



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITALPARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Office of the Inspector General

MEMORANDUM OF LIMITED INVESTIGATION

December 23, 2024

**To:** Jason Sartori, Director  
Montgomery County Planning Department

Robert Kronenberg, Deputy Director  
Montgomery County Planning Department

**From:** Renee Kenney, CIG, CPA, CIA, CISA  
Inspector General

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Deputy Inspector General

Robert Feeley, CICA, CFE, CGFM, CAA  
Assistant Inspector General

**Subject:** Employee Celebrations – MC-005-2025

A Memorandum of Limited Investigation describes specific issues or complaints received and the outcomes of limited procedures undertaken during a preliminary inquiry conducted by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). The investigation was not conducted per Government Auditing Standards or Principles and Standards for Inspector Offices of Inspector General.

**Concern/Allegation:**

On October 18, 2024, concerns were posted on the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC or Commission) independent fraud, waste and abuse hotline stating “personal baby and wedding showers are held on-site during work hours as well as the collection of donations and party preparation. Employees are inundated via the organization’s email system with requests for donations to support the personal party and purchase of gifts.” The allegations specifically stated the Montgomery Planning Downcounty, Midcounty and Upcounty Divisions were involved.

## **Analysis**

The OIG conducted interviews with Department of Planning Division Chief's in the three divisions mentioned in the allegation. In a 21-month period between January 2023 and September 2024, **17** celebrations were held for Montgomery County Planning Department employees. The celebrations were for personnel promotions, farewell parties, and baby showers. All events overlapped with normal work hours (8:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. with a 30-minute lunch break). All event notifications included a gift recommendation, which in some cases included the cost of food and beverages.

Nine (9) of the celebrations were held in the Wheaton Headquarters Facility and 8 were held at public restaurants. The invitations were sent via Commission email and Microsoft Teams (Teams) meeting requests. All gift solicitations were voluntary.

Ten (10) of the celebrations allocated a 2-hour time frame during normal work hours for attendance.

Payment for the meals at restaurants varied from employees paying their own way or a Division Chief personally paying for costs not covered by donations. There was one instance where reimbursement from the Commission was requested and received for an off-site celebration. Details of this can be found on page 3, **Significant Violation of Policy**.

Please see **Exhibit A** for additional details on the celebrations.

## **Criteria**

The OIG reviewed applicable Commission Practices and Procedures:

- Commission Practice 2-24, *Code of Ethics* provides the following guidance on gifts and use of Commission resources (e.g., conference rooms and Commission network/emails application.)
  - An employee may not solicit a gift from another employee. However, the Practice includes an exception for voluntary contributions of a reasonable amount for a gift made on a special occasion.
  - Commission resources may only be used for official business of the agency. Managers and supervisors must monitor and enforce the proper use of Commission resources.
- Commission Practice 3-10, *Authorized Business Expenses* allows local meals if they are taken in connection with external professional events. Business meetings may be considered for reimbursement of meals subject to prior authorization by the Department Head.

- Administrative Procedures No. 19-02, *Attendance, and Completion and Approval of Time Cards* states “employees must properly account for attendance and track overtime, tardiness, early/late arrivals/departures, meal period, breaks, leave, and premium pay.”
- Merit System Rules and regulations, Chapter 1500, states administrative leave may be granted by the Executive Director or the Department Head to one or more employees without altering employees accrued leave balances.

**Significant Violation of Policy**

One of the celebrations reviewed was a farewell celebration for an employee [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

There is no evidence (e.g., meeting minutes or notes discussing the transition) available that would support the documented business purpose. In addition, the receipt included an automatic large party gratuity of 20% (\$40) as well as an added tip of \$20 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The OIG reasonably concludes the event was a celebratory lunch, not a business transition meeting. Payment of farewell parties is not an allowable business expense. The OIG also reasonably concludes, [REDACTED] purposely falsified the business purpose of the luncheon on [REDACTED] expense report so [REDACTED] could be reimbursed for the cost of the celebration.

[REDACTED] actions meet the definition **Fraud, Waste, and Abuse** per Commission Practice 3-31, *Fraud, Waste, and Abuse*. (See Exhibit D). We recommend Montgomery County Planning Department management, in cooperation with Corporate Human Resources and General Counsel, review this transaction to determine whether any appropriate disciplinary action is warranted.

**Summary**

The OIG understands the value of celebrations within the Commission. However, management should be cognizant of the number of celebrations being held, the implied cost to the employee, and the perception of waste (e.g., paid time for personal events).

During our review, we identified opportunities to strengthen compliance with Commission policies and procedures, including ensuring employees timecards reflect leave as needed. Additional details including management's response, can be found on pages 5 and 6 of this report.

## **Opportunities to Strengthen Compliance with Commission Policies and Procedures**

### **1. Ensure Employees Timecards Reflect Leave as Needed to Attend Celebrations**

**Issue:** Montgomery Planning does not provide administrative leave or require employees to take personal leave when attending celebrations occurring during a workday. In a 21-month period between January 2023 and September 2024, the OIG identified **17** celebrations held for Montgomery County Planning Department employees in 3 of their 9 divisions. The celebrations were for personnel promotions, farewell parties, and baby showers that occurred during various times in a workday (e.g. 9am-10am, 2pm-4pm, and 3p-5pm). (See **Exhibit A**) According to Division Chiefs, none of the employees that attended the celebrations were granted administrative leave, used personal leave or flexed their time if the celebration extended beyond a 30-minute lunch period. The OIG determined that most of the celebrations that occurred were well beyond a typical lunch period.

The OIG reasonably assumes an employee may not attend an in-office celebration for the entire period. However, for celebrations that take place off-site (e.g. restaurant) during normal work hours, we assume an employee is more likely to attend the celebration for the entire time. In this case, management should communicate the option to employees to flex their time or use the appropriate leave.

#### **Criteria:**

- Administrative Procedures No. 19-02, *Attendance, and Completion and Approval of Time Cards states*, “employees must properly account for attendance and track overtime, tardiness, early/late arrivals/departures, meal period, breaks, leave, and premium pay.”
- Merit System Rules and regulations, Chapter 1500, states administrative leave may be granted by the Executive Director or the Department Head to one or more employees without altering employees accrued leave balances.

**Risk:** Medium

**Recommendation:** If administrative leave is to be provided, it must be preapproved by the Department Head. Administrative leave should also be reflected on the timecard for those employees who attended the celebration. In addition, if administrative leave is granted, management should communicate the approval of the administrative leave to all employees invited. In the case that administrative leave is not provided, management should instruct employees to use their own personal leave or flex their work schedule.

**Management Response:** Please see our course of action below

### **1. Ensure employees’ timecards reflect leave, as needed, to attend celebrations**

Montgomery Planning will coordinate with the Office of the General Counsel to provide guidance to staff on *Administrative Procedures No. 19-02 Attendance, and Completion and Approval of Time Cards*. This will include the distribution of a memo from the Director's Office and discussion at the Department's expanded Planning Leadership meeting with senior leadership and supervisors in February. In addition, a similar memo will be disseminated to all staff. These memos will include guidance on invitations for employee celebrations including being mindful of verbiage related to voluntary attendance and voluntary contributions.

**2. Provide guidance to staff on the authorization and reimbursement of employee meals**

Montgomery Planning will provide education and awareness for senior leadership on the authorization and reimbursement of employee meals. This will include information on *Practice 3-10 Authorized Business Travel Expenses*. The guidance and FAQ document will be placed on the Management Services Division MCPulse intranet site.

**Expected Completion Date:** February 21, 2025

**Follow-Up Date:** April 2025

Employee Celebrations – Montgomery County Planning Department  
MC-005-2025

Cc:

Audit Committee

Dorothy Bailey

Mitra Pedoeem

Erin White

Benjamin Williams

Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Todd Allen

Debra Borden

Gavin Cohen

Artie Harris

Ben Rupert

Peter Shapiro

William Spencer

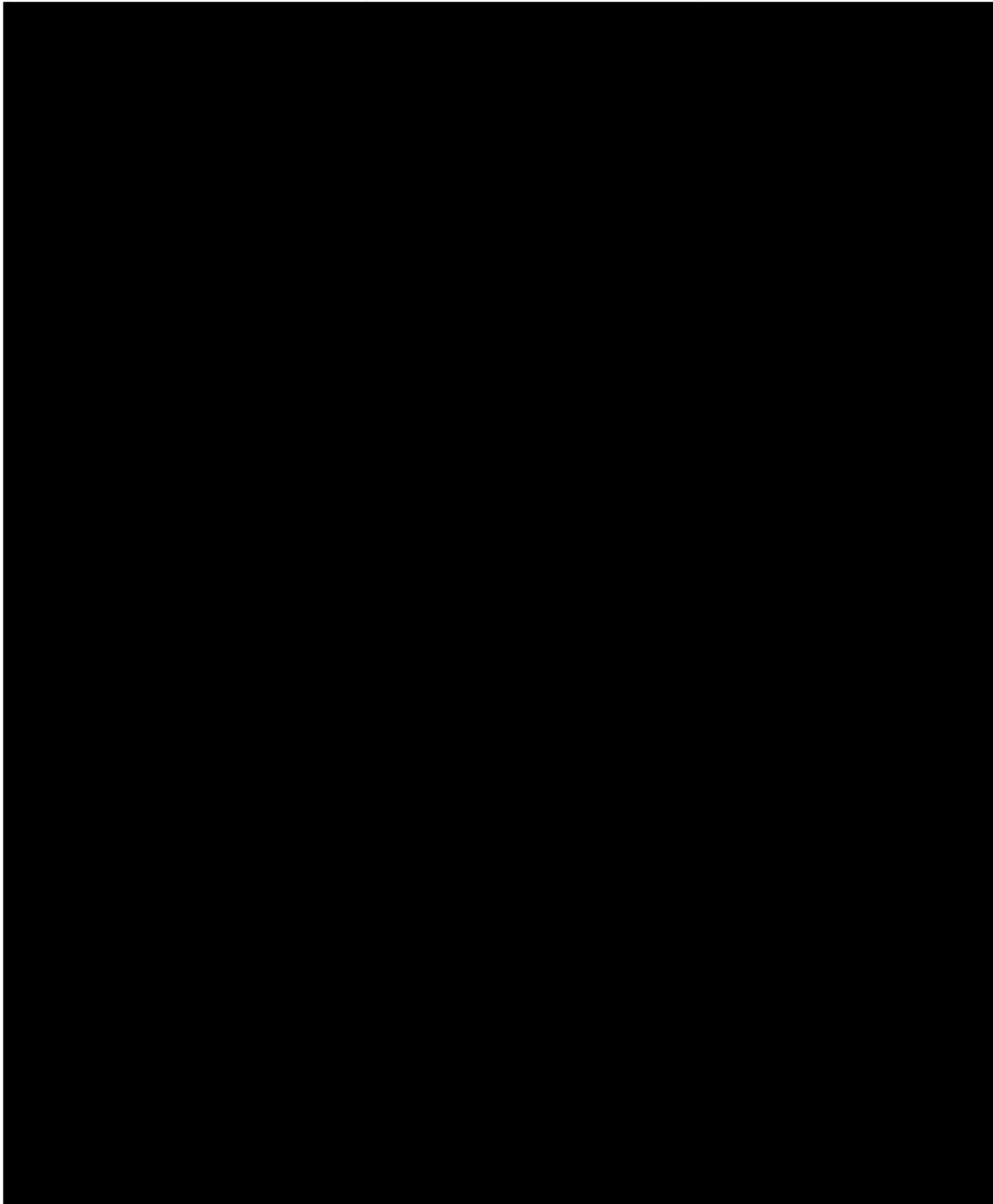
## Exhibit A

### Montgomery County Planning Department Celebrations

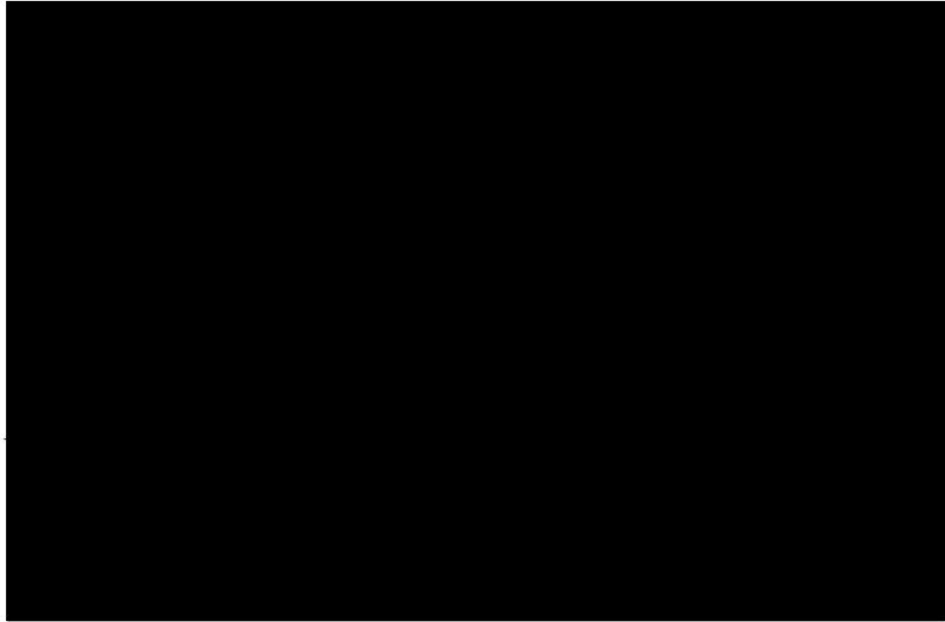
Division	Date	Time	Description	Place
<b>Mid-County Planning:</b>	4/11/23	3:00 p.m.– 5:00 p.m.	Baby shower	Wheaton HQ
	10/31/23	11:30 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.	Baby shower	Terra Mare Restaurant
<b>Downcounty Planning:</b>	1/5/23	11:30 a.m.– 1:30 p.m.	Baby shower	Ruan Thai Restaurant
	2/7/23	12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	Farewell	Ruan Thai Restaurant
	6/13/23	2:00 p.m.– 4:00 p.m.	Baby shower	Wheaton HQ
	7/31/24	12:00 p.m.– 2:00 p.m.	Farewell	District Bistro
<b>Upcounty Planning:</b>	3/23/23	4:00 p.m.– 6:00 p.m.	Farewell	Limerick Pub
	5/16/23	9:00 a.m.– 10:00 a.m.	Farewell	Wheaton HQ
	7/28/23	4:30 p.m.– 6:30 p.m.	Farewell	Terra Mare Restaurant
	8/31/23	12:00 p.m.– 1:30 p.m.	Farewell	Wheaton HQ
	11/8/23	3:00 p.m.– 5:00 p.m.	Baby shower	Wheaton HQ
	11/30/23	3:00 p.m.– 5:00 p.m.	Retirement	Terra Mare Restaurant
	1/25/24	9:30 a.m.– 10:30 a.m.	Welcome	Wheaton HQ
	2/8/24	4:00 p.m.– 6:00 p.m.	Farewell	Hakuna Matata Grill
	2/28/24	3:00 p.m.– 4:00 p.m.	Farewell	Wheaton HQ
	3/20/24	3:30 p.m.– 4:30 p.m.	Farewell	Wheaton HQ
	9/25/24	3:00 p.m.– 5:00 p.m.	Baby Shower	Wheaton HQ



**Exhibit B  
Celebration Flyer**



**Exhibit C  
Celebration EMail**



[District Bistro Lunch Menu Link](#)

Reservation Name: Montgomery Planning

**Exhibit D**  
**Fraud, Waste, and Abuse**

Fraud, waste, and abuse per the Annotated Code of Maryland, §15-501 and Commission Practice 3-31, *Fraud, Waste, and Abuse*, are defined as:

- Fraud: “Means an intentional act or attempt to obtain something of value from the Commission or another person through willful misrepresentation. Fraud includes a willful false representation of a material fact, whether by words or by conduct, by false or misleading allegations, or by concealment of that which should have been disclosed, which causes the Commission to act, or fail to act, to the detriment of the Commission’s interest.”
  
- Waste: “Means an inappropriate act or omission by an employee with control over, or access to, Commission property or funds that unreasonably deprives the Commission of value. Waste includes mismanagement or other unintentional conduct that is deficient or improper when compared to conduct a prudent person would consider necessary to preserve the value of Commission property or funds under the same facts and circumstances.”
  
- Abuse: “Means an employee’s intentional or reckless misconduct or misuse of authority or position:
  - (I) involving Commission property or funds that is improper or deficient when compared to conduct a prudent person would consider reasonable under the same facts and circumstances; or
  - (II) For the purpose of furthering improperly the private interests of the employee, a family member, or a close personal or business associate. Abuse includes theft or misappropriation of Commission property or funds; and destruction or alteration of official records.”