

Howard County Economic Opportunity and Prosperity Task Force

Minutes (Approved)

August 13, 2018

Columbia / Ellicott Room
1st Floor, George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

Members in attendance: Anne Brinker, Paul Casey, Ana Cisneros, Kim Flowers, Maddy Halbach, Jason Jannati, Phyllis Madachy, Leonardo McClarty, Elizabeth Noble, Jaykant Parekh, and Lawrence Twele. Peter O'Neil from a subcommittee also attended. Council Member Jon Weinstein also attended.

Staff in attendance: Jim Meyd, County Auditor's Office, Jeff Meyers, County Council office, and Jessie Keller, Council Member Weinstein's office.

Chairperson Madachy called the meeting to order at 3:21 p.m.

The Task Force approved the minutes from its meeting on July 9, 2018.

The Economic Development subcommittee reported on its progress since the last Task Force meeting. The subcommittee has not had a quorum at any of its meetings since April. At the last meeting on August 9, the committee discussed the issue of the under-employed and also ideas on how to help businesses in the County. The subcommittee encourages the continuation of existing programs to help businesses find space, land, and financing. The subcommittee encourages planning processes, particularly for Gateway and Route 1. The subcommittee discussed the impact of taxes on businesses, but concluded that the County does not have authority to modify taxes to help businesses and that taxes are not a preeminent factor in business decisions to locate in the County. There is little land for sale and the commercial vacancy rate is low. Some members of the subcommittee think the County should have a local purchasing preference or incentive program, however, others are concerned about unintended consequences. The current local business initiative is described here: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments/County-Administration/Purchasing/Local-Business-Initiative>. Some Task Force members believe that transportation, particularly for low-wage and younger employees, is a vital issue. Council Member Weinstein noted that the redevelopment of the Normandy Shopping Center is likely to be assisted senior living with space for future commercial development. New retail in the short term is unlikely due to the changing nature of that sector.

The Education and Workforce Development subcommittee has also not had a quorum in recent months, however, the subcommittee met on July 31. Minah Woo, of Howard Community College briefed the subcommittee. HCC's enrollment has mostly held steady over the last several years while its peer institutions have shown declines. HCC has special programs for those with limited English proficiency

and seeks to work with international students who already have professional training elsewhere but need local credentials. HCC reports that a number of individuals are unable to complete their programs because of a lack of funding or difficulties with transportation. HCC is also concerned with the challenges involved in moving the currently employed to higher-level and better paying jobs. HCC would like to expand programs similar to the 2 that now target international students, namely the medical translator program and the bilingual banking teller program. Many individuals who might be interested in these programs are unaware of them. There are numerous other programs throughout the County that also suffer due to a lack of information reaching the targeted populations, thus there is a need for a concerted, centralized, coordinated, non-fragmented, non-duplicative effort to improve communication. Care must be taken to respect cultural diversity and to ensure that sources of information are seen as trustworthy. The subcommittee will seek to find other jurisdictions and entities with success in this area as a way of learning best practices. Mr. McClarty suggested that there may be useful academic resources. Additional efforts need to be made to support the under-employed, particularly those in the gig economy who lack benefits.

The Housing and Community Development subcommittee had met twice since the last Task Force meetings and has approved recommendations. The main recommendation is that the County should develop a master plan for identifying and addressing the housing affordability needs of a broad spectrum of workforce families, limited income families, and other vulnerable populations. Vulnerable populations include senior citizens, individuals who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, disabled persons, immigrant populations, and ALICE (Asset-limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) individuals. The master plan shall be developed by a task force under the direction of the Department of Planning and Zoning with representatives from the Department of Community Resources and Services, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Howard County Housing Commission, the Columbia Downtown Housing Corporation, as well as representatives from stakeholders in the community. The master plan shall consider locations integrated in developments county-wide, funding, the availability of transportation, and proximity to employment opportunities, health services, and education. The master plan shall address the provision of annual and sustained funding to attain long-term and annual goals and plans and programs to achieve those goals.

The subcommittee also recommends that the County strengthen its commitment to affordable housing as represented by the Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement (DRRA) for Downtown Columbia and other development policies. Furthermore, the County should implement programs to incentivize private developers to partner with the County to create mechanisms that ensure the ongoing ability to develop affordable housing. The subcommittee also recommends that the County ensure coordination of the delivery of affordable housing resources and services to efficiently achieve the goals of the master plan. Mr. McClarty noted that businesses want consistency and predictability, that is, the rules requiring developers to provide affordable housing should be known and should not be lightly changed.

The subcommittee notes that the existing master plan for arts and culture dates from 1991 and is obsolete. A new master plan for arts and culture should be developed to address the interests of a

growing and diverse population County-wide including addressing the need for adequate dedicated spaces for the performing arts and visual arts and include guidelines for a formal public art program.

Finally, the subcommittee recognizes the increased demand for services to immigrant populations, therefore the County should provide additional resources for immigrant service providers like FIRN.

Mr. O'Neil noted that some jurisdictions have special taxes on property sales, which are earmarked for affordable housing and for open space expansion¹.

Ms. Halbach has developed a matrix with several pillars that the Task Force will use to organize its recommendations. The draft matrix is appended below. In addition to the 4 pillars shown, 2 more will be added: Communications and Arts & Culture. The Workforce Development pillar will be renamed to Business and Workforce Development. And Workforce Housing will be renamed Housing to reflect the needs of populations who have retired from the workforce or cannot reasonably be part of the workforce. Ms. Halbach recommended that additional columns be added for background and foundation. Mr. McClarty recommended that a subgroup be formed to turn the completed matrix into the Task Force's final report. Ms. Noble volunteered to arrange for HCC professors to review the report for grammar and style.

Various members noted the need to note the importance of soft skills, social and emotional learning, and cultural proficiency. There may be additional opportunities for events similar to the 50+ Expo on various themes that the Task Force has discussed.

Ms. Madachy asked members to help spread the word to ensure a big turnout for the Task Force's public hearing on October 9.

The Task Force adjourned at 5 p.m.

¹ An earmark for affordable housing would require action by the General Assembly and Maryland already funds park acquisition through a transfer tax earmark for Program Open Space.

Economic Opportunity and Prosperity Task Force

Pillars	Subcommittee	Sub Committee's Suggestions	Features & Benefits for Businesses	Features & Benefits for Residences
Workforce Housing	Economic Development Committee			
	Housing and Community Development Subcommittee			
	Workforce Development and Education Subcommittee			
Transportation	Economic Development Committee			
	Housing and Community Development Subcommittee			
	Workforce Development and Education Subcommittee			
Workforce Development	Economic Development Committee			
	Housing and Community Development Subcommittee			
	Workforce Development and Education Subcommittee			
Affordable Child Care	Economic Development Committee			
	Housing and Community Development Subcommittee			
	Workforce Development and Education Subcommittee			