

Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee (WUDAC)
Tuesday | May 21, 2024 | 7:00 pm-8:30 pm
Hybrid Meeting

In Attendance:

WUDAC: Jim Epstein, Tanya Baskin, Kit Wood, David Jarrett, Riana Cole, Pedro Matamoros, Rob Fox, Nina Koltnow

County Officials: Mid-County Director Luisa Cardona, WUD Operations Manager Crystal Ruiz, Director of Community Engagement Sidney Cooper

Guests: Kathia Chévez (for Council Member Fani-Gonzalez; Council Member Laurie-Anne Sayles; Dr. Kisha Davis, Chief Health Officer Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County; Kelly Velazquez, Department of Health and Human Services

Public: Dan Obrzut, Rachel Martin, Sean Crago

- I. 7:00 pm Call to Order - Jim Epstein, Chair
- II. 7:02 pm Review and Approve April Minutes - Approved
- III. 7:05 pm Community Concerns -
No concerns
- IV. Presentations - 7:20 PM - Presentation
 1. Youth Safety Trends and Data
Dr. Kisha Davis, Chief Health Officer,
Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County
Kelly Velazquez - Dept of HHS

The Department wants to hear from the public.

Starting in 2022, the Department has had a public health approach toward gun violence. Data is inconsistent; many agencies coordinate to share data, which creates inconsistencies. Now the Department is adding substance use, self harm, suicidality. We need to look at root causes.

Youth more likely to be victims than perpetrators of gun violence.

MoCo is largest, most diverse, and healthiest county in the state. This is a change.

80,000 MoCo residents (of 300K) are living in poverty now. It has gone up.

Chronic school absenteeism is up. For elementary students, much of it may have to do with parents not having transportation for kids.

Trend: kids used to look for various drugs and accidentally take fentanyl. Now they are more often seeking fentanyl. Now drugs are being laced with Molly before they come to this region, which makes people more aggressive. Fentanyl causes higher rates of addiction, which is one reason other drugs are laced with it.

Some good news: in late '23 and early '24, we had a decrease of 38 overdose deaths from the previous year. Hopefully this is from raising awareness. MoCo has put a lot of resources into awareness and help.

Since 2018, overdoses of people over 25 have gone down, and under 25 up, including 0 - 14 year olds. The volume of fentanyl is gigantic.

Giving out test strips is mixed, since now people seek fentanyl.

Males generally OD more than females, except for 15 - 17 year olds (of those who show up in ER).

Crime stats come from several law enforcement agencies, but we don't see statistics from Metro Police, even though they work very closely together. Law enforcement and County Council are working on diversion for younger perpetrators.

Increasing suicidality in particular among Black youth.

Community questions/comments:

- Book: "There are no Accidents" about systemic hazards that cause deaths. It would be interesting to hear more about causes of death in our county, especially ones classified as accidents. [That is already examined by several review boards, including every death of a child, deaths from opioids, to look for systemic issues. Recommendations are made from these.]
- For next month's public meeting: hoping that presentation can focus on Wheaton area and resources particular to here. People are desperate for resources. Speakers will be HHS, Identity. Trying to get someone from MCPS.

- Keep in mind that we can tell residents what the resources are, but many of the resources are at capacity. It is frustrating for people to call a resource and find out that there is no availability. People are angry.
- There is some perspective that more kids are trying to kick substance use. We need to continue on that path. Fewer kids seeming like zombies on the streets (according to an owner at the Streeter). But - in the Triangle, business owners are seeing more youth criminal activity.

Our guests thanked the public for comments and discussed coordinating with other agencies; a big effort moving forward.

Reports and Updates

1. Elected representatives in attendance -

Council Member Laurie-Anne Sayles - We are nearing the end of FY25 budget season. She serves on Economic Development and Health and Human Services Committees. Highlights from budget: increase of \$670K for WUD to insure that it has the resources it needs to keep things working. Increased civic engagement via Marion Fryer Plaza. Conference facilities in the county building are used heavily by community. Transitioning from gas to electric equipment for snow removal. Activated a community access grant for hosting/presenting programs at reduced rate.

Ambassador program to create safer spaces for residents. The Safe Team is working to fill publicly available spaces in Wheaton. County is working hard to find a tenant or tenants for the first floor of the county building. Many improvements have been made to the street scape. A&E District is a priority. Links are included:

There will be a community conversations meeting in July in Wheaton, led by Sayles. Focus on youth opportunities for healthy activities.

Economic Development Committee is active in looking at investments to create jobs and attract businesses. The Glenmont redevelopment project has been approved. What does the community want in the first floor space of the county building? We support building it out enough to attract a high quality occupant. It is a 12,000sf space.

Attendees: Could we use some of it now as a gallery or maker space? A showcase of the diversity in our community? Can we look at the idea of Wheaton as an “arts campus” where there is a diffusion of spaces including workshops, incubators, galleries, etc. Perhaps a food incubator, given the food identity of Wheaton.

Please keep the ideas coming.

montgomerycountymd.gov/Sayles/index.html

Kathia Chévez for Council Member Fani-Gonzalez -

The CM is making efforts to fund two new restaurant permitting inspectors with an innovative funding model that will dramatically speed up restaurant reviews.

In addition, the CM is proud to announce the following items that DID make it into the final budget, all of which will benefit Wheaton.

- \$4 million to build out the retail space of the Wheaton M-NCPPC Headquarters, so it can attract tenants
- \$450,000 to help spur the redevelopment of the Glenmont Shopping Center
- More than \$2.4 million for Montgomery County's business incubators to help grow businesses
- \$900,000 additional dollars for grants to businesses impacted by the purple line construction.

Wheaton Arts and Culture Center update: June 20 6 PM there will be a meeting at the library. DGS will answer questions to follow up on the previous meeting.

2. Wheaton & Kensington Chamber of Commerce - no report

3. Committee Reports

- Economic Development: Ali, Kit, Pedro - no report
- Public Safety (Youth Crisis): Kit, Dave, Nina - no report
- Arts & Entertainment: Ali, Jim, Riana - no report
- Transportation And Pedestrian Safety: Nina, Rob

Council Member Fani-Gonzalez coordinated walk around Wheaton Plaza with elected reps and Westfield management regarding how stakeholders can coordinate efforts to increase pedestrian/bike safety in the near term, especially ring road, signal coordination, parking garages. There are plans for the long term with redevelopment. Issues of coordination are difficult: DOT, Westfield, county.

- Outreach And Communications (Social Media Presence): Tanya, Riana, Pedro, Dave, Rob, Jim - no report

4. Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) - Rob Fox, MCCAB Member

OMB talked about County budget. Some of the walking/biking initiatives will be funded. Senior programming is robust.

CM Glass's office said that Drone program will continue.

MoCo business center reported on business support they provide.
Street design discussion about Reddie/Grandview intersection.

5. Mid-County Regional Services Center - Luisa Cardona, Director

Several property and business owners are reaching out to WUD with public safety complaints. Luisa is helping businesses coordinate with police to address these issues. She is hosting monthly meetings between the businesses and police. There are many programs that are supported by the county. No trespassing signs, better lighting, better engineering, policing policies. Reach out to your elected officials if you are frustrated about minors being allowed to go free repeatedly after crimes; the system needs to be rehabilitative, not punitive.

Thursday, May 30 there will be a historic marker dedication ceremony at Veterans park.

Red Line is closing for all of June, July, and August from Glenmont through Takoma Park. Shuttle buses will be provided. Luisa will distribute promotional materials. [click here](#)

Budget: WUD did get additional funding for marketing and street scape, which is just enough to maintain current level of service.

There will be a new, large, fancy county liquor store going up at Wheaton Plaza. This month, the county is giving a 10% discount on county products at liquor stores.

Sidney Cooper: Taste of Wheaton will be June 2. We are closing Triangle Lane to traffic for the event. It will let us know how it would feel to have Triangle Lane closed long-term. There will be local artisans along with restaurants, many exhibitors. Beer and wine garden will be accepting shelf stable foods to support MOM's food pantry.

TGIF will occur July 12 - end of August every Friday evening. Chuck Levin's will support 2 of the concerts. (They provide sound.) Heritage month will be one big event for the county, held one day in Wheaton. Luisa will share publicity for social media.

6. Wheaton & Kensington Chamber of Commerce - no report

VII Adjourn 8:30 pm

NEXT WUDAC MEETING: June 18, 2024 (Public health forum), 7:00 with executive session at 6:30.