

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMERCE CABINET**

**FRIDAY, JULY 31, 2020**

***MEETING MINUTES***

***Attendance***

**Commerce Cabinet Members:**

Andrew Kleine  
Marlene Michaelson  
Aseem Nigam  
Mitra Pedoeem  
Christopher Conklin  
Avinash G. Shetty  
David E. Dise  
Jeremy V. Criss  
Adam Ortiz  
Casey Anderson  
Leonard Howie  
Kelly Groff  
Benjamin Wu  
Tiffany Ward (Absent)

**Guests:**

Jerome Fletcher  
Tina Benjamin  
Mike Scheffel

**MCEDC Staff:**

Bill Tompkins  
Christy Blake

**Call to Order**

MCEDC President & CEO Ben Wu, the Commerce Cabinet Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:10 am and welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting. Chair Wu announced that since the Executive Order creating the Commerce Cabinet was issued in June, two additional members have been invited to join the Commerce Cabinet: the President and CEO of Visit Montgomery and the Montgomery County Chief Equity Officer. We now have 14 Commerce Cabinet members.

**Welcoming Remarks from the County Executive**

County Executive Elrich noted that the Commerce Cabinet was without precedent in Montgomery County. The County Executive gave an overview of his business listening tour, committing to making sure businesses in the County can grow, succeed, and create jobs. County Executive Elrich stated that this support of business will spin off other opportunities for the County. The County Executive spoke about preparing to reopen the economy and how the Commerce Cabinet can help with interagency coordination for economic development that has not existed before.

### **Introduction of the Commerce Cabinet**

Chair Wu stated that this interagency approach to sustain economic development for the County has the significance to create more opportunities for economic growth, better serve industry expansion, and make County economic development operations more effective and efficient for businesses.

Chair Wu noted the creation of the Montgomery County Commerce Cabinet is modeled after the Governor's Maryland Commerce Subcabinet, which has had great success in eliminating "log jams" in major state projects, making Maryland more competitive, and getting state government agencies to collaborate towards holistic solutions by making economic development a top administration priority.

Pursuant to the Executive Order creating the Commerce Cabinet, Chair Wu reported that MCEDC is responsible for the work, oversight, and staffing of the Commerce Cabinet.

### **Commerce Cabinet Member Introductions**

As an introduction for everyone to understand and recognize the wide spectrum of relevant programs within each of the County agencies, Chair Wu asked that each Commerce Cabinet member discuss their programs that impact economic development, the roles they see their agency playing to support economic development, and how the Commerce Cabinet could help them fulfill their organizational mission. Each Commerce Cabinet agency then provided an overview of their agency's economic development programs.

Bill Tompkins, MCEDC EVP & COO, gave an overview of the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC). Mr. Tompkins stated that MCEDC, a public-private partnership, plays a lead role on economic development with an industry-led focus to create jobs while also working with the County on response, recovery, and resilience of our local economy.

Leonard Howie, WorkSource Montgomery (WSM) President & CEO, reported that their key function is to serve as the entity designated as the County workforce development organization and to address economic development goals related to workforce activity. Mr. Howie also reported that WSM has two other important functions: to provide support for the County Workforce Development Board, and to serve as one of the local area State Workforce Directors and develop regional approaches to workforce development related topics.

Kelly Groff, Visit Montgomery President & CEO, reported that they are the destination marketing organization for the County and works with the State to foster economic growth for the community through tourism. Ms. Groff also cited her most pressing current issues are navigating relief efforts for the hospitality and tourism industries.

Jerome Fletcher, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer for Economic Development, gave the presentation for the CAO. Mr. Fletcher stated that the County Executive's Office is presently focusing efforts on economic recovery. Tina Benjamin, Special Projects Manager, spoke about the Business Assistance Team and the various COVID response efforts the Office of the County Executive has implemented.

Aseem Nigam, Director of the Department of Housing and Community Affairs, spoke about the department's affordable housing initiatives, as well as various funds for housing, community development, and HOME programs. Mr. Nigam stated that the State can also assist in economic development related activities through their programs.

Christopher Conklin, Director of the Department of Transportation, stated that his department is in charge of several transportation system components, including, but not limited to the operation of the County's transit system, operation of parking lot districts in CBD's, and enabling parking requirements for development projects. Mr. Conklin also stated that the Department of Transportation has a Commuter Services Division, which works with businesses to communicate to their employees on commuter options and serves as the primary liaison with WMATA and MD DOT.

Adam Ortiz, Director of the Department of Environmental Protection stated that his department is in charge of several programs related to business activity, including observance of and enforcement of noise ordinances, energy and climate compliance, energy benchmarking, stormwater management, beautification and litter control, enforcement of the plastic bag tax, and recycling and resource management.

Mitra Pedoeem, Director of the Department of Permitting Services, reported that her department, during this pandemic crisis, is offering services online and can make staff accessible when needed. Ms. Pedoeem reported that her department offers predesign consultations, assistance with reopening efforts, and guidelines for inspectors to enforce COVID-19 safety efforts. Ms. Pedoeem also stated that she has started a DPS customer service initiative and would be interested in exploring a Countywide economic development customer service initiative.

Avinash G. Shetty, Director of the Office of Procurement, reported on the dollar amount of County projects his Office manages for County procurement activities. Mr. Shetty stated that the Office of Procurement already has a "rate my service" feature for all customer interactions and would also be interested in participating in a customer service initiative within the Commerce Cabinet.

David E. Dise, Director of the Department of General Services reported that the department is the major property owner in the County. Mr. Dise also stated that Montgomery County is embracing public private partnerships through various projects around the County and would be open to new and innovative business models pursued by the Commerce Cabinet.

Mike Scheffel, Agriculture Preservation & Marketing staff from the Office of Agriculture, spoke on behalf of Director Jeremy Criss, who was experiencing technical difficulties in his virtual connection. Mr. Scheffel outlined the Office of Agriculture's Buy Local, and Eat Local campaigns, as well as their New Farmer Project.

Marlene Michaelson, Executive Director of the Office of the County Council, stated that all Council members have shown a desire to support economic development, and she can help support consideration before the Council of potential Commerce Cabinet legislative agenda items and identifying issues for greater economic development effectiveness.

Casey Anderson, Chair of the Montgomery County Planning Board, presented some of the major current initiatives before the Planning Board, and areas of COVID-affected economic development activities such as expanding the outdoor dining Streetery concept to the greater use of open air parks. Mr. Anderson noted that the Planning Board has an economic research staff that can directly support the data and analysis of Commerce Cabinet activities and together with MCEDC can collaborate on the research to assist in the development of new initiatives.

**Next Steps & Open Discussion**

David Dise suggested exploring the creation of subcommittees within the Commerce Cabinet. Future consideration will be undertaken to determine the most relevant and appropriate subcommittees to be created. Aseem Nigam suggested the Commerce Cabinet take a comparative look at Montgomery County versus Northern Virginia, as well as short-term and long-term goals. Chair Wu indicated that he would follow-up after the meeting with the Commerce Cabinet members for further discussion and directly solicit their additional input and suggestions moving forward. A follow-up conversation would be undertaken at the next scheduled Commerce Cabinet meeting in September.

**Adjournment**

Meeting was adjourned at 1:05pm.