



A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE WHEATON ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT 2016-2021



WHEATON URBAN DISTRICT

The Wheaton Urban District manages the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District on behalf of Montgomery County, Maryland.

FOREWORD



Dear Friends:

It is with great pleasure that I share with the community the results of ongoing conversations with residents, arts community, civic leaders, and business owners that culminate in a shared vision for the future of Wheaton as an Arts and Entertainment District.

We want to thank the community for its input in the electronic survey and community arts meetings that were held over this past year. This plan reflects the feedback, wishes and needs of the Wheaton community. The plan would not be possible without community participation, and the results of many community members' efforts are incorporated in the attached few pages.

This is in an exciting time for Wheaton. Wheaton is poised for growth and revitalization in the next decade. A strategic plan for the arts and entertainment will help guide this growth in a manner consistent with the values articulated by so many in the Wheaton community, the Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee, and supported by Montgomery County Government.

While the plan can be a guide for the future of Wheaton, the plan also provides a flexible framework as we engage in further long-term planning that creates and takes advantage of opportunities as they surface, within possibly shifting realities and budgetary realities. Though change and revision are inevitable in an effective strategic plan, we will continue to chart Wheaton's future based on the basic elements found to be essential to what makes Wheaton special. This includes the support and growth of Wheaton as a designated Arts and Entertainment District (one of 3 in the County and one of 24 in the State) and our focus on supporting the traditional arts as practiced by the talented artists living and working in Wheaton. The diversity of this community is central and we will continue to ensure that residents from all cultures feel welcome and supported.

We are certain that you will appreciate the nature of strategic plans, as they allow us to focus on the attainment of long-term goals, while providing for the current needs of the community. As you review the following pages, you will see elements of the plan already underway, as well as aspirations for the future.

I encourage you to read the plan and become an active participant in the future of Wheaton.

Sincerely,

Luisa Montero-Diaz
Mid-County Regional Service Center Director

INTRODUCTION

The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District, designated by the State of Maryland in 2006, is one of three A&E Districts in Montgomery County, and one of 24 in the State of Maryland.

An Arts and Entertainment District is a state designation created to empower rural, suburban and urban localities with tax-related incentives to encourage artists, arts organizations and other creative enterprises to locate in targeted areas in order to promote community involvement, tourism and neighborhood revitalization.

In 2016, Wheaton will seek re-designation as an Arts and Entertainment District by the State of Maryland. At this key milestone, it is an opportune time for Wheaton to evaluate, reflect, and plan for the future of the Arts and Entertainment District. A new plan is in order as much as changed since 2006. Wheaton has experienced significant changes in the ethnic and socio-economic make-up of its community. Moreover, original plans for urban development for Wheaton were not implemented due to the Great Recession of 2008-2009. Montgomery County's new capital investments in the area, (Wheaton Town Center, Wheaton Library/Recreation Center) have given impetus for renewed discussions and conversations about the role of the arts in Wheaton's future. Through various community conversations and targeted outreach, residents' and businesses' voices were heard and considered in formulating this strategic plan.

The strategic plan echoes the values, needs, and goals of the Wheaton community while seeking to build a thoughtful and sustainable plan for future success of the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District. The 2016-2021 Wheaton Strategic Plan lays the groundwork for revitalization of the arts that will motivate current and future residents and businesses to take advantage of the unique tax benefits and incentives provided by the designation as a State Arts and Entertainment District.

Assessment and Planning Process

For more than a year, Wheaton Urban District's Planning Committee and its arts planning consultant have been actively planning and evaluating the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District to develop a strategic plan for the District. The process began three years ago with a series of public discussions about the arts initiated by the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County (AHCMC). With information provided by AHCMC, the Wheaton Urban District and the Mid-County Regional Services Center began a self-evaluation process to determine the shortcomings and potential of their A&E District. The County's Department of Economic Development (DED), convened the three A&E districts in the County (Wheaton, Bethesda, and Silver Spring) to meet with staff from the County Executive's Office and DED to identify key obstacles in the areas of placemaking, arts, economic development, and marketing of their respective districts and to work towards solutions to help advance the County's three A&E Districts. The Wheaton strategic planning process continued with a public opinion survey, meetings with advisory committees, County agencies, and residents, as well as an assessment of the existing arts assets within and near the District.

Planning Methods/Tools

- Wheaton Urban District Planning Committee meetings
- Series of evaluation and planning meetings with other Montgomery County A&E Districts to discuss problems, A&E priorities, and management structure
- Regional community meetings and a public hearing to discuss the arts, A&E priorities, and the character of Wheaton
- Online survey completed by residents and artists
- Exploratory meetings to discuss A&E development opportunities with various County agencies
- Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee planning meeting to discuss the arts
- Arts Assessment Survey to identify existing assets in the district and surrounding area
- Concluding meeting to resolve planning questions and affirm priorities
- Public review and comments on the draft of the plan [in process]

Accountability for Results

The Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) requires an annual report from the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District that evaluates the prior year's goals and resulting accomplishments. In order to maintain status as an A&E District with the State of Maryland, Wheaton must report on a series of economic benchmarks, evaluation of current plans, and goals for the next fiscal year. This reporting, which is also provided to Montgomery County's Department of Economic Development, complements and will be used to benchmark accomplishments and challenges that are part of the strategic plan. While many of the goals and objectives in this plan are already in progress, and others do not have a budgetary impact, funding may need to be identified for to achieve some of the objectives.

Components of the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District's

Strategic Plan for the Arts

- Mission: Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District's ultimate purpose, why the Wheaton A&E exists
- Vision: What the future of the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District aspires to become and its impact on the Wheaton community
- Goals: The long term results which the Wheaton A&E district seeks to attain
- Assessment findings and rationale: Summaries of constituent input
- Objectives: The results and benchmarks the Wheaton A&E expects to see achieved within the strategic plan time frame (2016-2021)
- Strategies: Specific actions and methods to accomplish outcomes and advance goals

A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE WHEATON ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT, 2016-2021

Our Mission

To cultivate a thriving and diverse downtown community by providing and enhancing conditions where cultural arts are appreciated and supported, where tourism and creative economy enterprises create a positive economic impact, and where the social life of our neighborhood revolves around the Arts and Entertainment District.

Our Vision

The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will prosper as an arts and cultural destination that embraces creative placemaking by supporting and showcasing its community's distinctive ethnic and cultural heritages. The area will become a regional destination for traditional, visual, performing, and literary arts and for related cultural activities (i.e., dining, creative enterprises, festivals, and community events).

Our Goals

1. **Preserve the unique character** of Wheaton by respecting and supporting our residents' distinctive ethnic and cultural heritages
2. **Foster creativity** by providing an environment that supports and attracts artists and art-related enterprises
3. **Strengthen arts infrastructure and build capacity** to support the needs of the A&E District
4. Employ the arts as **drivers of creative economies** and beneficial economic impact
5. **Encourage tourism** through participation in the arts
6. **Promote creative placemaking** as a tool for community revitalization



Goal 1. Preserve the unique character of Wheaton by respecting and supporting our residents' distinctive ethnic and cultural heritages

During the numerous community meetings, when asked what they value most about Wheaton, what was heard again and again was the ambiance created by its multi-cultural community. Wheaton residents strongly embrace the differences between Wheaton and other areas within Montgomery County and around the DC region. In the public survey, 87% of respondents indicated that they would like the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District to celebrate the ethnic and cultural diversity of Wheaton with 82% indicating a desire to support the Traditional Arts.

Objectives:

1.1 Resist Homogeneity: The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will strive to preserve the cultural/ethnic and economic diversity that makes Wheaton unique. Wheaton's distinctive character will not be sacrificed during the pursuit of revitalization of the Arts and Entertainment District.

Strategies:

- Act as a voice for the community's desire that that Wheaton maintains its diversity and its unique multi-cultural ambiance when growth/development decisions are being made
- Research and make readily available census data, research, and historical information about Wheaton during meetings and discussions with developers, government agencies and the public regarding planning and redevelopment of the area
- Support unique ventures that combat gentrification and offset the homogeneity of urban development through arts enterprises

1.2 Promote Diversity and Inclusion: The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will model best practices for diverse programming and inclusion of its population.

Strategies:

- Review and assess existing programs and events held in the A&E District. Support, cultivate and organize programs, events and performances that celebrate the ethnic make-up of Wheaton's population
- When promoting events and programs, reach out to non-English speaking populations

- Showcase Wheaton organizations, art forms, and programs that exemplify diversity
- Model diversity in Arts and Entertainment programming and management practices

1.3 Build Upon and Discover Traditional Art Forms: The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will actively support and encourage Wheaton as a destination for traditional arts.

Strategies:

- Meet with the Maryland Traditions program (MSAC) for guidance on creating a strong traditional arts program
- Connect with ethnic communities in to identify traditional arts and artists in Wheaton that are unknown to the A&E management
- Commission an ethnographic study to identify traditional art forms in the A&E District and greater Wheaton area
- Build upon research conducted by the Montgomery Traditions program (AHCMC) to identify local artists and traditional communities
- Celebrate all forms of traditional artistry within Wheaton that include not only the visual, performing, and literary arts, but also “material arts,” such as the creation of traditional foods and other cultural markers such as crafts, games, and ceremonial practices
- Explore the possibility of locating a Traditional Arts Incubator space in the new Montgomery County office building, the planned Arts Center, or in a separate space within the district
- Explore the feasibility of accessing NEA (National Endowment for the Arts), Montgomery Traditions (AHCMC), and Maryland Traditions (MSAC) funding to support existing artists, traditional arts apprenticeships, infrastructure, and events within Wheaton
- Develop strategies to engage non English speaking traditional artists in hard to reach, lesser-known and/or lesser-represented communities and model patience and perseverance to practice inclusion
- As a priority, highlight traditional arts in events, public art, performances, and in all areas of A&E programming
- Partner with Maryland Traditions and National Council for Traditional Arts (NCTA) to explore the possibility of providing space for those organizations within the proposed Arts Center

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## **Goal 2. Foster creativity by providing an environment that supports and attracts artists and art-related enterprises**

Artists comprise the heart of an Arts and Entertainment district and are integral to creative placemaking. A strong community of artists brings life to our neighborhoods and communities. Whether they are delighting us with a performance, challenging our thinking, or providing a spot of color on an otherwise drab street, artists are essential to what makes communities livable and desirable.

In order for the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District to thrive, it must do more to attract artists and arts organizations to the area.

Given that housing is more affordable in Wheaton than in other locations in Montgomery County (and 20% below the average in the greater Washington DC area); Wheaton should take advantage of this to attract

artists to relocate to the District. The A&E District should assert its support for artists and arts organizations so that it may benefit from the vitality and economic impact they bring to communities. This is supported by the public survey: 83% of responders agreed with the statement “I would like Wheaton to be known as a place that artists can be successful.”

**2.1 Attract Artists:** The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will actively encourage and recruit artists and arts organizations artist to relocate to Wheaton.

Strategies:

- Develop an artist relocation program that highlights the affordability of its housing stock, proximity to major metropolitan areas, potential tax breaks within the A&E District, and its diverse population and culture
- Market and promote the artist relocation program
- In partnership with AHCMC, DED/MCEDC, DGS, establish a strategy to connect non-profit arts organizations with vacant office space within the A&E District
- Partner with local and state agencies to provide information and assistance to artists and arts organizations interested in relocating. Such agencies could include the Housing and Opportunities Commission (HOC) for affordable housing, Department of General Services (DGS) for office space, Innovation Center for potential funding, the County’s Department of Economic Development (DED/MCED) and the State’s Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED) for business loans.

**2.2 Artist Support:** Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will assist local artists and arts organizations to achieve their creative and economic potential.

Strategies:

- Encourage local and traditional artists to apply for any opportunities in the A&E District: arts commissions, public art projects, grants, etc.
- Communicate information on tax benefits, grants and resources available from the NEA, MSAC, and AHCMC to artists in the district
- Link artists with technical assistance (i.e., notices of funding opportunities, awards in newsletters, website)
- Raise artists’ and arts organizations’ visibility through Wheaton Urban District/Mid County Regional Services Center/and the A&E district’s promotional and social media tools

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Goal 3. Strengthen and increase arts infrastructure and build capacity to support the needs of the A&E District

One area that the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District is lacking is in the number of arts anchors within the district. The assessment identified lack of gathering spaces and arts venues as a high priority for the Wheaton Arts District. The economic downturn of 2008-09 exacerbated the lack of infrastructure.

Looking forward, the County and Wheaton community will need to explore investments in internal capacity building strategies that are geared toward the arts.

3.1 **Attract Venues:** Support efforts to attract arts venues and anchors to the district

Strategies:

- Work with the Department of Planning and DED/MCEDC to promote the benefits associated with an A&E District to attract potential businesses and enterprises
- Advocate on behalf of the community for arts venues within the district with County agencies and developers
- Present documentation (e.g., survey, support letters, etc.) to agencies, developers and organizations to express the community's desire for increased arts venues within the District
- Maintain regular communication between Wheaton A&E and DGS, Department of Planning, and the County Executive's Office to explore arts venue possibilities
- Convene discussions on potential programming, tenants, and potential components of the planned Arts Center in the district

3.2 **Capacity Building:** The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District administration needs to be commensurate with its constituents' growing needs.

Strategies:

- Apply for redesignation as an Arts & Entertainment District with the State of Maryland
- Contract with an arts consultant to further goals when staff capacity is finite
- Collaborate with other County agencies working in the A&E District to leverage and build upon their efforts for economic and community revitalization.
- Educate others on the goals, objectives and programming to make Wheaton a cultural destination
- Extend Wheaton A&E's impact through strategic alliances
- Apply to MSAC for a technical assistance grant
- Work with the A&E Districts of Bethesda, Silver Spring, DED, and new Economic Development agency (MCEDC) to develop a feasible work plan for management of the three districts

3.3 **Demonstrate Accountability:** The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will document its progress towards goals and objectives annually.

Strategies:

- Annually monitor achievement of objectives as outlined in the Strategic Plan
- Review and revise strategies as needed
- Track performance measurements and report to the Maryland State Arts Council. Provide annual report to Montgomery County and County Council on progress of the Strategic Plan
- Schedule at least an annual discussion with Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee about the arts in Wheaton and status of the Strategic Plan
- Renew formal strategic planning in 2021

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## Goal 4. Employ the arts as drivers of creative economies and beneficial economic impact

Economic studies conducted by the Maryland State Arts Council demonstrate the power of the arts to generate significant economic benefits for communities across the State. The arts, far from being extraneous, have the potential to stimulate and invigorate economic and business development, capital investment, and tourism. Moreover, members of the “creative class,” essential for generating innovative ideas and businesses, want to live in cultural neighborhoods that provide a variety of experiences. As an A&E District, it is clear that Wheaton is not currently benefiting from the tax incentives in place to attract businesses and artists. In order to take advantage of these benefits, the Wheaton A&E District needs to work with DED/MCEDC to expand the number of arts and related businesses in the commercial downtown area.

**4.1 Leverage Incentives:** The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will communicate its tax benefits and incentives to artists, businesses, developers, and potential creative enterprises

Strategies:

- In partnership with DED/MCEDC, develop presentation/press packet outlining incentives and tax benefits for DED/MCEDC to use when recruiting businesses to the area
- Partner with DED/MCEDC and other stakeholders to educate them on the benefits of an A&E District
- Provide information on tax benefits and resources to property owners, businesses, and artists in the A&E District
- Capitalize on Wheaton’s Smart Growth designation and Montgomery County’s financial incentives

**4.2 Attract Employers:** The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will collaborate with DED/MCEDC and the other County A&E Districts to advocate that cultural districts are desirable places for employees to live and work.

Strategies:

- Promote how social capital and creative placemaking foster vibrant neighborhoods that are attractive to employees
- Provide data-backed research of the positive impact of the arts on economic development and improved quality of life
- Support the growth of nightlife through the Nighttime Economy Taskforce Recommendations
- Celebrate and promote specific artistic and commercial successes in the District to encourage residents to patronize Wheaton businesses

## Goal 5. Encourage visitors to Wheaton through participation in the arts

Over 90% of survey respondents indicated a desire for the A&E District to be marketed as a destination locale. It is clear that residents would like others to experience what makes Wheaton special. At the same time, residents note that there is much room for improvement to make its offerings more attractive to visitors. The assessment found strong support for arts that reflect and celebrate the diversity of Wheaton.

**5.1 Improve Brand Recognition:** The Wheaton Arts & Entertainment District will increase awareness of Wheaton as an Arts and Entertainment District.

Strategies:

- Ensure that the Wheaton A&E District logo is included in all promotional flyers and publications
- Engage a photographer to document the cultural assets within the A&E District
- Revise the Wheaton Urban District home page to highlight the Wheaton A&E District
- Update the Wheaton A&E website pages with information on tax benefits, incentives and resources for artists
- Add MSAC logo to promotions and website where appropriate to website and promotional materials

**5.2 Highlight Cultural Assets:** The Wheaton Arts & Entertainment District will market and promote the work of the arts organizations, arts enterprises, and artists operating in the District.

Strategies:

- Solicit from artists and arts enterprises information on public events and accomplishments for the Wheaton Marketing Director for promotion on website calendar and social media
- Highlight success stories, creativity, and best practices of artists and businesses within the District

**5.3 Promote Heritage Tourism:** The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will actively support Wheaton as a destination for traditional and ethnic arts.

Strategies:

- Market the traditional arts and ethnic restaurants/activities as viable tourism attractions
- Research other cities with successful traditional arts tourism programs to develop working model
- Develop a marketing plan for Heritage Tourism that spotlights Wheaton's traditional arts
- Capitalize on the plethora of outstanding ethnic restaurants with food tours of Wheaton
- Reach out to the State Department of Tourism Development (TFA) to include a traditional foodways arts tour of Wheaton as part of the State's culinary tourism campaign
- Meet with Visit Montgomery and TFA discuss heritage tourism strategies for Wheaton
- With the County, DED/MCEDC, explore possibility of attracting a hotel chain to Wheaton

## Goal 6. Promote creative placemaking as a tool for community revitalization

According to a 2010 NEA White Paper:

“In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.

In turn, these creative locales foster entrepreneurs and cultural industries that generate jobs and income, spin off new products and services, and attract and retain unrelated businesses and skilled workers. Together, creative placemaking’s livability and economic development outcomes have the potential to radically change the future of American towns and cities.<sup>1</sup> “

An Arts and Entertainment District should create a sense of community, place and destination. Effective creative placemaking has the potential to improve the quality of life for local, County, and regional residents by connecting the arts intimately with community development and bringing together a diverse cultural community. Wheaton endeavors to create this sense of community and place by encouraging placemaking activities that will enliven and beautify the downtown. The public outreach assessment, as well as input received through community meetings, found strong support for increased events and programs, public art, streetscaping, and improving walkability.

**6.1 Maintain and Expand Creative Programming:** The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will sustain and expand arts activities for residents, visitors and tourists.

Strategies:

- Organize and promote Wheaton’s signature arts events
- Review existing programs and events and develop new activities where needed and funding is available
- Support Montgomery County’s “We Heart Wheaton Grants” to continue to enliven the Wheaton community
- Reach out to art grant recipients to promote their pop-up arts events through the website and social media
- Connect grant recipients in with the County’s Public Information Office to partner on press releases of events and activities

**6.2 Encourage Public Art Projects:** The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will increase public understanding of and appreciation for art in public spaces.

Strategies:

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, *Creative Placemaking* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2010), 3.

- Acknowledge and encourage private sector investments in public art
- Partner with MNCPPC to increase developer funded public art through the County's public art amenity option
- Collaborate with The Public Arts Trust to preserve existing public art and to increase number of Montgomery County supported public art installations within the District
- Approach the Maryland Public Art Commission/MSAC to express support for State-funded public art in future State construction projects in the A&E District
- Explore the possibility of adding a public art page to the website highlighting current and upcoming public art installations within Wheaton

**6.3 Prioritize Walkability:** The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District will continue efforts to create a human-scale, safe and attractive community by increasing pedestrian traffic to generate heightened activity in the District.

Strategies:

- Explore different signage/wayfinding options to visually brand the A&E District
- Advocate to MNCPPC the community preference for artistic enhancements for any streetscape/planning improvements in the District
- Develop a plan for monitoring the new Town Center project to ensure that Center will improve public safety and provide for community use of parks and outdoor recreational space
- Continue efforts of the Clean and Safe Team
- Promote Clean and Safe Team programs that will include Safe Escorts and Jump Starts
- Offer and promote more evening activities to extend the hours the area is used for tourism, shopping, dining, and art related activities
- Develop thematic Walking Tours of Wheaton for restaurants/art/shopping with descriptions and map on website
- Promote feature on the existing website that identifies nearby shopping and dining options

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District is governed by Montgomery County Government with the assistance of the Department of Economic Development and the Wheaton Urban District.

Isiah Leggett, County Executive of Montgomery County

Thank you to our administrative and artistic partners.

Pamela Dunne, A&E Program Coordinator, Maryland State Arts Council

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Tina Benjamin, Special Projects, Montgomery County

Suzan Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer, Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County

Sally Sternbach, Acting Director of Department of Economic Development

Molline Jackson, Public Art Coordinator, MNCPPC

Pete McGinnity, Department of General Services

Reemberto Rodriguez, Director, Silver Spring Arts and Entertainment District

Ken Hartmen, Director, Bethesda Arts and Entertainment District

Councilmember Nancy Navarro

Councilmember Nancy Floreen

Councilmember Roger Berliner

Councilmember Marc Elrich

Councilmember Tom Hucker

Councilmember Sidney Katz

Councilmember George Leventhal

Councilmember Craig Rice

Councilmember Hans Riemer

## **Wheaton Urban District Staff**

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## **Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee**

### **Residents:**

Devala Janardan, Chair

Derry Goberdhansingh

Daniel Thompson

### **Chamber of Commerce Representatives**

Mirza Donegan

Omar Lazo, Vice Chair

### **Small Business Representatives:**

Leah Haygood

### **Large Business Representatives**

William Moore, Secretary

### **MCCAB Representative**

Henriot St. Gerard

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