



EAST COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD (ECCAB)

Wednesday, January 3, 2024 Meeting Summary

Board Members Present: Fisseha Adugna, Bill Bentley, 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:** LaTonya Brooks

Guests: Rabbiah Sabbakhan, Councilmember Kristin Mink, Chris Wilhelm, David Lorenzo-Botello, Hugo Cantu, Dianna Whittaker, Capt. Gregory Chmiel, Lt Dave Reed, Lt. Robert Sheehan, Danielle Moxley, Ed Weiler, Margie Georgen-Rood, Rob Richardson, Eileen Finnegan, Sharon Brown

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

Welcome and Introductions: The meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m. by Chair Peter Myo Khin. Board members, government officials, and public members introduced themselves.

Approval of December ECCAB Meeting Summary: The meeting summary of the December 6, 2023 meeting was approved with no objections.

Police Presentation:

Capt. Dave Reed from District 3 substituting for Captain David McBain, who was celebrating his anniversary.

- Staffing is down 25 officers. The officers they have are working a lot of overtime and they pull officers from other districts as needed to address short duration hot spots. All districts are in the same situation, in that they also pull officers from other districts to address hot spots. This situation can lead to burn-out and mental health issues. The department is aware of this and works hard to keep an eye on their officers (via peer support) to identify this situation and address it. The long-term solution includes hiring more officers, but too few people at this time want to become officers.
- A large percentage of the crimes include teen violence, drug addictions and related stealing, car-jacking. There were 13 homicides in D3, almost all with teens involved. Nearly all were made by people whom the victims knew.

- Street racing is a problem and legislation is needed to make enforcement effective. Current penalties are too lenient – need to increase the out-of-pocket cost to the perpetrators.
- Technology is a great tool to compensate somewhat for staff shortage and to solve cases faster. Automated vehicle license plate readers are helping to reduce auto thefts since the process is much faster. The drone aircraft allows police to ID criminals and track them in some cases before they can leave the scene. Drones and cameras placed in parking lots are linked to the Real-Time Crime Center and continually monitored so that prompt action can be taken.

Police Lt. Dave Reed reported that most of District 4 is outside of East County and that the part within East County is mostly residential in nature and therefore has much less crime than District 3.

- Fentanyl had been a big problem in Wheaton but their crackdown there just moved the problem to Glenmont.
- Thefts of cars is a problem. All too often Uber drivers leave the car running, double park and go inside a building. When the driver comes back out, the car has been stolen. In this situation the police don't respond since the driver is inviting the thief and they don't have the resources to compensate for the driver's bad judgement.

DPS Presentation

Rabbiah Sabbakhan, Director of Department of Permitting Services, gave a presentation, which Jewru had emailed to the Board before the meeting. Rabbiah indicated he had been the director for a year. He has been working to change the mind-set of the department to operate by his slogan that DPS is: "Your Project Partner." He is striving to improve the process to be a world class permit department. He indicated that customers have the right to get a second opinion from others in the department including the supervisor, manager or director. He also pointed out the "Customer Bill of Rights" on page 8 of the presentation.

The development review process is overseen by the Planning Department (which reports to the Council), while general permitting is handled by DPS (which reports to the County Executive). Developers work with both departments to get their project approved.

DPS has six focus areas:

- New townhouses and single-family dwellings
- Multifamily buildings, including office conversions
- Biotechnology and life sciences facilities
- Restaurants
- Office tenant build-outs
- Special events

The department is working on a dashboard, which currently is only available internally, but they are targeting the February timeframe to make it available to the public. It will primarily be of benefit to customers to know the length of time it takes to review applications, thus setting expectations and help the public plan accordingly.

DPS handles complaints related to code enforcement while the Department of Housing and Community Affairs handles housing code enforcement (abandoned/unmaintained houses, grass & weeds, overcrowding and rental houses.)

Old Business:

Before the meeting a draft letter to the County Executive was circulated. It contained the Board's recommendations for the Operating Budget, which the Executive will present to the Council in March. The letter was approved unanimously as written.

Peter Myo Khin talked about possible locations for a skate park in East County. The issue was brought up last fall when we learned that the Parks Department was considering locations throughout Montgomery County for such parks and none of the locations were in Eastern County. The issue was brought up at the November 1, 2023 Board Meeting, where District 14 and 20 Senators and Delegates talked about their priorities for the Session that starts in January 2024. At that meeting, some Board members requested funding from the state for a park in East County. Senator Zucker wrote back that we needed to identify a location. The Parks Department presented possible locations in District 14 to the December Planning and Economic Development Committee. From that meeting, Peter presented two possible locations: Fairland Recreational Park on Greencastle Road and the Calverton-Galway Local Park on Fairland Road. After some discussion, the Board unanimously selected the Fairland Recreation Park, largely because the site was more visible. Peter will communicate this to the Parks Department and Senator Zucker. Councilmember Mink thanked the Board for being proactive on this issue.

New Business

Jewru Bandeh reported that the Sprouts Grocery store will formally open on Jan 19 at the Burtonsville Crossing Shopping Center (the long-closed center on the east side of Old Columbia Pike.) Grand opening events will be held Jan 19-21. Jewru will distribute more information. Cicero Salles indicated that a WAWA will be built in Burtonsville, where the Mattress and 7-11 stores are currently located.

David Lorenzo-Botello reported that Bill 36-23 was approved by the Council in December. The bill was called: Sale of Firearms or Ammunition – Suicide Awareness and Firearm Education (SAFE). The staff report indicates that national and local data demonstrate a high prevalence of suicides by firearms. The Bill 36-23 would

- (1) Require the Department of Health and Human Services to develop literature about firearm safety, suicide prevention, and conflict resolution
- (2) Require sellers of firearms or ammunition to display and distribute the literature at points of sale
- (3) Enable the Department of Health and Human Services to enforce the display and distribution requirements, and
- (4) Amend the law regarding education about mental health and firearms in the County.

Councilmember Mink indicated this will be a challenging budget year since it needs to include support for VIVA White Oak and Montgomery College. She indicated the Viva White Oak team members had updated the agreement so the project can now start to move forward.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 8:56 p.m.