



WHEATON URBAN DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Ana L. van Balen
Director

July 26, 2013

County Executive Isiah Leggett
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear County Executive Leggett,

Thank you for attending and speaking at the June 1 Wheaton walking tour. The Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee (WUDAC), along with the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG), organized this 2-hour walking tour of the Wheaton Urban District to explore the opportunities and challenges in creating a vibrant and walkable Wheaton. We are particularly appreciative of your attendance as well as from other elected officials and County employees, such as Council President Nancy Navarro, Councilmember Hans Riemer, Maryland State Senator Richard Madaleno, and Maryland District 18 Delegates Al Carr, and Jeffrey Waldstreicher.

WUDAC received a number of thoughtful comments and observations from tour attendees, only a few of which can be summarized here. All of the comments and observations are being actively considered in detail by WUDAC, and we hope to create a set of specific recommendations for the County's consideration in the near future.

Pedestrian Access & Safety

Pedestrian and traffic safety in the Wheaton Urban District is complicated by the fact that the three main thoroughfares in Wheaton (Georgia Ave., Veirs Mill Rd., University Blvd.) are Maryland state routes. We urge the County to work with state transportation officials to ensure safe and well-lighted access at the following locations:

- 1) Intersection of Reedie Dr. and Georgia Ave.
- 2) Pedestrian Crosswalk at Price Ave. and Georgia Ave.
- 3) Intersection of University Blvd. and Georgia Ave.
- 4) Intersection of Veirs Mill Rd. and Reedie Dr.
- 5) Intersection of Grandview Ave. and University Blvd.
- 6) Intersection of University Blvd. and Veirs Mill Rd.

WUDAC is particularly concerned about the intersection of Reedie Dr. and Georgia Ave., as the Exchange at Wheaton Station will create a sharp increase in pedestrian traffic as the 486 apartment units are occupied.

In addition to safety, tour attendees noted a number of difficulties in using sidewalks, from sidewalk obstructions to inadequate width. For example, the Exchange at Wheaton Station project completely closed sidewalk access immediately across the street from the Wheaton Metro Station. We urge the County to ensure that future projects provide adequate pedestrian access during construction. Additional accessibility issues include narrow sidewalks and sidewalk obstructions, including suboptimal placement of utility poles.

Arts & Entertainment

Wheaton is one of just three Arts & Entertainment (A&E) Districts in Montgomery County, but it is clearly lagging behind Bethesda and Silver Spring in its A&E offerings. The following are some suggestions from attendees on how to improve A&E activity in Wheaton:

- 1) Utilize Veterans Park (Reedie Dr. and Fern St.) for A&E activities, such as weekly music series, outdoor art exhibit and/or dance lessons. In addition, a suggestion was made to explore a redesign of Veterans Park to make it more inviting for use.
- 2) Research the current A&E tax incentive structure and consider whether other options would be more effective.
- 3) Wheaton's A&E organizations could benefit from a multi-purpose center where they could share space and the cost of renting and maintaining it. There are several existing properties in Wheaton that, with some remodeling, could become a multi-purpose center for arts and entertainment organizations and/or a performance/exhibit venue.
- 4) Ensure that event programming is an integral part of the redevelopment of Parking Lot 13/new town square.
- 5) Explore untraditional uses for our existing public places, such as using the roof of Parking Garage 45 for music concerts.
- 6) Focus on Price St. and Elkin Ave. as a location for a revitalized Wheaton A&E District.

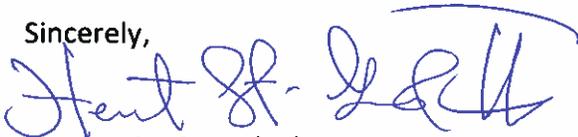
Parking & Lighting

The loss of parking during construction on Parking Lot 13 will shift the parking burden to Parking Garage 45 (entrances on Amherst Ave. and Fern St.). One consistent comment that WUDAC received from tour attendees revolved around the perception that Parking Garage 45 is "not safe enough" due to its location on the outskirts of the Wheaton Urban District, inadequate signage, and insufficient lighting. In short, many people feel unsafe walking to/from Parking Garage 45. We urge the County to examine Parking Garage 45 to ensure that it operates on a level necessary to alleviate citizen concerns regarding safety and lighting.

In addition to Parking Garage 45, parking as a whole is a general concern for both Wheaton's businesses and residents. WUDAC received comments concerning short time limits (1 hour parking) in certain parking areas. The results lead to short, focused visits by visitors to Wheaton, rather than cultivating an environment where patrons feel free to enter multiple Wheaton businesses over the course of one trip.

Thank you again for your support. WUDAC looks forward to working with County Departments in the near future, through meetings and open communication, to ensure the continued progress of the Wheaton Urban District.

Sincerely,



Henriot St. Gerard, Chair
Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee

cc: County Executive/Council President