

LABQUEST Minutes for Wednesday, May 14, 2025

Announcement: The next in-person LABQUEST meeting will be Wednesday, June 11, 2025 at 12:30, location TBD.

We thank the WOMC for hosting the meeting. Betsy Bretz thanked everyone for coming and asked everyone to introduce themselves. Rob Richardson facilitated the remainder of the meeting.

White Oak Medical Center (WOMC)

Rob Richardson and Peter Myo Khin indicated they have contacted a delegate from state legislative District 14 and another from District 20, which serve the area around WOMC within Montgomery County. The purpose of the proposed meeting is to ask them to address the issues covered in the April minutes and the October 2, 2023 Council worksession. Rob indicated that he, Peter, and Dan Wilhelm would be meeting with Anthony Stahl tomorrow to discuss the best way to approach the set of issues. The basic question is whether we address only the shortage of beds or whether we also need to address the issues related to the Total Cost of Care (TCOC). Under TCOC the state dictates the budget of each hospital and wants to reduce it year after year. The TCOC does not consider metrics related to the medical needs of the patients in an area.

At the meeting, COO Jason Shockey, in the position only several months, provided his insight into the issues.

Viva White Oak (VWO)

Carlos Bonner reported that the county executive issued a press release on May 9 concerning the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) proposal to support MCB financing of the VWO infrastructure. Rob Richardson indicated that a proposal to establish a TIF district for the VWO property had been introduced in the council on May 13. That package contained minimal information and indicated more detailed information would be made available two weeks before the public hearing, which was set for June 10.

Carlos indicated that the financial part of the TIF will indicate that the development is valued at \$2.8B, with a request to finance \$420M for needed infrastructure. Upon County Council's authorization of the TIF District, MCB will continue to work with the MoCo Finance and their consultant MuniCap to finalize the TIF amount.

The Planning Board will be considering three VWO plans on June 29: Sketch Plan, Preliminary Plan and Forest Conservation Plan.

Carlos indicated MCB continues to talk with multiple potential tenants. He has had many phone calls from interested parties since the Executive's May 9 TIF press release.

Science Report

Charles reviewed several items from his May 9 and upcoming May 16 Science Reports:

- Two recent studies were completed where Stem Cell Therapy was used to treat Parkinson's Disease. Both small clinical trials tested the safety of the approach. While promising, larger studies will be needed to assess its effectiveness.

- FDA is phasing out six petroleum-based synthetic food dyes by end of 2026. Tyson Foods has announced that it expects to complete the elimination of petroleum-based dyes from its products by the end of this month. Natural food dyes are available to replace these.
- While the last Maryland coal-fired power plant is slated by the owner to be closed by the end of this year, the grid operator has indicated they will not allow the closing until 2029.
- Strides are being made to increase the energy density in batteries, which is key to many new developments. One such development that uses only high-density batteries is an air taxi by Joby Aviation that takes-off and lands vertically and then flies horizontally, similar to the military Osprey. It is ready for FAA certification. Another example is a heart pacemaker that will last for 10 years.
- Amazon has launched the first 27 high-speed internet low-earth orbit communications satellites for its planned Project Kuiper system that provides satellite phone service. Battery density is a key technology needed by this system.

Montgomery County

Cicero Salles reported that there will be a public forum tonight concerning the alternatives study for BRT on New Hampshire Ave.

Submitted by Dan Wilhelm