

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMERCE CABINET
FRIDAY, JULY 9, 2021
MEETING MINUTES**

**Department of Permitting Services
2424 Reedie Drive, 7th Floor
Wheaton, MD 20902**

Attendance

Commerce Cabinet Members:

Anthony Featherstone
Jeremy Criss
Adam Ortiz
Aseem Nigam
Ash Shetty
Casey Anderson
Chris Conklin
David Dise
Mitra Pedoeem
Richard Madaleno
Benjamin Wu

Guests:

Judy Stephenson
Scott Pomeroy
Jerome Fletcher
Laurie Boyer Babb
Grace Denno
Julio Murillo
Gene Smith

MCEDC Staff:

Ben Seigel
Bill Tompkins
Christy Blake

MCEDC President & CEO Ben Wu, the Commerce Cabinet Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:06 pm. A quorum of the Commerce Cabinet members was present. Ms. Blake was designated to take minutes.

Call to Order: Ben Wu, Commerce Cabinet Chair

Mr. Wu opened the meeting by welcoming Commerce Cabinet members to the newly-built Wheaton Revitalization Project Building, the headquarters of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), the owner and manager of the building, along with six other County departments and agencies including: Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Licensure and Regulatory Services Section, Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services, Montgomery County Department of Recreation, The Office of Community Use of Public Facilities and The Mid-County Regional Services

Center/Urban District. Mr. Wu noted that, due to the pandemic, this was the first in-person gathering of the Commerce Cabinet since the initial meeting a year ago. He thanked Mr. Madaleno for the recommendation and request to hold a physical meeting and to have it in the new Wheaton building, which is expected to bring a significant economic impact to the local area.

As the meeting host, Ms. Pedoeem also welcomed everyone to the new building and offered a tour afterwards. Following the welcome, Mr. Wu opened the meeting for members to talk about economic development related activities in their respective organizations.

Mr. Nigam reported that housing construction costs have gone up. Additionally, there are some concerns about the potential judicial challenges to the eviction moratorium. Mr. Nigam stated there are still rental assistance programs for those in need and have distributed fliers about the program.

Mr. Criss reported that the Office of Agriculture received CARES Act funding to increase wholesale food production for citizens in need. Twenty-two farmers are actively participating. Mr. Criss is hoping to continue this program but will need more funding to do so. Mr. Criss also reported increased activity in the agricultural space regarding permitting and seeing an increased interest in growing food and other agricultural activities during the pandemic. Mr. Criss reported that the volume is so great that the Office of Agriculture is even having difficulty keeping up with demand.

Mr. Featherstone stated that he would be interested in learning more about agriculture from a workforce development perspective to see how his team and others can work to meet those demands. Mr. Featherstone then provided an overview of new WorkSource Montgomery programs and the opening of the American Jobs Center to support displaced and unemployed workers find new positions.

Mr. Dise stated that he is seeing commercial property tenants looking for reduced space in offices or not coming back at all. He reported that the workplace is changing and therefore the County is also considering a reduction in their lease footprint, particularly in administrative office space. Many county offices are vacant, so the County is looking to save money, reduce carbon footprint, and keep traffic down as required by law. All these disruptions will affect the commercial real estate market, especially since construction costs have gone up. Mr. Dise reported additional pandemic-related issues such as COVID standards that affect housing for the homeless, the cutting of housing supply in half, and having to convert recreation centers into temporary shelters.

Brief Updates on the Commerce Cabinet Initiatives

Mr. Wu gave a brief update on some of the current Commerce Cabinet initiatives.

- Customer Initiative: The MCEDC Economic Action Plan is expected to reinforce the need for this initiative to focus on customer service.
- Regulatory Reform Initiative: MCEDC staff will continue to create a structure to move this initiative forward. Mr. Wu asked Mr. Madaleno for assistance in this initiative.
- Public Private Marketing Initiative: The MCEDC Economic Action Plan is expected to make a recommendation in support of this initiative, which will also encourage solicitations and guidance from industry.
- Unified Impact Project on Downtown Silver Spring: Mr. Seigel gave an update on the progress for this initiative, which included some updated engagement with NOAA and the status of collaborations with the Montgomery County congressional delegation for federal funding appropriations. Mr. Wu also asked the Commerce Cabinet members to think about the next

location for a showcase project, with a projected transition out of Silver Spring sometime early next year.

Review and Approval of May 14, 2021, Meeting Minutes

Ms. Pedoeem motioned to approve minutes. Mr. Madaleno seconded the motion, noting that his name was misspelled.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 2:03pm.