March 1, 2006

WHEATON TOWN MEETING

The Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee and the Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee sponsored a Town Meeting to discuss amending the Wheaton Retail Preservation Overlay Zone to accomplish the following:

- Facilitate small development projects, including additions to existing buildings;
- Encourage mixed-use, transit oriented development with public-use space and amenities in downtown Wheaton;
- Encourage retention of small business space at the street level;
- Maintain quality of public approval procedures and streamline approval process; and
- Encourage Art & Entertainment uses in the downtown.

Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity at 11319 Elkin Street, Wheaton.

There is still time to present public comment to the County Council. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please call the Wheaton & Kensington Chamber at (301) 949-0080.

The 22nd Annual Wheaton & Kensington Chamber of Commerce Community Awards Banquet

Wednesday, March 22, 2006
Beginning at 6:30 pm
at Hollywood East Cafe on the Boulevard
2621 University Blvd. West
Wheaton, Maryland 20902

$25 in advance (by March 20)
$30 at the door
Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan today announced that Wheaton has been designated by the State of Maryland as an Arts and Entertainment District, joining Silver Spring and Bethesda as the third district in Montgomery County to receive the distinction.

“I’m delighted that Wheaton has been named an Arts and Entertainment District,” said Duncan. “I have made the revitalization of Wheaton a priority of my administration, and this designation is a very important piece of that project. This is a well-deserved honor for Wheaton, especially given its diverse mix of ethnic restaurants, expanding arts community and, of course, the world-renowned Chuck Levin’s Washington Music Center.”

The Arts and Entertainment District designation provides artists working in that area with an income tax break. Developers who create spaces for artists to live and work can be exempt from paying certain property taxes on the value of the renovations for up to 10 years. Designated districts are exempt from admissions and amusement taxes.

Montgomery County’s Ad Hoc Arts and Entertainment District Advisory Panel, chaired by David Edgerley, director of the Department of Economic Development, held a public hearing in July and approved forwarding the Wheaton application to the State. The application, which was submitted to the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development in early October, cited Wheaton’s strategic location, cultural diversity, exceptional accessibility and affordability. The six-member County Executive-appointed Arts and Entertainment Task Force, which includes representatives of the downtown’s business and residential community, and an Arts Network group of more than 70 members, have been set up to identify local arts and entertainment resources and develop ideas to enhance the downtown’s arts base.

“One of our major goals for Wheaton is to revitalize and redevelop this unique commercial center into a 24/7 downtown destination. It will be a place people and businesses from all cultures and areas come together in a festive, friendly, safe and inclusive environment to enjoy arts and entertainment, specialty retail, ethnic restaurants and Wheaton’s other amenities,” said Midcounty Regional Services Center Director Natalie Cantor. “The State’s designation of Wheaton as an Arts and Entertainment District will help us accomplish this important goal. We look forward to welcoming new artists and entertainers, to a downtown already recognized for its one-of-a-kind atmosphere.”

For more information, call Nancy Gasko, Wheaton Redevelopment Program, at (240) 777-8126.

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S.C.O.R.E. Manny and the LEDC are new Wheaton & Kensington Chamber members, and are opening a branch office in Wheaton soon.

S.C.O.R.E. is a nationwide volunteer association of retired business owners and executives. As a resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Administration, S.C.O.R.E. provides free counseling to small businesses and has several branches in this area. Businesses learn about special resources available to them and the importance of having a business plan and the steps to develop one. For more information, contact Manny Hildalgo at (202) 588-5102 or Larry Tremonti at (202) 272-0390.

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Breakfast Mixer February 22, 2006

The Crossway Community Center Breakfast Mixer had a good turnout, even with the nonstop morning snowfall.

The breakfast was hosted by Kathleen Guinan, of the Crossway Community (below), who spoke about her counseling program and the need for non-government funding. The guest speakers were Manny Hildalgo (left), from the Latino Economic Development Corporation and Larry Tremonti (right), from
The Chamber welcomes these new members:

Royal Mile Pub
Hot Deals Boutique
Bagel City & Beyond
Latino Economic Development Corp.

And appreciates these member renewals:

The Stone Group
Glenmont Management
Mid-County Services Center
Wheaton Library
Hodgson Consulting
Montgomery Housing Partnership

Woll & Woll
Montgomery Co. Police Dept.
Kensington Vol. Fire Dept.
Wheaton Place Apts.

New member Hot Deals Boutique is having their grand opening on Saturday, March 11, with a ribbon cutting ceremony at 9:00 a.m. They are in Westfield Wheaton, on the upper level near JCPenney and the Food Court.

One day of every month, they will offer gift certificates on purchases of $20 or more. The designated gift certificate day will be announced one week ahead.

Welcome a new Board Member, Sean Chrysostom from Chevy Chase Bank. He works out of the new branch in Kensington (that replaced the Pizza Hut).

Welcome a new Chamber Publicity Committee Member, Kristin Orr from Royal Mile Pub.
FARE SHARE COUNTY-WIDE

offers a match of up to $20,000 – for one year with an optional one-year extension to each contributing organization for employees’ public transportation to and from the workplace. Transit includes: Ride On, Metrorail, Metrobus, Commuter Buses, MARC/VRE Commuter Train, and Vanpools.

The participating employer pays up to $32.50 per month for each employee who commutes by transit. Montgomery County matches that amount up to $32.50 per month. The combined amount of up to $65.00 is tax-free to the employee and a tax deduction for the employer under Federal tax law.

FARE SHARE WHEATON AND MONTGOMERY HILLS CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICTS

is a special one-year transit discount program that will give employees a “raise,” attract quality staff, and save parking spaces for customers. A company may be entitled to up to $20,000 in matching dollars from Montgomery County. More than $500 is available for each transit-using employee during the year.

For the first six months, the employer pays $1 per transit-user per month. The County provides up to $64 per transit-user per month; with the employer getting a total of $65 per month tax-free to cover transit costs. For the last six months, the County will match the employer dollar-for-dollar up to $32.50 for each employee’s monthly transit costs. This combined amount of $65 is tax-free to the employee and eligible for tax deductions and tax credits for the employer.

For more information, or to set up Fare Share or Fare Share Wheaton and Montgomery Hills programs, contact Ms. Sheila D. Wilson, Transit Marketing Specialist at (301) 565-7315, or email at sheila.wilson@montgomerycountymd.gov.

SUPER FARE SHARE TRANSPORTATION

Management Districts of downtown Bethesda, North Bethesda, Friendship Heights, and downtown Silver Spring could be eligible for up to $100,000 in transit benefits during the next five years. In Year One, the employer pays $1 per participating employee and the County pays up to $64 per month per employee. The employer distributes up to $65 in Metrocheks and/or Ride On passes – “for free” – to its transit-using employees.

Years two through five, a company pays up to $32.50 per month per employee, and the County matches the contribution up to $32.50 per month. The company then distributes up to $65 in Metrocheks and/or Ride On passes to each transit commuter each month. The total of $65 per month offered to employees is tax-free to the employer and a tax deduction for the employer.

Each of the programs are eligible for a tax deduction for contributing to their employees’ transit costs and a Tax Credit from the State of Maryland. Be sure to check out www.mdot.state.md.us/CommuterChoice.

For more information, or to set up your Super Fare Share program, call (301) 565-7313, or email commuter.express@montgomerycountymd.gov.

LOCAL RESTAURANT SERVES AGAIN

Anchor Inn Donated to Habitat for Humanity

The property owner, Anchor Inn Properties, LLC, a subsidiary of local real estate developer Greenhill Capital Corporation, has donated all of the Anchor Inn contents to Habitat for Humanity of Montgomery County Maryland, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to the reduction of substandard housing by providing a hand-up to help families realize the dream of home ownership. Working in partnership with families, Habitat volunteers build affordable housing in Montgomery County. Habitat has already removed the building contents, and will use elements of the building structure as well.

Over a year ago, the Anchor Inn restaurant in Wheaton closed its doors, its proprietors leaving the area. But now the Anchor Inn is serving again, this time not entrees, but giving back to the community that patronized it for so long.

Greenhill has also given Wheaton Fire and Rescue permission to conduct emergency training on the Anchor Inn site. One day soon, Greenhill will demolish what remains of the building, in preparation for its redevelopment of the site.

Montgomery County Incubators

Business Incubator Network

WHEATON

The Montgomery County Business Incubator Network (MCBIN) is growing! Spurred by the success of their original facility, the Maryland Technology Development Center (MTDC) located in the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center, and the year-old Silver Spring Innovation Center (SSIC), located in Downtown Silver Spring—which together house 60 companies with over 250 employees—they’re opening their third incubator facility within the County.

The NEW Wheaton Small Business Incubator—to open in soon in the Wheaton South Building at Westfield Wheaton—will provide office space, conference rooms and support services for approximately 25 – 30 local small businesses.

Features include:

• 10K square-foot, custom-designed business center in the heart of Downtown Wheaton—which is in the midst of a $400 million, multi-phase commercial, residential and retail revitalization
• State-of-the-art conference & meeting space with full plug-and-play capability
• Office equipped with internet access via T1 lines and voice & data connections
• Shared work space with copier, fax, printer & mail service
• Available storage space

Like tenants of the MTDC & the SSIC, Wheaton Small Business Incubator tenants will have access to a host of business resources

Continued on page 6
Arts and Entertainment District – Wheaton has just been designated by the State of Maryland as an Arts and Entertainment District (A&ED). Qualifying artists working in the Wheaton A&ED are now eligible for income tax credits. Developers who create spaces for artists to live and/or work and A&E businesses owning property can be eligible for property tax credits. The property tax credit is for a period of 10 years and is on the increased portion of the County property taxes that would be due from new qualified capital investments, such as building renovations and new construction. For the first 5 years, eligible businesses would receive a property tax credit for 80% of the increased taxes due. For the next 5 years, the property tax credit would decrease by 10% per year (70% credit on year 6, 60% credit on year 7, etc.) The Wheaton A&ED is also exempt from admissions and amusement taxes.

Enterprise Zone – Businesses and owners of commercial property in the Enterprise Zone may be eligible for employment and/or property tax credits. A one-time State income tax credit of $1,000 will be available to qualifying businesses creating new full time jobs in Wheaton. These new jobs must work 35 hours or more in Wheaton Enterprise Zone; have been established for 6 months or more; and earn wages of at least 150% of the Federal minimum wage. Businesses may be eligible for $6,000 in tax credits for newly created positions that are filled by economically disadvantaged workers.

Property tax credits are also available to eligible commercial businesses (lessee’s may be eligible with property owner approval) and property owners who make capital investments thru property renovations and/or construction of new buildings. The property tax credit is for a period of 10 years and is on the portion of the County property taxes that would be due from these qualified capital investments, such as building renovations and new construction. For the first 5 years, eligible businesses would receive a property tax credit for 80% of the increased taxes due. For the next 5 years, the property tax credit would decrease by 10% per year (70% credit on year 6, 60% credit on year 7, etc).

SPECIAL NOTE: In some circumstances these two tax credit programs may be combined. Developers who create space for artists to work and A&E businesses owning and making eligible capital improvements to property that is within both the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District and the Wheaton Enterprise Zone, may be eligible for the Enterprise Zone property tax credit plus an additional 20% tax credit from the A&ED.

For more information on these tax credit programs, contact: Nancy Gasko at the Wheaton Redevelopment Program at (240) 777-8126.

WHEATON BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

In the County’s effort to assist and prepare the local businesses and restaurants for the coming changes to downtown Wheaton, the Wheaton Redevelopment Office in cooperation with the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development conducted a Small Business Survey endorsed by the Wheaton-Kensington Chamber of Commerce. Each street-level business and restaurant received the thirteen question survey printed in English and Spanish. A total of 188 surveys were distributed and 139 responses were received. That represents a 71% response rate.

Once the surveys were tabulated, the County was able to identify the types of services and programs the local business community felt to be important.

Here were some of the findings:

✯ the majority of businesses in Wheaton are doing well and the County needs to insure that Wheaton businesses continue to prosper through the Redevelopment and beyond;

✯ 73% of the businesses that responded said Redevelopment would affect their business and 87% said their business would be affected in a good way.

✯ 88% of the businesses want to renew their lease, while only 7% will not renew their lease and 5% were undecided;

✯ in five years or less, more than 70% of those responding may be faced with significantly higher rent or prospect of relocating or both;

✯ businesses identified the following program needs: marketing; storefront improvements; financial; lease negotiations; computer; business plans; bookkeeping; and merchandising. The County is already working on this request and hope to bring several of these programs to our businesses and restaurants in February or March of this year;

✯ the immediate concerns of the businesses were: parking concerns were across the board; safety and crime were prevalent concerns of older businesses; rent increases were among the new business; vehicle traffic; foot traffic and others such as marketing; business expansion; and Mall competition;

✯ 31% of the businesses have been in business for 16+ years and 26% of those businesses have had their business in Wheaton for 15+ years

For additional information, please contact Sharon Lasswell in the Wheaton Redevelopment Office at (240) 777-8123.
Emphasizing the importance of Montgomery County’s small business community, County Executive Douglas M. Duncan urges businesses to register for the County’s new Local Small Business Reserve Program (LSBRP). Qualifying and registering for the program can be done online at the LSBRP’s brand new website, www.montgomerycountymd.gov/LSBRP.

“Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and we have always made it a top priority to do whatever we can to help them grow and prosper,” said Duncan. “The success of this program is dependant on the numbers of local companies we can get qualified and registered. This new website is user friendly and will walk the business people through the process and answer any questions they may have. We will continue our outreach efforts to try and ensure the local business community is fully aware of this new program.”

The LSBRP program, which went into effect January 1, 2006, ensures that all County departments set aside (with specified exceptions), a minimum of 10 percent of procurements for small businesses. In addition, it also provides for the web site posting of procurement opportunities and the on-going marketing and evaluation of the Program.

The Program defines small businesses based on specific industry. For example: wholesale businesses less than 15 employees or $2 million in gross sales; retail businesses less than 15 employees or $2.5 million; manufacturing companies less than 20 employees or $7 million; service companies less than 25 employees or $2.5 million; and Construction companies less than 25 employees or $7 millions. Businesses must be independently owned and physically located only in Montgomery County. Broker and subsidiary businesses are not eligible for this Program. Companies will be able to determine if they qualify by answering the questions on the website when they go to register.

The Program is self-certifying, meaning that registration is based on information the businesses provide. The burden of responsibility rests with firms registering. Providing false information is likely to result in contract termination and ineligibility for future contracting with the County. After a business successfully registers for the Program, it will immediately receive an e-mail informing it that it has successfully self-certified its firm for the Program. The business must have at minimum this verification to bid on County work designated “Local Small Business Reserve Program”.

Individual County Departments will decide what work is to be designated within this program. The new LSBRP web site will have links to all procurement opportunities posted on the County’s Procurement Office website. Companies will be required to re-register each year to ensure that they still meet the program qualifications.

For more information and to register for the program, go to www.montgomerycountymd.gov/LSBRP or call the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development at (240) 777-2000.

Montgomery County Incubators

Continued from page 4

including training, development, and best practices seminars led by industry experts, free counseling & legal services, business counseling through the University of Maryland Intellectual Property Legal Resource Center, networking conferences, business counseling through the County’s award-winning business mentoring program, and more.

They’re on the way to achieving the goal of 7 by 7: seven incubators in Montgomery County by 2007. In addition to Wheaton, new incubators are planned for East County, Rockville and Germantown.

For more details, contact (240) 777-2000 or Jerry.Goodwin@montgomerycountymd.gov.
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Community Awards Banquet
Wednesday, March 22, 2006
Beginning at 6:30 pm
at
Hollywood East Cafe on the Boulevard
2621 University Blvd. West
Wheaton, Maryland 20902

The Chamber is rewarding those individuals who have performed above and beyond the call in each award category. We want to say thank you and celebrate not only the individuals, but also the Wheaton & Kensington community.

~ The Awards ~

The Chamber President’s Award
The Chamber Member of the Year Award
The Outstanding Chamber Service Award
The Chuck Levin Economic Development Award

The Mid-County Citizen’s Advisory Board Awards:
The Mid-County Citizen’s Advisory Board Citizen of the Year Award
The Mid-County Citizen’s Advisory Board Civic Association of the Year Award

Public Safety Awards:
The 2nd District Police Public Safety Officer of the Year
The 4th District Police Public Safety Officer of the Year
The Wheaton Rescue Squad Public Safety Award
The Kensington Volunteer Fire Department Public Safety Award

Wheaton High School Awards:
Wheaton High School Teacher of the Year Award
Wheaton High School ESOL Student of the Year Award
Wheaton High School Student Community Service of the Year

$25 in advance (by March 20) or $30 at the door

For registration information call: 301-949-0080 • fax: 301-949-0081 • email: wkchamber@wkchamber.org
Tell us your news!