

LABQUEST Minutes for Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Announcement: The next in-person LABQUEST meeting will be Wednesday, April 9, 2025 at 12:30 in the trailer.

The LABQUEST meeting was held on Wednesday, March 12, 2025. The February 2025 meeting had been cancelled because of the weather. Everyone introduced themselves. Dori Farley introduced Theresa Stegman, since this was her first time attending a LABQUEST meeting. Theresa is part of the MCB team as Director of Development.

Viva White Oak (VWO)

Carlos Bonner reported that they are responding to the second set of comments from the Planning Development Review Committee (DRC) on the Preliminary Plan for the three Master Planned roads. He indicated MCB is still on schedule to have permits by November 2025 and will therefore be able to start construction. See the LABQUEST September 2024 minutes for construction phasing.

White Oak Medical Center (WOMC)

Anthony Stahl reported that the 30 additional beds on the 8th floor were placed in use last month and have been 100% used from the first day. Currently WOMC estimates they need another 70 beds, and that is not counting a future need to accommodate the Viva White Oak development.

WOMC recently received regulatory approval to use the empty 6th floor of the adjacent pavilion building for hospital functions. This was a surprise development since such approval had been rejected multiple times in the past.

The new BATMAN minimally invasive heart surgical procedure was successfully performed on a patient at WOMC. (This was done after other hospitals indicated they could not perform any heart procedure on this patient.) BATMAN stands for “balloon-assisted translocation of the anterior.” With this procedure, the patient can often go home the same day.

Rob Jepson is leaving for a position in Florida, still with Adventist. Rob was a tireless and indispensable asset in the long effort to relocate the White Oak Medical Center to our community. We wish him the best but he will be very much missed.

John Sackett will be attending our April meeting. John is the President/CEO of Adventist HealthCare.

Science Report

Charles reviewed several items from the March 7 Science Report:

- This flu season is the worst in 15 years with 19,000 flu-related deaths so far. Reasons include lower vaccination rates and a cold winter that has kept people indoors and in contact with each other.
- FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM) has accepted a drug that would extend the lifespan of senior dogs aged 10 and older weighing at least 10 pounds.
- The measles outbreak is increasing and spreading. As of March 4, there were 159 confirmed cases and 22 hospitalizations. Some 75% of those getting the disease are 18 or younger and have not been vaccinated.
- Those who were vaccinated against measles between 1963 and 1968 should get another shot since the vaccine produced during this period was not very effective.
- The report contains a link that identifies nine restaurants where one of their fried chicken dishes is unhealthy.
- There is a link to watch the Big Bear Valley live eagle cam (three chicklets).
- Toyota is investing \$1.5B in a new EV battery plant near Houston, Texas.

Charles previewed the following that will be in the March 14 Science Report:

- Marty Makary was nominated as the next FDA Commissioner. He is a widely published researcher from Johns Hopkins. Charles liked his stance before the senate on the effect of food on our health.

Hillandale Gateway

Shane Polin indicated that the contractor is pouring the concrete for the 3rd floor of one of the towers. He also indicated that contractors are giving them a heads up that the price of domestic steel may increase to match the foreign steel price, which is now higher because of tariffs.

FDA and GSA

Andrew Dempster, FDA, was unable to attend. Rudy Ramirez indicated parking lots are once again full. Both GSA and FDA are working to determine how to accommodate 12,000 people reporting to the site on Monday, since the site only has 6000 parking spaces. They are looking at space around the Research Center and also off site. Before the pandemic, the largest number of people working at the site was 8800. FDA has always had many employees working remotely.

Parts of GSA nation-wide have been cut by 62%.

Montgomery County

Jewru Bandeh reported the following:

- On March 14, the Executive will present his proposed operating budget to the council.
- The Council Economic Committee has agreed to modify the \$40M Viva White Oak CIP project payment schedule to match what MCB expects in terms of building the three master plan roads. MCB will build the roads and then submit an invoice to be reimbursed for the county's share of the cost.

- Efforts are moving forward to extend the US29 Blue BRT corridor into Howard County. The funds for the vehicles have been approved at the federal level and Howard County will cover the remaining cost. Howard County also will build BRT stations there.
- Amazon Fresh will open late March in the White Oak Town Center on Industrial Pkwy
- The county is spending more effort to support furloughed federal employees. The county is working collaboratively with local partners (MCEDC, Worksource Montgomery, Local Chambers, etc) to assist impacted federal and its contract employees with information about available services. This effort now consumes more resources than are used to assist people affected by ICE actions. We continue to see longer lines at our East County food distribution sites.

Kristina Ellis provided a report on her efforts with the County Department of Housing and Community Development concerning façade improvements:

- Improvements are almost ready to begin on that part of the Hillandale Shopping Center nearest the intersection of Powder Mill Rd and New Hampshire Ave.
- Funds have been received for improvements to the White Oak commercial area along Lockwood Drive, near the transit station (behind Giant).

Submitted by Dan Wilhelm