week.
- The drone aircraft is now being used for the first time in District 3. It can generally respond faster than an officer is able to drive to the site thus gaining better situation awareness.

New Business:

- Len Newman, as the ECCAB representative to the Department of Permitting Services Advisory Committee, gave an overview of the Committee. It is composed of 17 members, including one member from each of the five regional service center advisory boards; two active members of civic organizations in the county; two active members of environmental organizations in the county; two members active in land development or related professions; and six non-voting representatives of the Departments of Environmental Protection, Housing and Community Affairs, Transportation, and representatives of the Fire Chief, the Planning Board, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. Len identified some activities that need permits from Permitting Services. They also provide inspections for these activities as well as for some approvals made by the Planning Board.
- A list was handed out that identified the membership of the two ECCAB subcommittees. Three individuals had yet to select a committee. Every Board member is expected to be on at least one committee.
- Issues assigned the Quality of Life/Services Committee:
 - Dan Wilhelm suggested that the group should consider supporting ZTA 23-10, which would allow developers to provide less parking near premium transit stations (Metrorail, Purple Line and BRT)
- Issues assigned the Planning & Economic Development Committee:
 - Dan Wilhelm suggested a letter be sent to the Planning Director supporting the White Oak Medical Center amended site plan to add a 61,750 sq ft medical office building on the northern end of the site. It would also include additional parking.
 - The committee will be developing its proposed priority recommendations for the FY25 Operating Budget – the budget forum was held on November 15.
 - From the last meeting, the district 14 and 20 delegates and senators are willing to ask for funding to support a skate park in east county but they need the ECCAB to identify a location.

Old Business: None

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 9:09 p.m.