

AI Meeting Summary for the Annual Town Meeting

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Quick recap

Tom and Yesenia discussed the journey of Washington Grove and Leadership Montgomery's efforts in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, while also addressing technical issues with the audio and video during the meeting. Tom welcomed everyone to the first in-person town meeting in five years and discussed the town's progress over the past year, including the implementation of the Meadow Restoration Plan and the renewal of the Renewable Energy Conversion Center program. The meeting also covered the town's efforts to address diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, the proposed tax rate and dwelling tax assessment for the upcoming fiscal year, and the town's stormwater management issues.

Next steps

- Town Council to review and approve renewal of the Renewable Energy Conversion Incentive Program in June.
- Christine to update the town website with information about the DEIB training and presentations.
- Peter to continue discussions with Bell Properties regarding renovation of the commercial corner.
- Planning Commission to finalize and present new ordinances related to fence permits.
- Stormwater Management Working Group to continue weekly meetings with SMI to finalize 35% design build plan.
- Jim to repair and restore the cement work around Maple Spring.
- Town Council to review and respond to draft mitigation plan for West Woods from Maryland Environmental Services.
- Town representatives to continue participating in Gaithersburg watershed planning meetings.
- Town Council to approve and announce future DEIB training programs for residents.
- Woods Committee to pursue funding for West Woods restoration project.

Summary

First in-Person Town Meeting in Five Years

John welcomed everyone to the first in-person town meeting in five years, which was a hybrid meeting with both in-person and virtual attendees. He confirmed that there was a quorum, meaning the business of the meeting could proceed. The meeting started with an invocation by Reverend Joe Clark.

John then proceeded to approve the agenda for the meeting, which included operational matters, a state of the town report, volunteer of the year, two presentations, consideration of the budget and tax rate, and reports from various committees. He also mentioned that the meeting would follow Robert's Rules of Order and that a Parliamentarian would be present to assist with the process.

State of the Town

John also recognized the town employees, contract employees, and volunteers who contribute to the town's operations. He then moved on to the Town Council, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors of Elections, Historic Preservation Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, Shared Use Pathway Committee, and various volunteer committees. He emphasized the importance of these committees in the town's operations and encouraged participation. Tom also recognized the Emergency Preparedness and Safety Committee and the Maintenance Coordinator. Finally, he mentioned the town's contractors who have been a great partner in managing the town's landscape.

Town's Progress and Future Plans

John discussed the town's progress over the past year, including the implementation of the Meadow Restoration Plan, the renewal of the Renewable Energy Conversion Center program, and the Washington Grove connector project. He also mentioned the town's efforts to own its streetlights and the successful contract bids for refuse and recycling, leaf collection, and road paving. Tom highlighted the ongoing stormwater infrastructure maintenance project and the need for a mandatory review by the planning board for the Washington Grove connector. He also mentioned the playground workgroup's efforts to create a master plan for the playground and the town's plans to renovate the commercial corner.

Renewable Energy Conversion Program

Looking ahead, Bob discussed the town's plans for sustainability, including the renewal of the renewable energy conversion incentive program and the potential for a mandatory review by the planning board for the Washington Grove connector. He also mentioned the town's plans for a leaf composting project and a food waste composting project.

Town's DEIB Efforts and Future Plans

John reviewed the town's efforts to address diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The town had previously formed a racial and social equity committee, but it had since dissolved. However, the town agreed to continue with education on these issues. The town arranged for a seminar with Leadership Montgomery. The Leadership Montgomery seminar facilitators recorded a summary of the sessions which was shared with the meeting attendees. The seminar aimed to build a common language around key DEIB concepts and explore how bias operates in everyday life. The town also engaged in a deeper exploration of how to operationalize DEIB within the town, involving 15 residents, including the town mayor, councilors, and committee members. The participants engaged in a mix of formats, including individual reflection, interactive group activities, small group dialogue, and whole group discussions. The emphasis was on practice, not just thinking about DEIB, but doing the work. The town also identified the need for sustainability and implementation of the goals, as well as the challenges of navigating disagreement. The participants expressed appreciation for the structured tools and frameworks introduced and the importance of having facilitators who could hold the complexity while still making room for reflection, accountability, and learning. The town plans to continue with more DEIB workshops in the future.

Tax Rate and Budget Discussion

John discussed the proposed tax rate and dwelling tax assessment for the upcoming fiscal year. He explained that the tax rate would be slightly lower than the previous year, but would yield the same revenue. The dwelling tax assessment would be slightly higher due to an increase in refuse and recycling costs. John also reviewed other expenses, including salaries, landscaping, facility services, and refuse and recycling costs. He mentioned a few notable expenses, such as McCathran Hall maintenance, road work, tree removal, playground equipment, website modernization, and DEIB education. John then opened the floor for discussion on the budget. After a vote, the budget was approved with a significant majority in favor. John discussed the town's budget preparation process and the importance of resident input.

Historic Preservation Commission Updates

He also mentioned the Historic Preservation Commission's efforts to update design guidelines and commemorate missing buildings in the town. The commission selected a project for recognition that represents a hopeful turn for vacant houses in the town.

Planning Commission Report

Georgette presented the Planning Commission's report, highlighting the need for a Montgomery County permit for fences and the planning commission's efforts to update ordinances.

Future of the Commercial Corner

Peter discussed the future of the commercial corner, emphasizing the need for flexibility and the potential for residential housing. He also mentioned the importance of the comprehensive plan in guiding changes.

Washington Grove Stormwater Management Issues

Patty Klein provided updates on ongoing stormwater management projects. She discussed the town of Washington Grove's stormwater management issues, which are exacerbated by its location at the headwaters of three drainage areas. Patty mentioned that the town has been working with Soltesz, an environmental engineering company, since 2023 to assess and address these issues. The company conducted a stormwater management assessment, which identified areas of concern and recommended improvements. In 2024, the town issued a request for proposals (RFP) for a design-build project to address these issues. The project is funded by federal and state funds, including ARPA money. The town is currently working with the contractor, SMI, to refine the design and prepare for construction. Patty also mentioned that the town is working with the Green Bank on a parallel project to address stormwater issues in the West Woods. The Green Bank's Environmental Engineering Company, Maryland Environmental Services, has provided a draft mitigation plan for the West Woods, which is currently under review. She expressed gratitude to the stormwater management working group for their efforts.

Patty went on to discuss the town's woods reserve and the efforts made by the Woods Committee to maintain them.

John acknowledged the contributions committee members, mentioning Patty, Joan, and Jolie, and their work to address the impact of weather changes and deer predation on the woods.

Town Council Reports

The meeting also included a discussion on town council reports, which were made available electronically. John encouraged attendees to review the reports and ask questions if they had any. There was a brief discussion about the town's newsletter and the town's kiosk proposal.

Election Results

The meeting ended with the announcement of the election results for the town mayor and councilors.

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