

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMERCE CABINET
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2021
MEETING MINUTES**

Attendance

Commerce Cabinet Members:

Jeremy Criss
Benjamin Wu
Bill Tompkins
Mitra Pedoeem
Kelly Groff
Christopher Conklin
Ash Shetty
Marlene Michaelson
David Dise
Aseem Nigam
Anthony Featherstone
Richard Madaleno

Guests:

Laurie Boyer Babb
Gene Smith
Jake Weissmann
Grace Denno
Scott Pomeroy
Phillip Singerman
Judy Costello

MCEDC Staff:

Ben Seigel
Bill Tompkins
Christy Blake

MCEDC President & CEO Ben Wu, the Commerce Cabinet Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:05 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 indicated that the meeting agenda would focus on reviewing the Montgomery County Economic Development Strategic Plan. Under the newly-passed Council statute, the plan will be developed by MCEDC. It will then be submitted by December 31, 2021 to the County Executive for his review and input. Starting in February 2022, the Council will then have the chance to hold a public hearing and ratify the plan by April 15, 2022.

In addition to the discussion on the Montgomery County Economic Development Strategic Plan, Mr. Wu stated that there would also be an overview of the recently published Connecting the Dots report by the MCEDC Economic Advisory Panel. The report released on October 19 offered 20 recommendations on how to strengthen local economic development from a 20-member blue-ribbon panel of business executives.

Mr. Wu moved to approve the meeting minutes from the prior Commerce Cabinet meeting held on July 9, 2021. Mr. Dise motioned for approval; Mr. Madaleno seconded the motion. Ms. Michaelson abstained as she was not present at the last meeting. Mr. Madaleno stated that he was listed as both an “attendee” and a “guest” and asked that the July minutes be amended to record Mr. Madaleno as an “attendee.” Mr. Wu agreed and asked that the minutes be amended accordingly.

The Montgomery County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan

Mr. Tompkins presented updates on the past, current, and future engagements and meetings with Commerce Cabinet members providing input on the Strategic Plan. Additionally, Mr. Tompkins identified other government and community partners that are also being consulted to offer input. Mr. Tompkins thanked the Cabinet members for their engagement and noted there will be additional input requested as the outreach effort continues.

Mr. Tompkins did note that through research and stakeholder engagement, there is a need for more jobs that offer affordable wages to achieve an inclusive economy and that the County may want to take a look at what other jurisdictions are doing with regard to wages and small/minority owned businesses. Mr. Madaleno state that the Maryland Small Business Development Financing Authority (MSBDFA) has struggled to make headway in Montgomery County. Mr Wu agreed, offering that the County can work on better engagement with MSBDFA and there are also opportunities for greater engagement as well with the Maryland Video Lottery Terminal (VLT) Loan Program.

Ms. Michaelson asked if there has been any input from the business community. Mr. Tompkins reported that the MCEDC team has spoken to local chambers of commerce, as well as sought out input from the MCEDC business development team that engage directly with businesses. Mr. Madaleno offered that the plan would need to address successes within the County to tackle a negative narrative and questioned if we can root this document in a regional conversation.

Connecting the Dots: Accelerating Economic Growth Montgomery County; a MCEDC Economic Advisory Panel Report

Following the presentation and discussion by Mr. Tompkins, Mr. Wu introduced the Connecting the Dots report. He stated that it is expected that the Montgomery County Economic Development Strategic Plan may have some thematic overlap with the recently released Connecting the Dots report. The report also calls out some of the initiatives being undertaken by the Commerce Cabinet.

The MCEDC Economic Advisory Panel was chaired by Norm Augustine and DeRionne Pollard. The Connecting the Dots report sought to achieve consensus on a response to the COVID-19 pandemic for economic recovery and to help set the stage for future long-term economic growth.

Commerce Cabinet Initiative Update: Showcase Location Project

Mr. Siegel gave an update on the current Showcase Location Project in Downtown Silver Spring. He stated that, thanks to MCDOT funding support, the brewery district/public art project has completed sidewalk improvements and there is a second phase of the project that is pending a potential congressional appropriations earmark by Congressman Jamie Raskin to provide \$300,000 for further improvements. Mr. Siegel also stated that the future of the project will need to be implemented and sustained and noted that the Regional Services Center has been very helpful.

Mr. Siegel also gave an update on the proposed clean tech hub project with NOAA, which is another potential project pending congressional appropriations action. At this time, it does not appear as if Congress will complete their appropriations work before they adjourn for the year. Mr. Siegel reported that resources for the project are dependent on a federal funding, but that representatives from NOAA offered insight on a similar initiative in Asheville, North Carolina that could be of interest.

Mr. Wu raised the issue of moving from Downtown Silver Spring to another Showcase Location Project and invited discussion on a future location, Mr. Siegel stated that he has received feedback from the community that the next Showcase Location Project should be either Wheaton or Gaithersburg. Mr. Dise agreed that Wheaton deserves the attention of the Commerce Cabinet. Ms. Podeem also expressed her support. Mr. Wu asked Mr. Siegel to prepare plans for a potential Commerce Cabinet initiative in Wheaton and it can be brought for review and discussion at the next meeting in January 2022.

New Business

There was no new business to report from the Cabinet.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:27 pm.