

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMERCE CABINET
FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2022
MEETING MINUTES**

Attendance

Commerce Cabinet Members:

Ash Shetty
Jeremy Criss
Aseem Nigam
Ben Wu
Mitra Pedoeem
Chris Conklin
Grace Denno
Richard Madaleno
Tom Lewis
Anthony Featherstone
Casey Anderson
Kelly Groff

Guests:

Cicero Salles
Judy Costello
Gene Smith
Jake Weissmann
Tom Lewis

MCEDC Staff:

Bill Tompkins
Christy Blake
Ben Siegel
Philip Singerman

MCEDC President & CEO Ben Wu, the Commerce Cabinet Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:08 pm. A quorum of the Commerce Cabinet members was present. Ms. Blake was designated to take the minutes.

Approval of the January 14, 2022 Commerce Cabinet Meeting Minutes

Mr. Wu called for approval of the minutes. Mr. Madaleno made a motion to approve which was seconded by Mr. Nigam.

CountyStat Montgomery County Quality of Life Survey Results

Mr. Wu noted that CountyStat recently conducted a Quality-of-Life Survey of Montgomery County residents that provided a positive snapshot of citizen perceptions related to local economic development satisfaction. He asked Mr. Madaleno to share an overview of the survey results.

Mr. Madaleno stated that the County submits a survey to the County community every odd year to gain insight into how citizens feel about government services. He reported that the survey reached citizens in November of 2021 during the omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey results have also been benchmarked by other jurisdictions nationally. Mr. Madaleno stated that some of the survey questions were related, but not limited to the following:

- Public transport and shopping opportunities
- The County as a place to work
- Community support for the arts
- Internet access
- Cost-of-living, place to retire, connection/engagement with local community, participation in local elections

Mr. Madaleno stated that the County benchmarked high on most items in comparison to other jurisdictions, and overall, there was a strong response to the survey with positive results for the County. Mr. Anderson asked if the survey included information about public safety, parks, and schools. Mr. Madaleno stated that crime and public safety were considered most important by survey participants.

Mr. Madaleno concluded that the report will be released to the public, but the timeline still needs to be determined.

FY22 Year-End Economic Development Activities: Partnership Discussion

Mr. Wu opened this portion of the meeting to provide an opportunity for Commerce Cabinet members to discuss their significant FY22 economic development projects. The discussion allows for agencies to not only share information about their key projects but for other agencies to offer support through the sharing of resources and collaborations to bring these projects to a close in the remaining quarter of the fiscal year.

Ms. Groff reported that Visit Montgomery is putting together a proposal for a marketing grant to highlight outdoor activities to generate hotel room night stays. Ms. Groff stated that this proposal will be completed by April. Ms. Groff also reported that Visit Montgomery previously launched a MoCo Eats website and database for food services such as curbside, delivery, etc. She reported that the site is still ongoing but is currently stagnant. Visit Montgomery is looking for assistance to continue the MoCo Eats website. Ms. Groff also expressed some interest in exploring new USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) federal grant opportunities in conjunction with the Office of Agriculture.

Mr. Criss stated that there are many opportunities for collaboration within the Office of Agriculture. He stated that many businesses have been using accessory functions for farms to expand their businesses. The Office of Agriculture is working on some local regulations to allow for new commercial buildings to be used for agricultural tourism and alcohol development. He also stated that many people are making investments in restoring old buildings due to these new opportunities for use and that the changing policies allowing for new uses are generating jobs and new economic contributions to the county, especially with farm alcohol production. Mr. Wu asked whether that there could be connections

between farm alcohol production and the new arts and brewery district in Silver Spring, which has been a Commerce Cabinet deliverable.

Mr. Anderson reported that various Planning Board plans are going to the County Council soon for review, including the Silver Spring Master Plan. He also stated that Thrive Montgomery 2050 is expected to be published in the Fall.

Mr. Nigam reported that the Department of Housing and Community Affairs will be closing approximately eight transactions for affordable housing units very soon.

Mr. Featherstone reported that his team released a local workforce development plan which was approved by the County Executive. He also stated that WorkSource Montgomery has started the GROW Program for hospitality businesses for new County residents. He stated that they will be adding new phases to the program in the coming months. He also stated that WorksSource Montgomery has been working on rebranding some workforce programs. Additionally, Mr. Featherstone stated that WorkSource Montgomery has released the “Skill Up” platform for all County residents to gain professional development and credentials. He suggested that this platform would be a great tool for small businesses to offer their employees for free. He also reported that WorkSource Montgomery is reopening job centers in Germantown, the Montgomery County Correctional Facility, and adding a mobile job center.

Mr. Conklin reported that the Route 355 crossing has been opened. He also stated that WMATA has finished work on the Rockville and Silver Spring Metro stations. Additionally, Mr. Conklin stated that the Ride-On service is expanding following the omicron wave of the pandemic and that the Ride-On “Reimagine Study” is getting underway. He also reported that his team has completed a review of the capital improvement program concerning a proposal for BRT corridors.

Mr. Wu noted that Montgomery County will be hosting two significant golf tournaments in the coming months, which will have a significant economic impact. The Wells Fargo Championship at TPC Potomac will be held in May and the KPMG PGA Women’s Championship at Congressional Country Club will be held in June. An economic impact analysis of the Wells Fargo Championship forecasts \$30 million in revenue generation for both the state and the county, with \$17 million that would not have been accrued locally but for the tournament itself.

The Montgomery County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan

Mr. Tompkins stated that the MCEDC will go before the County Council Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee on Monday, March 14, to present the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan. He stated that Commerce Cabinet members may go to the County Council website to view a staff report highlighting several recommendations for the plan.

Commerce Cabinet Initiatives Update

Downtown Silver Spring: Mr. Siegel reported that the FY22 federal budget finally passed the House and the Senate, and the bill contained a \$300,000 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) appropriation earmarked by Congressman Jaime Raskin for further development of the Arts and

Brewery district in Silver Spring. Mr. Siegel reported that first phase streetscape improvements, and wayfinding signage and lighting have already been implemented in Silver Spring through the Department of Transportation and he is working to finalize the budget and work with stakeholders to begin setting up some additional activities such as farm brewery pop up and building murals in a proposed second phase. There was discussion of a potential summer event to announce and celebrate these activities.

Wheaton: Mr. Siegel stated that he met with Luis Astrada, Coordinator for the Downtown Wheaton study, and would like to build off work the Planning Board is doing to support small businesses and property owners as part of the new Wheaton Showcase Location initiative.

Mr. Singerman and Ms. Blake also gave a presentation and provided an overview of an EDA ARPA EAA federal grant opportunity MCEDC has been the lead applicant for the development of the Wheaton Sustainable Innovation Zone (WSIZ). The grant application would create a project to support inclusive economic development and climate resilience in diverse urban communities, such as Wheaton, through the creation of a Sustainable Innovation Zone to support environmental sustainability and local business growth.

Other Initiatives: Mr. Wu is working with Mr. Weissmann on continuing other Commerce Cabinet initiatives.

- Montgomery County Customer Service Initiative
- Montgomery County Regulatory Reform Initiative
- Montgomery County Marketing and Branding Initiative

New Business

Mr. Wu stated that there was interest in the possibility of gathering the Commerce Cabinet in-person, perhaps as early as the May or July meeting. A possible venue could be the Old Gray Courthouse, which is the new home of the Department of Procurement with renovations recently completed.

Mr. Wu noted the presence of Mr. Lewis and Mr. Salles as new additions to the Executive branch and looks forward to their engagement with the Commerce Cabinet. Mr. Madaleno stated that there is a lot of activity in the East County/White Oak and White Flint areas of the County, and he is grateful to have new staff members on board to support these regions for business support and economic development.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:36 PM.