



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

**MCPB
Item #11
6/11/09**

June 5, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Glenn Kreger, Acting Chief *GK*
Vision Division
Khalid Afzal, Team Leader, East Transit Corridor Team
Vision Division *KA*

FROM: Sandy Tallant, Planner Coordinator (301.495.1329) *ST*
East Transit Corridor Team
Vision Division

SUBJECT: Status Report: Wheaton Central Business District (CBD) and Vicinity Sector Plan Amendment

RECOMMENDATION: Discuss the high density development scenario to be modeled (24,100 jobs and 9,400 households); and the potential use of some of the County parking lots as future open spaces.

INTRODUCTION

In September 2008 the Planning Board approved a Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan Scope of Work, thereby authorizing staff to proceed with the development of the draft Sector Plan. The purpose of this meeting is to report to the Board on the progress of the Sector Plan work to date. Staff also seeks feedback from the Board regarding a long-term development scenario that will set the land use and planning framework for the Sector Plan and define the infrastructure needs to achieve that scenario. Within that long-term scenario, the staff will evaluate a more likely development scenario for the next 15-20 years that will be the basis for developing an implementation strategy to achieve the goals and objectives of the Sector Plan amendment. In addition to discussing the development envelope with the Planning Board, staff will also provide an overview of work to date on community character, transportation, the environment, and an urban design concept including streets and open space.

WHEATON TODAY

Wheaton is one of the four CBDs in the County. It is also designated a State Enterprise Zone, a County Urban District, an Arts and Entertainment District, and a Parking Lot District. The Sector Plan area covers approximately 485 acres. The non-residential core, including the Wheaton Westfield Mall, covers approximately 85 acres. Wheaton Westfield Mall encompasses approximately 2.4 million square feet of commercial space. The mall's core trade area is within Montgomery County but the secondary trade area extends beyond the County into northeast Washington, DC, and parts of Howard and Prince George's Counties. Across Veirs Mill Road from Wheaton Mall, the CBD commercial area, also called the Marketplace, contains numerous ethnic restaurants and other small businesses in a variety of low-rise buildings.

The County has seen substantial growth and development in its other CBDs and the I-270 Corridor over the past 20 years. Wheaton has not kept pace with that level of development and revitalization. The Wheaton CBD has added no significant office space, even after the Wheaton Retail Preservation Overlay Zone was amended in 2006 (the Overlay Zone had often been cited as the biggest single land use obstacle to development in Wheaton). There has been significant investment by Westfield in their mall in Wheaton, and close to 400 residential units were added on three sites near Metro since 2000, but no major office development has taken place since the adoption of the 1990 Wheaton Sector Plan.

Staff believes that there is sufficient retail in Wheaton but not enough office space. This was confirmed by a study prepared by the International Downtown Association for Wheaton in 2008, which noted that the Wheaton CBD had relatively little office space and could support more, though not as much as Bethesda or Silver Spring. The study concluded that because Wheaton is an untested market for "Class A" commercial office space, the County will have to play a key role in attracting commercial office development in the CBD (see attached report).

Staff believes that office development in Wheaton would help to revitalize the area, support the existing retail development, and create a better jobs/household balance in the County. However, there are land use and economic development challenges associated with office development in Wheaton. There is no regulatory barrier to developing office space in Wheaton; the challenges are primarily image, perception and market. Image and perception can be addressed, to some extent, by the Sector Plan, the development review process, and other revitalization activities by County agencies and the private sector. Market barriers are most effectively addressed using County and State economic development tools.

Future Development Scenarios

Staff is focused on two critical questions:

1. What is the long-term vision and the ultimate maximum level of development that we should plan for? and
2. What is the most realistic level of development that is likely to occur in Wheaton in the next 15-20 years?

Our current forecast, Round 7.1 for 2030 (based on the existing zoning and the current Sector Plan), includes significant residential growth in Wheaton but not much office space. Staff has modeled the existing conditions and the 2030 forecast and plans to test an ultimate long-term development scenario with significant increases in the density, primarily through office space on the Westfield Wheaton Mall site and a few selected properties. The proposed high scenario increases the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for the entire Sector Plan area from 0.40 (what is currently on the ground in Wheaton today) to 1.00. We believe the full capacity in the high scenario will not be absorbed in the next 20 years, and we anticipate that significant changes to the transportation network would be needed to accommodate the level of growth represented in the proposed high scenario.

Our proposed high scenario reflects our best estimate of the maximum development that could be accommodated in the long term in an aggressive development environment taking into consideration urban design place-making principles and compatibility with adjoining uses including the residential edge. It was developed based on staff's block by block estimate of the reasonable maximum development on each block, taking into consideration the size, shape and location of the block and whether it should be predominantly office or residential. The highest densities and height were placed in the core (the triangle bounded by University Boulevard, Georgia Avenue, and Veirs Mill Road), tapering down toward the residential properties on the edge of the Central Business District. The proposed high scenario assumes that the surface parking associated with Westfield Mall is developed with both office and housing.

This high scenario is an appropriate maximum long-term development envelope reflecting a vision of Wheaton as an urban mixed-use center, but still smaller than Silver Spring or Bethesda. It is significantly less than the maximum permitted FAR under the existing CBD zoning since we believe that not all commercially zoned properties would be able to achieve their current zoning envelope due to various physical constraints and other considerations. (Staff will review our development assumptions with the Board at the worksession.) The first table below compares existing development and the proposed high scenario for modeling in Wheaton. The second table compares the proposed high scenario in Wheaton with other major centers in the County.

Wheaton Sector Plan

Wheaton Development Envelopes	Jobs	Households	Jobs/HH Balance	FAR
Existing Development*	8,755	2,172	4 jobs per household	0.40
Round 7.1 Forecast*	10,407	5,433	1.9 jobs per household	0.50
Proposed High Scenario	24,100	9,400	2.6 jobs per household	1.00

*Already modeled

Comparison with Other Centers

Sector Plan	Acres	Existing		Future	
		Jobs	Households	Jobs	Households
Bethesda CBD*	407	35,800	6,700	50,900	9,400
Silver Spring CBD*	367	30,400	5,600	45,700	8,100
White Flint*	430	18,100	2,100	48,600	12,300
Wheaton Sector Plan Area*	484 (CBD 72 Acres)	8,900	2,200	24,100	9,400

*The numbers in this chart are based on current master plans for Bethesda and Silver Spring, the draft plan for White Flint, and the proposed high scenario for Wheaton.

After determining the desired level of maximum, long-term development for Wheaton and the infrastructure needed to support it, we will need to assess the development likely to occur in the next 15 to 20 years. The estimate for this lower level of development will be based on the sites that are currently available for redevelopment and the likely assemblages of properties into common ownership. This development scenario will also depend on the general economic conditions for the real estate industry as a whole and the amount of office space that can be absorbed in the Wheaton CBD in the next 15-20 years. Planning staff is working with the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development to develop a Scope of Work for a consultant study to address:

- The amount of new development that Wheaton's market can absorb by 2030; and
- The percentage of each commercial use that can be supported (projected market share and absorption rate)

Staff will present this likely development scenario to the Planning Board, and its impacts on transportation, environment and community facilities as part of its preliminary recommendations later this summer.

Potential Future Open Spaces

One of the objectives of the Sector Plan amendment is to improve the public realm through public and private open spaces and related amenities for workers as well as current and future residents. Instead of relying on the development process to provide public use space on each parcel as it redevelops, staff believes that an overall open space plan should delineate the most desirable locations for major open spaces in the CBD. These open spaces should be provided through public-private partnership and other means (ex., the Amenity Fund) as redevelopment takes place.

In addition to privately owned properties in the Sector Plan area staff intends to explore the feasibility of including some of the County-owned parking lots as potential open spaces. Three of these parking lots are the best locations for open space in their respective quadrants and can be used as a way to consolidate smaller open spaces that would otherwise be scattered in less than desirable locations. A portion of Parking Lot 13 on the west side of Georgia Avenue (Triangle Lane, Reddie Drive and Grandview Avenue) has been discussed as a future open space, and the County is planning to include it as a potential open space in its effort to redevelop the WMATA property (Georgia Avenue, Veirs Mill Road, Reddie Drive). Staff is looking at additional public and private opportunities to create an open space network, including two other parking lots, one on Price Avenue and the other on Blueridge Avenue. Staff will be working with the County agencies to ensure adequate parking to support future redevelopment in Wheaton as well as meet any legal and financial obligations of the Parking Lot District. The Parking Lot District must maintain its financial viability and the County must be compensated for their property at fair market value if these existing public parking lots are used for open spaces.

Status of Other Tasks

The Montgomery County Department of Economic Development and the Maryland Department of Transportation are currently working on economic development initiatives for Wheaton. They anticipate contracting out some economic analysis work including a financial feasibility study of WMATA/Parking Lot 13 redevelopment. Although this work is important to the revitalization effort and will inform the sector plan amendment process, it is not critical to the development of the Sector Plan.

The Montgomery County Department of Economic Development, with the help of the Department of Housing and Community Affairs, the Wheaton Redevelopment Office, and the M-NCPPC is also considering a retail study for Wheaton to identify ways to help locally owned, viable retail and other small businesses and support “mom-n-pop” stores. The primary goal of the initiative is to provide viable, local small businesses with the tools and assistance they need to adapt to changing markets and to successfully transition and thrive as redevelopment occurs. This goal will also help achieve a secondary objective of retaining the unique character and flavor of an area as redevelopment occurs, and to help make the area a regional destination. If these initiatives work in Wheaton, they will be considered for other areas of the County.

Community Outreach

The Plan is being developed with full participation of the community and other stakeholders. In lieu of a master plan advisory group, the project team is using the experience and expertise of the two existing advisory committees associated with the Mid-County Services Center. In addition to these committees, staff is utilizing a range of outreach techniques to engage the community. Meetings and presentations have been held with the committees associated with the Mid-County Services Center, and the Latino Economic Development Corporation.

NEXT STEPS

After evaluating the high scenario, staff will analyze a likely development scenario and present its findings and preliminary recommendations in July 2009. Staff anticipates developing a draft Plan in late September 2009.

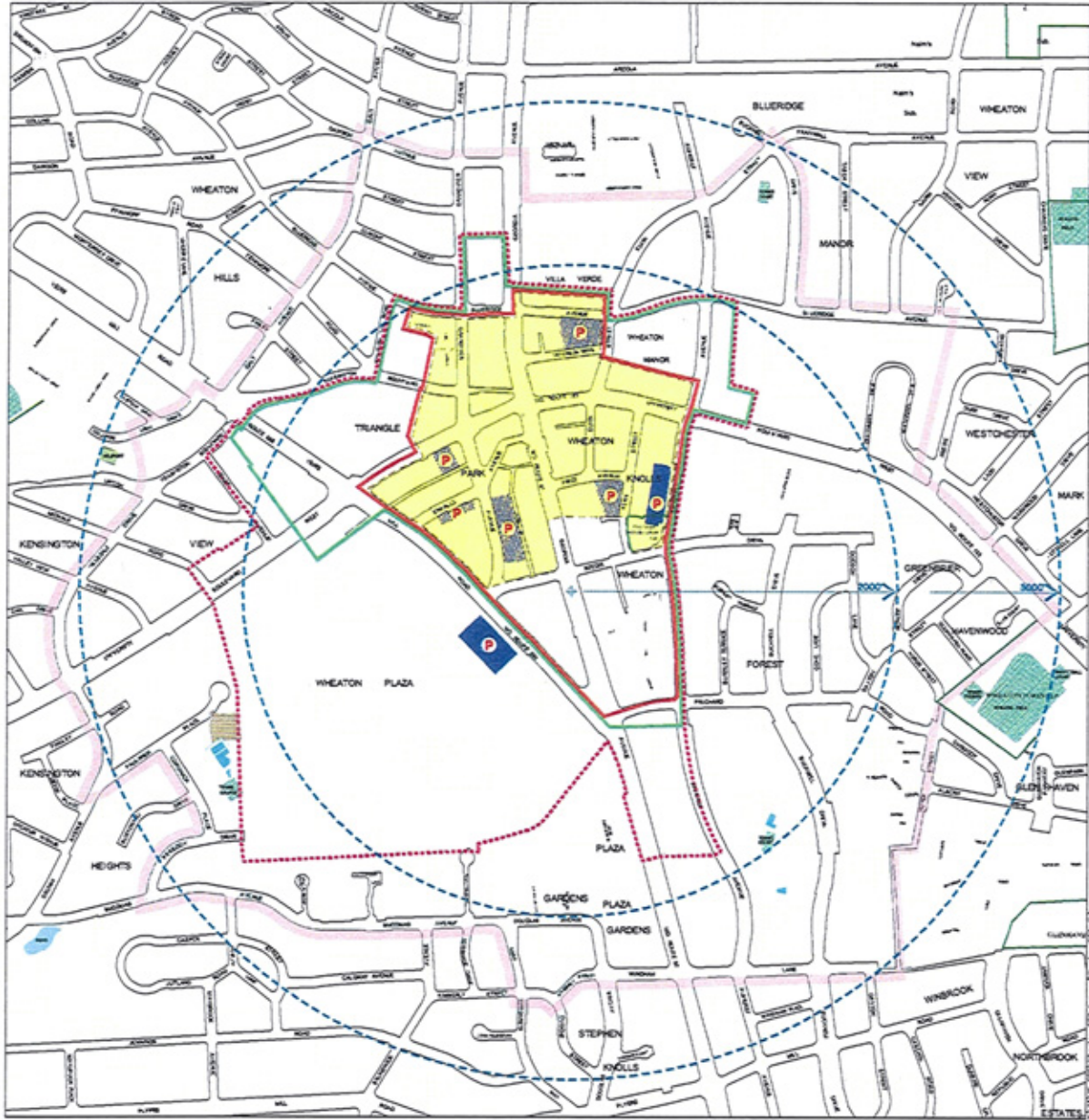
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Attachments:

1. General Location Map
2. International Downtown Association Report - Wheaton Central Business District

ATTACHMENT 1

VICINITY MAP FOR WHEATON CBD



LEGEND

- WHEATON OVERLAY ZONE BOUNDARY
- SECTOR PLAN BOUNDARY
- URBAN DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- C.B.D. BOUNDARY
- PARKING DISTRICT BOUNDARY





Wheaton Central Business District

**International Downtown Association
Advisory Panel Report
Wheaton Urban District
Wheaton, MD
March 15-18, 2008**



International Downtown Association

Wheaton Advisory Panel

Wheaton, Maryland

March 15-18, 2008

Introduction

Montgomery County has seen substantial growth and development in several of its larger business districts over the past two decades. Bethesda has blossomed into one of the most desirable downtown locations in the Washington DC metro area. Downtown Silver Spring has recently been transformed into a nationally recognized success story, combining office, residential and dining/entertainment uses around a business and intermodal transportation hub, and attracting a premier headquarters office in the Discovery Channel. Rockville is creating a town center anchored by a new and attractive county library.

Wheaton's Central Business District (CBD) has also seen some recent successes, including a multi-million dollar investment by Westfield in the regional mall (commonly known as Wheaton Plaza, but officially named Westfield Wheaton), and several hundred new market rate residential units. However, Wheaton residents, business owners, and County officials generally concur that Wheaton's business district development has not kept pace with other prominent business districts in Montgomery County.

With strong support from Wheaton residents, business owners and property owners, and grounded in the work of previous planning efforts, Montgomery County commissioned the International Downtown Association (IDA), in association with the Urban Agenda, Inc. to undertake an Advisory Panel on Wheaton's revitalization. This would provide additional perspective on redevelopment for the upcoming Wheaton Central Business District Sector Plan Review conducted by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). It would also serve to identify how County assets might be used as an impetus for Wheaton's redevelopment.

The panel, convened March 15-18, involved scores of local stakeholders. It engaged downtown revitalization experts from Michigan, North Carolina, Vermont and Washington DC.

With the County's interest in building a new Wheaton library, county officials wondered if moving this key facility into the heart of the CBD could serve to leverage additional development. At the same time, county officials sought to determine if other county assets, such as the Mid-County Regional Service Center and the County's numerous public parking lots, might also be brought into play.

Wheaton has benefitted from thoughtful planning; from investments by private sector interests in retail and residential development; from a wonderful collection of ethnically diverse restaurants and shops; from its prominence as a transit hub; and from its location at the convergence of three major state highways. Both county officials and local stakeholders now see the opportunity for Wheaton to become the next Montgomery County business district success story.

Advisory Panel Members

David M. Feehan (Team leader) – President, International Downtown Association, Washington, DC

Betsy Jackson (Consultant) – President, The Urban Agenda, Inc., Ann Arbor, MI

David Diaz – President and CEO, Downtown Raleigh Alliance, Raleigh, NC

Ron Redmond – Executive Director, Church Street Marketplace District, Burlington, VT

Michael Stevens, President, Capital Riverfront Business Improvement District,
Washington DC

Kathy Wendler – President, Southwest Detroit Business Association, Detroit, MI

IDA Panel Observations

Strengths and Assets

Downtown Wheaton is *strategically located*. A major transportation hub, it sits at the intersection of three state highways, the Metrorail Red Line Wheaton Station, and the

Metrobus and Ride-On bus stations. It is easily accessible from much of Montgomery County and the northern sections of the District of Columbia.

Leadership is important to any business district. The County's staff and elected officials are focused on Wheaton as a priority and are willing to devote significant time and resources to making the CBD a success.

The County leadership is willing to look at an array of roles for participation in redevelopment. Among the options cities and counties often consider in revitalization areas are (1) leasing instead of buying, as a way to leverage private office development; (2) land swaps, to secure appropriate locations for both public and private development, and (3) entering into a partnership with a private developer.

Another important role the County plays is in terms of *business assistance*. Panelists wondered if this program is *coordinated and promoted* well enough.

The *Mid-County Regional Services Center* is an essential asset now, and it may be more so in the future. Besides providing a home for the Wheaton Urban District and the Wheaton Redevelopment Program, it offers County residents a host of other publicly funded services.

A second County facility of major importance is the *Wheaton Library*. This library serves not only traditional functions, but also is used as a community meeting place, a "common ground" where important community issues can be examined, debated and decided.

Just to the east of the CBD is *Wheaton Regional Park*, one of the County's most outstanding recreational assets. The park seems both well used and well located, though it may be hard to find for some.

There are a number of *nonprofit organizations* located in and serving the central business district. Several community members pointed out that, collectively, they help to establish the community's identity and give the community "soul."

The *residential area* surrounding downtown Wheaton is for the most part solid, and offers housing at a variety of price levels. This is important, because it means that both workers and business owners can live within a short commute from the Wheaton CBD.

Residential development within the business district has proven highly successful in terms of both apartments and condominiums. This popularity should help encourage future developers to undertake residential projects within the downtown, especially given proximity to the Wheaton Metro Station.

The Wheaton CBD has relatively little *office space*. Panelists believe that the CBD could support more, though perhaps not on the scale of Bethesda or Silver Spring. Because the CBD is an untested market for "Class A" commercial office space, the County will have to play a key role in attracting commercial office development to the CBD. It may need to be a pioneer by locating a significant department in Wheaton's CBD, either as a tenant in a private sector development or as a county facility that could anchor additional private sector development.

Another apparent asset is the *eclectic collection of niche restaurants and small businesses*. Though many of these are ethnic in character, there is great diversity. Few other business districts in the D.C metro area have a collection like the one found in downtown Wheaton.

The panelists were impressed by the *strong, well-informed and active citizen groups*. Some groups are officially sanctioned; others are independent resident advocacy groups. All have a deep interest and concern in what happens in *their* downtown – downtown Wheaton – and will work hard to move a consensus vision forward.

Overall, the Parking District has a sufficient supply of on-street and off-street parking, although some of this supply is underutilized. The County's parking inventory, for the most part, is well-situated and provides strategic development opportunities. A striking example is *Parking Lot #13, an extraordinarily important and valuable asset*. Its everyday vitality illustrates that it is the community gathering place, the "town square." It should be treated with care and developed with a view to the future.

The *Westfield Wheaton shopping mall* is benefiting from a major series of investments by the owner. The level of interior finish is excellent, and appropriate to the market Westfield wants to attract in the future. The owners have expressed a commitment to long-term ownership and investment. The mall was also seen by panelists as an opportunity for densification – including both office and additional residential development.

The *planning and visioning* that has taken place is an asset. Stakeholders have had numerous opportunities over the past few years to examine proposals, drawings and other options, and this has helped to build a consensus for positive change.

Weaknesses, Threats and Challenges

Business owners and residents expressed the need for a *strategic economic development plan* for the CBD that will be clearly understood by all its stakeholders.

While the Mid-County Regional Service Center is an asset, its current location *does not represent the highest and best use* of a prime piece of real estate. This facility, at the southern end of Lot #13 and just north of the bus depot at the Metro station could be better utilized. In addition, the building, while suitable for its current uses, is neither historic nor architecturally significant.

While downtown Wheaton is home to a number of niche businesses and restaurants, panelists believe *these are not maximizing their market potential*. Some of the restaurants

reportedly cater primarily to local residents and specific ethnic groups, while their appeal could be county-wide or greater.

Some small businesses are dependent on *property owners who seem to be unresponsive to the needs of their tenants*. This lack of responsiveness, when it comes to repairs, maintenance, and the overall appearance of the building, can have a detrimental effect on the success of the tenants.

Language barriers were observed. Some ethnic businesses have window signs that are only in languages other than English, diminishing the opportunity to market to the broader Montgomery County area and beyond.

Citizen groups are, as previously noted, an asset to the business district and the community. However, these *groups expressed frustration* with the pace of revitalization and change. They described the process as one of “fits and starts” – and this includes both the planning process and development process. It should be noted that this is characteristic of the community development process and is not peculiar to Wheaton. However, efforts to explain starts and stops to citizens groups might be improved.

Lot #13 and other county-owned surface parking lots are prime sites for conversion to other uses. The *challenge*, according to panelists, will be to *replace parking lost through development* with convenient replacement spaces. The County has apparently anticipated this problem and county staff have options in mind.

As noted above, the Wheaton Regional Park is an outstanding facility. However, though the park seems well-used, *its association with the CBD could be strengthened*. It is too far for a lunchtime stroll, and signage directing auto and bicycle traffic is minimal.

Challenges exist as the County considers moving the library. Some participants, particularly some residents, expressed a *desire to see the library stay in a residential rather than commercial location*. Understandably, some who live nearby simply do not

want it to move. Panelists did not think the objections and challenges were insurmountable, and could be overcome by well-planned alternative uses for the site. Several interviewees noted what they called “silos” within County government. In other words, there seem to be *bureaucratic walls between various departments*, resulting in communication breakdowns and delays. This condition was noted between the County and M-NCPPC and between the County and State on transportation issues.

Some developers and business owners believe that the County is *unreasonably restrictive*, identifying requirements on variances, height restrictions, and permitting as examples. Some commented that these cause unnecessary delays, which increase the cost of development.

Some people interviewed by the Panel indicated concern that while M-NCPPC’s planning and development policies, role and authority, are clear to those in the development process, they are *confusing to the public*.

Expectations regarding the implementation of the Arts and Entertainment District exceed the pace and scope of implementation. Interviewees generally expressed support for the designation, but are unclear as to what this means, how it will play out over time, and who is responsible for making it happen.

Marketing of the Wheaton business district and its assets is seen as weak by interviewees and panelists. As a result, much of the news and other messages people in the County and surrounding area receive is negative – chiefly crime-related news.

The Central Business District is a *challenge for pedestrians*. Crossing the major arterials has been improved, but is still problematic. Pedestrian wayfinding systems seem nonexistent. The connections to Westfield Wheaton are unappealing, at least from the direction of the business district. The at-grade crossing leads visually into a parking garage. The pedestrian bridge over Veirs Mill Road requires climbing a couple of flights of stairs or waiting for a slow hydraulic elevator. The stair towers and elevators

sometimes reek of urine. Once a pedestrian crosses Veirs Mill on the bridge, a passage through the WMATA parking garage to a bottleneck pedestrian ramp is necessary.

IDA Advisory Panel General Recommendations

Panelists believe that the County has a unique opportunity in Wheaton. The opportunity exists to *create a quality town center environment*, unique to the region. The success the County has had in Bethesda, Silver Spring and Rockville give the panel confidence that a similar degree of success is possible in Wheaton.

Wheaton possesses a *civic identity* that is unique. Key to the success of any business district is its ability to differentiate itself – to convey its own character, personality and identity – in other words, its *community DNA*. This civic identity, or community DNA, has roots in Wheaton’s history, geography, and demographic makeup. Communicating this civic identity will take work. It is not just a matter of creating a catchy slogan, logo or jingle. It requires carefully identifying, defining, and teasing out the most appealing features of downtown Wheaton.

Wheaton must be seen as a *desirable destination*, if its market potential is to be realized. As the panel was told, even the regional mall functions more as a community shopping center. There are two aspects to the issue of destination. One is to market downtown Wheaton itself as a “place to be.” The other is to attract destination retailers and restaurants who give those from outside the immediate Wheaton community a reason to visit downtown Wheaton periodically, and often.

Creating and promoting a cluster of *desirable amenities* will serve to attract for further business investment. Wheaton already possesses a number of amenities that simply need to be highlighted and promoted. *Building an outstanding library in a signature building* located in the heart of the business district will signal to potential investors that downtown Wheaton is moving in the right direction. This is particularly important in terms of office tenants, as the County seeks to expand the tax base in downtown Wheaton through the construction of new office buildings.

What are some of the desirable amenities that currently exist or might be induced to exist in downtown Wheaton?

A strong arts community already exists in Montgomery County and increasingly in the Wheaton area. Wheaton could be a magnet for artists because of its funky, eclectic character and its opportunities for inexpensive live-work spaces above some of the stores. Wheaton is a designated Arts & Entertainment District. Although this designation provides generous tax incentives for the creation of live/work space, such incentives have not been utilized. Artists are pioneers, and they have repeatedly proven that their choice of a given location leads to restaurant, entertainment, residential, and eventually other commercial uses. *The County should consider taking a more aggressive role to ensure the arts community is a key part of downtown Wheaton's revitalization strategy.*

Food is a major asset for downtown Wheaton. It is one of the primary reasons people who do not live or work in close proximity to the business district come here. Food-related businesses are a current asset and a great opportunity for downtown Wheaton. And this opportunity goes beyond restaurants and ethnic markets, to include catering operations, a culinary school, a major farmers market, glass, crystal and china (tabletop) retailers and suppliers, and a host of other businesses. Wheaton seems to do most of its restaurant business in the evening; a daytime lunch business could add measurably to the success of current and future establishments as the office component is expanded in downtown Wheaton.

Not every street-level business in downtown Wheaton is a restaurant. There are a number of independent *niche businesses* that give the CBD color, distinctiveness and appeal. The County should strive to make sure that these independent businesses are taken into account as development occurs. The fear on the part of many business owners and residents is that new development means displacement from the Wheaton business district. A carefully crafted program to provide information on other locations within the CBD, combined with a menu of helpful business assistance programs, could mean that

the vast majority of Wheaton's desirable niche businesses can not only survive but can expand in a revitalized downtown Wheaton.

One other major asset the County possesses in terms of creating a quality town center environment is the significant number of *County-owned properties* within and adjacent to the business district. In addition to Parking Lot 13, the County owns four additional surface lots within the CBD. All of these lots appear to be prime candidates to support later-stage, mixed-use development.

One constraint that often occurs in downtowns undertaking revitalization is that development sites are often in the hands of private, uncooperative owners. With eminent domain increasingly restricted and controversial as an economic development tool, local government is often stymied as it tries to package sites for development. Montgomery County is fortunate to have a number of strategically located sites within its control in downtown Wheaton.

Priority Recommendations

The IDA Advisory Panel urges Montgomery County to "*grow the downtown from the inside out.*" In other words, the County should see parking lot #13 and the Mid-County Regional Services Center as "ground zero" for the first phases of redevelopment. These properties are currently County-owned; combined with the Bozzuto and Metro air rights sites, they offer a sizable opportunity in a key location. They are perceived by nearly everyone the panel interviewed as "the center of downtown."

The panel urges the County to *create a new civic identity* by redeveloping a portion of Lot #13 into a "*town-square*" environment, with mixed-use development on surrounding parcels in subsequent phases. This could be the place where an enhanced farmers' market occurs, where a street arts festival is held, or where people simply gather in nice weather to eat lunch, read the paper, and converse. The County should actively program this space.

As the County alters the use of Lot #13, it is critical to plan for *replacement parking*. This lot is the lifeblood for nearby businesses, and convenient replacement parking must be available as the lot is converted. Small businesses have a tough time surviving whenever construction occurs; loss of close-by parking could be the death knell for many. Parking replacement should be part of the pro forma analysis of the development as a whole, and specifically as part of the Wheaton Library relocation.

The *Wheaton library should be relocated to the southern end of Lot #13* and should be seen as not just a library (though it should be a great library). It should also *encompass an arts/cultural center*. This new facility should not be seen as being limited to just the library/cultural center. It could be a mixed-use facility, with offices, residential, retail, restaurant, and parking. The panel examined the possibility of including County recreation programs into this facility and concluded that these could stay in the current location north of the business district, incorporated into the Rafferty Center, especially because there is a private health club incorporated into the Westfield development.

Social Services are part of Wheaton's civic identity. They should be retained, but not necessarily within the priority development area. They should, however, be in appropriate, user-friendly facilities easily accessible by Metro and other public transit.

Panelists noted frequently the challenges pedestrians face in downtown Wheaton. A priority recommendation is to *develop and execute a traffic calming/pedestrian safety/circulation/parking plan and program* for the entire downtown district. One of the ways smaller businesses in the heart of the district could benefit from such a plan is that it would give them access to shoppers who now come to Wheaton only for the Westfield mall.

Panelists agreed that there is a need to *conduct a market study of the development opportunities* in the downtown district. The study should focus on market demand and feasibility for a number of uses, including public and private sector office space, retail, residential (both mixed/affordable and market rate) and cultural amenities. A focused

marketing and promotion plan can then be used to communicate Wheaton's potential and its ongoing revitalization.

The County has a *significant business assistance program*. It includes the Wheaton Business Innovation Center, and a variety of economic development tools, such as tax credits, financing, and workforce development programs. The panel recommends that the County examine ways to improve the target marketing of these programs, so that all downtown Wheaton businesses are aware of them and how best to use them. Funding for additional outreach might be a desirable first step for the County to consider. In addition to the already impressive list of services, the County should consider expanding to include business recruitment and business-to-business networking and mentoring services.

Summarizing the panel's recommendations, the County and its current and potential business partners need to:

- *Plan and develop a town center where parking lot #13 now stands, and use the development sites to the south – the Mid-County Center and the Bozzuto and Metro Station air rights – to create a central focus for future development.* This is where a striking, architecturally significant library, art and cultural center, and potentially mixed-use project – should be built. It is important that the plan identify future phases of development along the perimeter of Lot #13 as well.
- *Concurrently, develop a better understanding of the market potential for the CBD by undertaking a well-conceived and well-funded study (or series of studies) to serve as the basis for a comprehensive strategic and economic development plan for the entire CBD.*
- *Begin programming the town square (Lot #13) as soon as it becomes available.* This crucial space should be seen as a place of regular, enjoyable activity. It must also be recognized as safe and well maintained. Imaginative programming and expanded clean-and-safe services can make this happen.

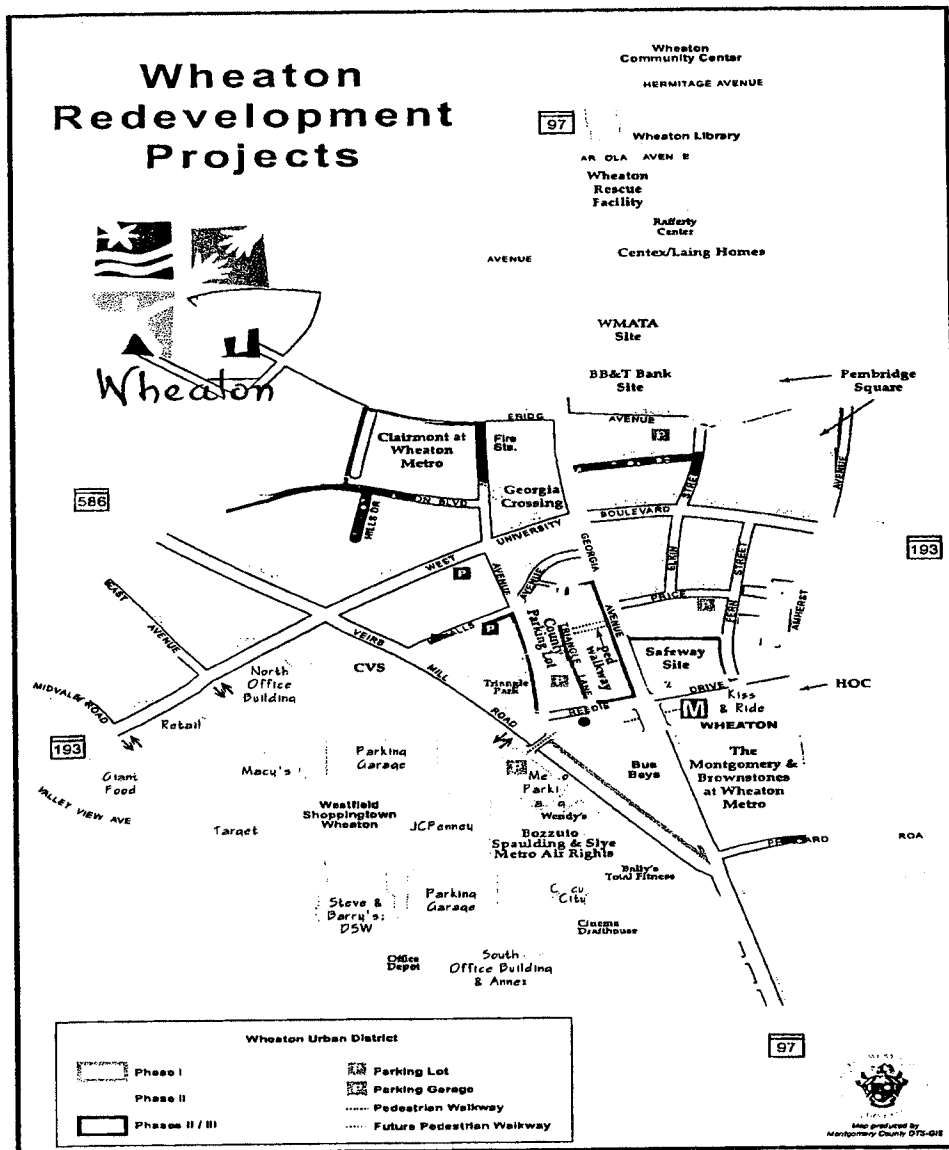
- *Make sure that parking is replaced simultaneously with the redevelopment of Lot #13.* Signage and promotion, in addition to providing actual replacement spaces, are essential. Some downtowns have actually been able to increase sales for local retailers during construction. Wheaton should learn how they accomplished this and adopt their methods. One example occurred during the removal of the pedestrian mall in Kalamazoo, Michigan.
- *Make downtown Wheaton the most pedestrian-friendly business district in Montgomery County.* Set the bar high. Investigate using Project for Public Spaces, the New York-based nonprofit experts, as consultants in order to achieve an extraordinary degree of urban walkability.
- *Develop and implement a new marketing strategy for Wheaton.* Make the program dual-focused – external and internal. It is just as important that local businesses and residents understand and support downtown revitalization efforts as potential businesses and residents from outside the area.
- *Invest in the public realm.* Sidewalks, streets and parking lots should not just be “industry standard.” Wheaton has, judging from many comments during interviews and meetings with the panel, an image problem. Chicago and some other cities have realized that creating beauty in the public realm is not only possible; it pays off handsomely in increased tax revenues and business investment.
- *Continue to invest in and expand the business improvement district’s Clean and Safe program.* As basic services are accomplished, businesses, residents and visitors will take better conditions for granted. The trick is to continually improve and innovate, so that people not only see a cleaner and safer environment; they actually see people doing the work, increasing awareness of this vital service.

Action Steps and Implementation Phases

The IDA Advisory Panel has made many recommendations. To attempt them all simultaneously is folly; *it is essential that the County and the community approach these recommendations in phases.* There are several reasons for this. The first is opportunity: it is critical to leverage development opportunities – such as the relocation of the library –

in order to move the revitalization of downtown Wheaton forward. The second is focused attention and visual impact: creating a critical mass of development creates a sense of forward progress and increases support for future development initiatives. And third is investor confidence: once developers see initial success, they will be eager to be part of the next wave of development in the Wheaton CBD.

The panel recommends the following phases for the County's involvement in downtown Wheaton's redevelopment, with the caveat that economic and market conditions will play a significant role in the implementing the recommendations made below :



Phase I (0-3 years)	Phase II (5-10 years)	Phase III (10+ years)
<p>Plan "town center" development around Parking Lot #13, Mid-County parcel, and Bozzuto/Metro Air Rights site. Use portion of Lot #13 for "town green" development.</p> <p>Safeway site: Monitor progress of Park & Planning's Zoning Text Amendment to modify the northern boundary of the CBD. If approved by Council, Avalon Bay could continue to move through the planning process making the relocation of Safeway and subsequent construction on its site viable in Phase I.</p>	<p>(1) Pursue Phase II redevelopment of town center site by focusing on the Georgia Avenue block that abuts the town square site. Focus on local business retention, upper story residential and live-work space, and additional parking development.</p> <p>(2) Participate in/influence private-sector developments undertaken east of Georgia Avenue to the CBD boundary.</p>	<p>(1) Pursue Phase II-III development of the town center site by focusing on a "bookend" site to a new Wheaton library proposed to be situated within the Bozzuto/Metro Air Rights project development. The "bookend" would include the property abutting Parking Lot # 13, northward to University Blvd., bounded by Grandview Ave to the East and Georgia Ave to the west .</p> <p>(2) Continue to use County real estate assets (parking lots, parking structure, tenancy potential, etc.) to leverage desired development.</p>
<p>Begin programming the "town square" as soon as it's available. Manage the space, schedule/rent out for private events (weddings, etc.), create special events, etc.</p>	<p>(1) Continue to manage the town square space for uses described in Phase I.</p> <p>(2) Redesign and program Veteran's Park as an integral element of redevelopment efforts east of Georgia Avenue.</p>	<p>(3) Review programming of town square and adjust as market potential dictates.</p> <p>(4) Assess physical conditions and make needed repairs or redesign.</p>
<p>Concurrently, conduct market study/feasibility analysis as basis for a comprehensive strategic and economic plan for the Wheaton CBD.</p>	<p>Use market data for Phase II development and make available to private-sector development projects.</p>	<p>Update market data and use for Phase III development.</p>
<p>Parking replacement as town green comes on line.</p>	<p>Creation of additional parking as a result of second phase of town center redevelopment.</p>	<p>Continue to assess parking needs as new development or parking demand increases dictate.</p>
<p>Focus on relocation of Wheaton Library to the town center development site; expand library development to include arts/cultural uses; incorporate mixed uses into the development.</p>	<p>Expand on cultural arts programming. Like town square, keep events and offerings fresh.</p>	<p>Incorporate cultural arts businesses and programming in additional phases of development, with special attention paid to clustering arts activities to maximize patronage.</p>

<p>Create/execute traffic calming, pedestrian safety, access, circulation, wayfinding, and parking strategies for the whole CBD.</p>	<p>(1) Execute/manage traffic calming, pedestrian safety, access, circulation, and parking strategies for the whole CBD. (2) Realign Ennalls Avenue in preparation for Phase II-III development of block bordered by Grandview, W. University, Georgia, and Ennalls.</p>	<p>(1) Incorporate pedestrian access into all future development projects. (2) Create strong pedestrian, cycle, and vehicular connections between Wheaton Regional Park and the CBD.</p>
<p>Expand County services to small businesses. (retention, expansion, B2B, recruitment)</p>	<p>Use market data to redirect/enhance County services.</p>	<p>Use updated market data to redirect/enhance County services.</p>
<p>Create marketing and communications strategies to inform/promote strengths and plans for the CBD (Internal = community stakeholders. External = to general public, target consumer markets, media, potential new businesses and investors.)</p>	<p>Maintain and refresh marketing and communications program to reflect new realities.</p>	<p>Revamp downtown marketing and communications strategies.</p>
<p>Improve quality of investment in the public realm.</p>	<p>Maintain public space investments.</p>	<p>Review public space needs and redesign/maintain as required.</p>
<p>Expand/enhance County's commitment to 'clean and safe' activities.</p>	<p>Expand/enhance County's commitment to 'clean and safe' activities.</p>	<p>Consider physical expansion of 'clean and safe' boundaries as development expands to the periphery of the district.</p>

Conclusion

Of course, every downtown is unique; no two are exactly alike. But what makes downtown Wheaton unique? It is not its architecture; both panelists and interviewees agreed that downtown Wheaton's current physical appearance is not what gives it distinction. What makes downtown Wheaton unique is its combination of location, transit options, cultural diversity, and solid residential base.

But downtown Wheaton comes with its own set of dichotomies, contrasts that challenged the IDA panelists to think about their recommendations in new ways. To the panel, downtown Wheaton is:

- A suburban downtown in location, but decidedly urban in character;
- Blessed with exceptional public transportation, but still auto-centered in its operation;
- Seen by many as a moderate-to-lower-income area, but featuring \$800,000 townhomes and million dollar single family homes;
- Perceived as a struggling business district, but with few retail vacancies;
- The site of a major regional mall, but viewed by many as a community shopping district;
- Blessed with many strong, sophisticated citizens' groups, but struggling with how best to utilize their energies;
- Relatively clean and safe thanks to the business improvement district, but perceived by some – perhaps many – as unsafe;
- Home to numerous independent businesses, but with a Chamber of Commerce that is struggling to represent them; and
- Strategically located as a potential office center, but with little in the way of office development.

These seeming contradictions did not dissuade IDA panelists from seeing the enormous potential of the Wheaton CBD. They unanimously concluded that despite recent

economic downturns, Wheaton could truly become the next “major success story” in Montgomery County.

The new library and the town square project will signal the downtown Wheaton renaissance. The County has one opportunity to do this right. Care should be taken to ensure the design, concept, various components of development, and public involvement and awareness are optimal from the outset. At the same time, the County needs to remain attentive to the functional elements - circulation, wayfinding, pedestrian safety, business performance, cleanliness, safety, marketing, and more - of the entire Central Business District.

By taking these actions, the panelists are confident that rapid strides can be made in downtown Wheaton.

Addenda

Acknowledgements

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Bruce Adams, Director, Montgomery County Office of Community Partnerships
Uma Ahluwalia, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Diane Anderson, Wheaton resident
Greg Baker, Montgomery Housing Partnership/Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
Tina Benjamin, Montgomery County Department of Economic Development
Frankie Blackburn, Executive Director, Impact Silver Spring
Mary Bradford, Director, Montgomery County Department of Parks M-NCPPC
Jill Brantley, Wheaton Library Advisory Committee
Moshe Briel, Wheaton-Kensington Chamber of Commerce

Wheaton IDA Advisory Panel

Tom Brown, Wheaton Volunteer Rescue Squad
Kathleen Cahill, Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board, Holy Cross Hospital
Teresa Cameron, Executive Director, Montgomery County Arts and Humanities Council
Nguyen Mihn Chou, Montgomery County Office of Community Partnerships
Lt. Jacques Croom, Montgomery County Police Department
Karen Cordry, Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
John Cox, Senior Vice President, Avalon Bay Communities
Cheryl Czekaj, Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
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Eleanor Duckett, Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
Eric Dull, Wheaton Library Advisory Committee
Valerie Ervin, Councilmember, Montgomery County Council
Sheldon Fishman, Mid-County Community Advisory Board
David Fraser-Hidalgo, Chair, Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee
Joe Fritch, Mid-County Regional Recreation Advisory Board
Marian Fryer, Wheaton Citizens Coalition/ Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee
Pradeep Ganguly, Director, Montgomery County Department of Economic Development
Rob Goldman, Executive Director, Montgomery Housing Partnership
Leonard Greenberg, President, Greenhill Companies
George Griffin, Director, Montgomery County Department of Liquor Control
Albert Gruber, Wheaton Forest Civic Association
Yesvy Gustap, Wheaton Library Advisory Committee
Parker Hamilton, Director, Montgomery County Public Libraries
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Linda Harrison, Wheaton Library Advisory Committee
Sonya Healey, Montgomery County Council
Chris Helsabeck, Development Director, Avalon Bay Communities
Manny Hidalgo, Executive Director, Leading Economic Development in the Community
Judy Higgins – Kensington View Civic Association
John Korpela, Montgomery County Business Innovation Centers
Paul Lederer, Wheaton Library Advisory Committee
Zoe Lefkowitz, Montgomery County Commission on Aging
Marc Lilley, Montgomery County Department of Recreation
Chris Lindsay, Principal, Lindsay Ford-Kia

Wheaton IDA Advisory Panel

Tamara Looper-Robinson, Wheaton Library Advisory Committee
Leonard Lucas, Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
Martin T. Mankowski, Director of Community Development, Centex Homes
Robin McElhenny, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Ian Morrison, Principal, The Royal Mile Pub
Steve Morrison, Mid-County Citizen's Advisory Board
Daniel Nachtigal, Executive Director, Through the Kitchen Door, Inc.
Ken Nelson, Montgomery College
Rick Nelson, Director, Montgomery County Department of Housing & Community Affairs
Jennifer Deng Pickett, Mid-County Citizens' Advisory Board
Freddy Real, Local First Wheaton
Maritza Rivera-Cohen, Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity
Morey Rothberg, Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
Shelby Sannett, Wheaton Library Advisory Committee
Donna Savage, Kensington Heights Civic Assn./ Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee
Matt Schmidt, Chair, Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
Virginia Sheard, Kensington View Civic Association
Duncan Smith, Westfield Wheaton/ Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee
Lisa Solomon, Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
Dan Soma, Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
Pilar Torres, Executive Director, Centro Familia
Gustave Torres, Executive Director, Casa of Maryland
Peter Tuck, Westfield Wheaton
Fran Ware, Wheaton Library
Shirley Washington, Wheaton Library Advisory Committee
Robyn Watts, Wheaton Library Advisory Committee
Tim Weins, President, Wheaton-Kensington Chamber of Commerce
Larry White, First Baptist Church of Wheaton
Bruce Wood, Wheaton Hills Civic Association

Advisory Panel Process

Saturday, March 15

6:00 p.m. Panel assembles at hotel and has dinner in downtown Wheaton

Wheaton IDA Advisory Panel

Sunday, March 16

- 9:00 a.m. IDA Advisory Panel members meet for orientation.
- 10:00 a.m. Tour of downtown. Individual panelists review materials, explore downtown on foot; gain first-hand, on the street “feel” for parking issues.
- 6:00 p.m. Dinner with Core Constituents.
- 8:00 p.m. Brief panel group meeting. Discussion of observations from tour and dinner.

Monday, March 17

- 7:30 a.m. Community Breakfast. Introduction of the IDA Advisory Panel to invited community leaders. Dave Feehan describes IDA and how the Advisory Panel process works. Each panelist makes some observations about his/her experience in management and, and about the importance of creating a healthy, high quality downtown. Panelists are instructed not to offer observations or opinions at this point. Attendees are told that the first day is devoted to listening, exploring and gaining understanding about downtown Wheaton and its unique characteristics.
- 9:30 a.m. Small Group Interviews
- 12:15 p.m. Working Lunch.
- 2:00 p.m. Small Group Interviews
- 4:00 p.m. Panel Working Session
- 6:30 p.m. Dinner with local team

Tuesday, March 18

- 7:30 a.m. Panelist Working Breakfast. Identification of key local issues, application of best practices and successful strategies from other cities, key opportunities for strategic improvements. Panelists test various ideas for long term funding and sustainability.
- 8:30 a.m. Interview with Core Constituents. Panelists test directions and strategies with local team and core constituents.
- 9:30 a.m. Panel working session
- 12:00 noon Working lunch
- 2:00 p.m. Panel presentation to stakeholders