



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

News Release

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Montgomery County Begins feasibility study for Arts and Humanities Center for Wheaton

Facility could be another step in County's efforts to revitalize Downtown Wheaton

Montgomery County's Office of Planning and Development is developing a feasibility study that could lead to the building of a new arts and humanities center in Wheaton. Although the study will not determine a specific site for a potential center, it is another step in the County's efforts toward revitalizing the overall Wheaton community.

The County retained arts facilities planners in March to conduct a comprehensive analysis to assess the vision for a new arts and humanities center. The study, which will provide recommendations on the type, size and scope of the proposed arts facility, is expected to be completed by the end of 2018.

Consultants Victor Gotesman and Teresa Koberstein are undertaking a community engagement process to discover the community's and cultural sector's arts space needs. The consultants kicked off the process in April with tours of Wheaton and countywide cultural arts facilities, one-on-one interviews and meetings with focus groups. The consultants presented how their work will unfold on April 10 to the Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee. The consultants will hold town hall meetings as part of their efforts on Monday, April 30, and Tuesday, May 1. Each meeting will begin at 7 p.m. Locations of those meetings have yet to be determined.

The kickoff presentation is available at <https://tinyurl.com/y7quhmef>.

Consultants Gotesman and Koberstein have considerable experience across the U.S. in working with large and smaller jurisdictions in helping developing arts centers.

Among the goals of the planning study are to:

- Assess competitive facilities, programs and services in the Montgomery County area and explore strategic program partnership opportunities for facility use.
- Review and analyze market demographics to determine the level of potential participation in the programs of new arts facilities including commute times, likelihood of and barriers to attendance and other information about the region relative to the arts facilities development.
- Benchmark comparable projects and successful operating models in similar size communities.
- Shape the mission and vision for a new arts facility in the context of local and regional community needs that may be accommodated in new facilities.
- Develop an organizational operating plan for new arts facilities, with associated pro forma operating estimates based on the anticipated facility configuration and amenities.

In talking about the project with the Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee, Mr. Gotesman said that it will not be the study's purpose to determine whether a possible new arts center is located as part of, or adjacent to, the future Wheaton Revitalization Project's new government office building and public plaza.

"I have long recognized that the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District remains an indispensable component of Wheaton's strategic goal of becoming a destination for arts, entertainment, business and community life, which is why I spearheaded this initiative to include the Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center project in the County's Capital Improvements Program," said County Councilmember Nancy Navarro, who represents the Council district that includes Wheaton. "One of Wheaton's extraordinary gifts is its cultural diversity, and I am so excited that we have enlisted the expertise of nationally recognized consultants to undertake this feasibility study and engage our community in this process."

Mr. Gotesman said a major part of the study will be to try and determine the size of a facility that would be appropriate. He also added that the long-term success of any arts facility is a direct result of the programming for a completed building—not just having the building itself.

Updates on the facility study will be first available at the Office of Planning and Development website at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DGS/OPD/FacilityPlanningandSiteSelection.html>.

In June 2017, the County began construction of the Wheaton Revitalization Project. That is the first step toward transforming Wheaton's central business district with a mixed-use, transit-oriented development in the Wheaton Triangle area. In addition to the construction of a 14-story government office building, the project—which is scheduled for completion in Spring 2020—will provide 397 belowground parking spaces, first-floor retail space and a new town square. Most significantly impacted during construction is the Wheaton Triangle area between Veirs Mill Road and Georgia Avenue. The local roads that form the Triangle area include Grandview Avenue, Reedie Drive and Triangle Lane.

The main occupant of the new building will be the relocated Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, which is now in Downtown Silver Spring. The 308,000 square-foot building is designed to achieve LEED platinum certification. The building also will be home to several County departments including Permitting Services, Environmental Protection, Health and Human Services, Recreation and Community Use of Public Facilities. In addition, relocating to the new building will be the Wheaton Urban District and the Mid-County Regional Services Center.

A camera has been installed to view construction on the site and can be accessed via the project's website at: wheatonproject.com.

Also underway is construction of a new Wheaton Library and a new Recreation Center located adjacently at the corner of Georgia Avenue and Arcola Avenue. Updated information on those projects can be found at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DGS-BDC/MMC/361202.html>.

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