

THE WHEATON LIBRARY AND WHEATON REC CENTER A HISTORY BETWEEN 1997-2014

There have been many years of false starts to bring the Wheaton Library and Recreation Center up to today's standards. The county has wasted time and lots of money without success. The following describes a timeline of what transpired with both the library and Rec Center.

One of the on going hurdles for the Wheaton Library, Rec Center and Gilchrist Project is that the Rec Center land is owned by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission while the building is operated by the Montgomery County Department of Recreation. A land swap between parks and planning and Montgomery County to acquire the land is still unresolved. The library property is owned and operated by the county already.

1997: THE REC CENTER WAS SLATED FOR REPLACEMENT OVER 17 YEARS AGO

The Recreation Strategic Facility Plan 1997-2010 called for replacing the existing facility with a larger full service center to serve the Wheaton/Kemp Mill communities. Full service status means a building of at least 30,000 square feet, including classrooms, a social area, weight and exercise rooms, ball fields and a three-bay gymnasium.

2002: PROPOSAL TO MOVE WHEAT RESCUE SQUAD TO THE REC CENTER PROPERTY

The Rec Center was in need of repair. It was proposed to demolish it and move the Wheaton Rescue Squad to that location, instead of the building on the property the squad already owned on Arcola Ave. A land swap between the two properties was proposed. The Rafferty Center on Good Counsel property would be utilized as an alternative to the Rec Center. Community outcry blocked this idea.

2004: THE WHEATON LIBRARY WAS SCHEDULED TO BE COMPLETELY RENNOVATED IN 2004 BUT THEN REMOVED FROM THE BUDGET IN 2010, AFTER A SIX YEAR WAIT, TO EXPLORE IT'S RELOCATION TO DOWNTOWN WHEATON

A project providing for the complete renovation of the Wheaton Library was approved initially as part of the FY05-10 CIP. However, the Council deleted the project from the FY09-14 CIP because of uncertainty regarding the scope of the project and the possibility of relocation to a site in the Central Business District, as an anchor in downtown Wheaton revitalization.

2005: USING THE RAFFERTY CENTER, A SOLUTION TO THE LACK OF REC SPACE IN OUR AREA, ADDED TO COUNTY PLANS IN 2005 AND ELIMINATED FROM THE BUDGET IN 2010

The Wheaton Community Center-Rafferty project was proposed in the FY09-14 CIP to renovate and expand a portion of the former Good Counsel High School, which was designated for a public purpose as a part of a site development rezoning decision. The Rafferty Center, along with a renovated Wheaton Recreation Center, was intended to provide the equivalent of a full service community recreation center. Space limitations and other challenges with the site made the project undesirable, and it was eliminated from the CIP.

2010: COUNTY PROPOSED A NEW REC CENTER AT RANDOLPH AND GEORGIA IN GLENMONT AS ANOTHER SOLUTION

The property would not be available until 2015; the community rejected this idea, as it took too long.

2012: WHEATON LIBRARY WAS RETURNED TO THE BUDGET, AS A JOINT PROJECT WITH THE REC CENTER

After negative community outcry, the county agreed to keep the library at the existing location. Over 3,000 people signed a petition to support keeping the library where it was instead of using it as a centerpiece to Wheaton revitalization in the Wheaton Triangle business district.

The current project, a joint library and Rec Center was adopted in October 2012. *The County Council expedited the project because of all the delays incurred from various false starts.* The Gilchrist Center was added in March 2013.

June 2013: PROJECT PLANS AND COMMUNITY FEEDBACK SESSIONS WERE ON TRACK

This project was well underway before the historic designation request was made. Grimm and Parker, the selected architects of the dual-purpose project, presented six designs and held two community feedback sessions over the summer of 2013. At the first meeting, community input was collected. At the second meeting, an online survey was discussed as well as the collected community ideas from the last time. Traffic patterns into the Wheaton Community Center and Library neighborhood were discussed and breakout groups discussed the issue.

As of August 25, 2013 the design was narrowed down to three possibilities. All three moved the new building closer to the corner of Arcola and Georgia Avenues and appear smaller. If the existing old Rec Center remains as a separate entity, outdoor green space will be sacrificed and the cost of the project will increase and most likely be delayed. The historic Rec Center, if saved, may be used for The Gilchrist Center and/or other meeting spaces according to the plans.

September 2013: MARYLAND-PARK AND PLANNING PRESENTS SEVERAL BUILDINGS ON PARK LAND FOR HISTORIC DESIGNATION

The Historic Preservation Committee hears testimony and votes to approve historic designation of Rec Center, months after the design phase of the new project was started.

November 2013: THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD APPROVES HISTORIC PRESERVATION FOR THE REC CENTER

Even though they approved this designation, the Planning Board stated that the old building might be too costly to renovate, or that there may not be any use for it that was worth the expense.

FEBRUARY 2014: COMMUNITY MEETINGS HELD THROUGHOUT WHEATON TO DISCUSS THE ARCHITECT'S PROPOSALS AND THE DESIGNATION OF THE REC CENTER AS HISTORICAL

During the month of February neighborhood meetings were held with representatives of the county building and design department, the Department of Recreation, the architect, the County Council, the Planning Board, and Montgomery Historical Preservation. Members of four neighborhood associations, which surround the library and Rec Center were in attendance.

Overwhelmingly, citizens of Wheaton voiced their objection to designating the Rec Center as an historical site.

February 25, 2014: THE COUNTY COUNCIL HEARING TO APPROVE OR DENY THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OF THE EXISTING WHEATON REC CENTER WILL BE HELD ON FEB. 25, 2014 AT 7:30 PM

What you can do to express the opinion that the Wheaton Library, Rec Center and Gilchrist Center should proceed as originally planned, without historic designation for the Wheaton Rec Center:

1. Write every Council Member: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/contact.html>
2. Talk to your neighbors
3. Write: info@savewheatonlibrary.com if you want to help
4. Attend the county council hearing on Feb. 25th at 7:30 and/or testify
Council Office Building, 100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, MD 20850