



Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Director's Quarterly Leadership Meeting with Boards, Commissions and Committees (BCC)

Date: June 30, 2020 (FY20 Fourth Quarter Report)

BCC: Commission on Aging (CoA)

BCC Representative: Jean Dinwiddie, Chair

Montgomery County's Commission on Aging continues to serve as an advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of the County's older residents by identifying significant issues where its voice on the needs of seniors can make a difference. The CoA appreciates the County's efforts to deal with the COVID-19 Pandemic and its resulting health and economic crises. The CoA stands ready to provide services and assistance in any way it can.

In March 2020 all CoA activities were suspended because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. It resumed its deliberations in May 2020.

Age-Friendly Montgomery County

The CoA continues active participation in the Age-Friendly Montgomery County Initiative. The Commission Chair is a member of the Age-Friendly Advisory Group, a CoA alumnus is the Senior Fellow that staffs the Initiative, and individual CoA members participate on the various Committees. All have the ultimate goal of continuing to make the County a community for a lifetime.

FY20 First Quarter Activities

During the first quarter of FY20, the Commission concentrated its efforts on setting its budget priorities for FY21. A special meeting was held on July 25 where CoA members discussed strategies for advancing those priorities with Gabriel Albornoz, Member, Montgomery County Council; Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director, Montgomery County Health and Human Services; Richard Madaleno, Director, Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget; and Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst, Montgomery County Council. Following this discussion – and taking into consideration previous CoA research and recommendations, FY20 priorities that were not funded but where the need continues, input from agency directors, and other information – the Commission adopted the following budget priorities for FY21:

HHS: (1) Expand home delivered Senior Nutrition programs to include weekends; (2) add two social worker positions: one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public Guardianship program; and (3) increase the subsidy for small group homes and Adult Foster Care.

Recreation: (1) Restore FY20 cuts affecting programs serving older adults; and (2) increase hours of service for senior programs.

Housing: Continue to increase the Housing Initiative Fund to further expand affordable housing options for older adults.

While the CoA may not be able to advocate for all issues, especially since it is often asked to identify its top two or three budget priorities, the list is important because it provides additional guidance for advocacy moving forward. Some budget items for which the CoA has advocated in the past received some support in the voting process, but they did not rise to the highest level of priority this year. These include Friday transportation to senior centers; restoring the senior fellow positions and adding one more position on diversity issues; and expanding funding for the early stage memory loss program at senior centers. We will continue to advocate for these items as appropriate. Some additional issues – e.g., hearing loss and social isolation, older adult employment, the new Flex Ride program – will be studied further by CoA Committees.

The CoA was pleased to learn that the County will receive additional State funding to cover the costs of expanding the home delivered meals program.

During this quarter, the Commission welcomed two new members: Karon Phillips and Janice Zalen.

FY20 Second Quarter Activities

During the second quarter, the CoA met with County Executive Marc Elrich where he discussed his vision and seven goals for the County and explained the position and actions he has taken on such CoA priorities as affordable housing, employment for older adults, and transportation. The CoA also sent a letter to Gabe Albornoz, Chair of the County Council's HHS Committee, outlining the CoA's budget priorities for FY21 as described above. CoA Chair, Jean Dinwiddie, presented these priorities to the Council at its October 10 hearing.

In November the CoA held its annual Legislative Breakfast where CoA members had the opportunity to meet with Montgomery County's State legislators. About one-third of Montgomery County's State delegation attended. Also in November, at the CoA's regular monthly meeting, Commission members met with County Council Member, Evan Glass, who discussed The *Housing Impact Fairness Act*, legislation that could generate an additional \$5.7 million a year for school construction and \$4.3 million a year for the County's affordable housing programs. Members also heard from Rona Kramer, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging, regarding initiatives that her Department has instituted. These programs include Senior Call Check, Maryland Communities for Life, and the Durable Equipment Lease program.

During the quarter, Chair Dinwiddie and other CoA members met with a number of Montgomery County Department Directors and staff to discuss issues of concern to the CoA. These sessions included meetings with Aseem Nigam, Director of the Department of Housing and Community Affairs and Deputy Director, Frank Demarais; Al Roshdieh, Director of the Department of

Transportation; Fred Lees, Chief of Management; Barry Hudson, the new Director of Montgomery County's Office of Public Information; HR Director Berke Atilla; Tiffany Ward, Racial Equity Program Manager in the County Executive's office; and Elaine Bonner Tompkins, Senior Legislative Analyst for the County Council.

FY20 Third Quarter Activities

At its January 2020 meeting the CoA met with Recreation Department Director, Robin Riley, and Recreation Department staff member, Phil Smakula, who discussed older adult programs and activities at County recreation facilities. They noted that, although the Department is working to address a number of the issues facing its older adult programs, it needs advocates so that the County Council will provide enough funding for them. They also stated that the County has many more older adults who participate in Recreation Department activities than just the individuals who go to the senior centers. For instance, the Departments' adult sports programs, such as the Senior Olympics, have many senior participants. The recreation centers offer about 60 hours of availability a week, and this does not include private rentals.

At its February meeting the CoA met with a number of officials including Montgomery County Council Member, Gabe Alborno; Special Assistant to the County Executive, Chuck Short; Khalid Afzal, Special Projects Manager for the Maryland-National Capitol Park and Planning Commission; Daniel Jones, Partnership Specialist for the Bureau of Census; and Walton Harris, Policy Analyst for Taxicab Regulation and Special Transit Services.

Council Member Alborno and Mr. Short discussed the Montgomery County Property Tax Credit for Senior Citizen Volunteers bill (MC 23-20) and noted that the bill would be tabled to allow time for it to be studied. They also discussed pedestrian safety in the County and explained a number of actions that are being taken to address the issue. Mr. Afzal distributed the "Thrive Montgomery 2050: Issues Report" and described the County's Thrive Montgomery long-term planning initiative and several of the steps that are being taken to implement it. Mr. Jones reminded the CoA that the 2020 U.S. Census would be taken in March and urged members to advocate for individuals to participate. Finally, Mr. Harris provided an update on the status of the Transportation Services Improvement Fund.

Also, at the February meeting, CoA members discussed plans for the CoA's annual forum. The theme of the 2020 event was to be "What Can Racial Equity Look Like in an Age-Friendly Community?" Unfortunately, the forum and the March CoA meeting were cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis.

FY20 Fourth Quarter Activities

The CoA cancelled its April meetings because of the COVID Pandemic. It resumed deliberations in May by holding meetings by conference and Zoom calls. It will continue to hold virtual meetings for the foreseeable future.

At the May meeting CoA members heard from Lylie Fisher, facilitator of Montgomery County's Caregiver Support Program. She is the lead for the County's Dementia Friendly initiative and a

member of the Maryland Commission on Caregiving. Ms. Fisher provided a Powerpoint presentation and discussed the services that the Caregiver Support Program offers, including an Eligibility and Resource Unit to help caregivers, and a respite care program administered by the ARC of Montgomery County. Ms. Fisher stated that she is working to ensure that all caregiving information is available online and noted that Montgomery County now has a website for caregivers. In addition, the Caregiver Support Program staff have developed a podcast program on Montgomery County's website, a YouTube channel called Engage@HOME, and also a blog that has over 4,000 subscribers. Ms. Fisher also reported that in 2019, Montgomery County had its first caregiver event. It was held in the Silver Spring Community building and over 200 individuals attended.

The CoA's June meeting featured a panel discussion with Sidney Katz, President of the Montgomery County Council, and Rich Madaleno, Director of Montgomery County's Office of Management and Budget. The discussion centered around the County's financial and budget situation and the impact the Pandemic has had on the economy. It was noted that because of the Pandemic and other problems, the FY22 budget could go down as the worst County budget in history. The County will have more expenses than it has ever had all the while sustaining decreased revenues. The Council President reported that there will be at least a \$200 million shortfall, and it could be as much as a \$600 million. Budget cuts will have to be made. The economy was helped by the passage of the CARES Act and other legislation, including a Federal grant of \$183 million to be spent on services directly related to the Pandemic. The speakers stressed that if Congress does not act to continue to add relief for individuals and State and local governments, Montgomery County's economy will be less stable. Without Federal assistance the economy could lose another 4 million in jobs. If State and local governments do not get more help, kindergartners will not be able to start school this Fall. The County had \$540 million in reserve before the Pandemic hit. It had to use some of that money over the past few months but the reserve is not depleted. However, more Federal assistance is needed for the economy to survive. Over the next few months, as money comes in or does not come in, the County hopes to cut \$200 million from its budget.

In July, the CoA is planning to hold a special meeting to discuss budget priorities for the FY22 Montgomery County budget.

Aging in Community Committee

The Committee's May meeting was devoted to looking at the impact COVID-19 has had on the older adult community. At that meeting Chief Brunetto addressed four issues: transportation, food insecurity, social isolation, and community living program services. The Committee has decided to focus on social isolation and what role the CoA can play in reaching isolated older adults. At their June meeting, Committee members decided to research ways to communicate to older adults what types of County resources are available to them. In addition, Committee members are looking at employment for older adults, affordable housing, and evictions.

Health and Wellness Committee

At its May meeting the Committee looked at COVID responses and the incidents at different aging facilities. Committee members looked at the State's "Go" and "Bridge" teams and discussed how the CoA can advocate to have the "Go" Teams continue after June 9.

At its June meeting, the Committee continued its discussion of the State's "Go Teams," and also met with Eileen Bennett, a program manager in the County's Ombudsman Program. In addition, Committee members resumed their research on hearing loss.

The Committee prepared a Fact Sheet regarding hearing impairments and planned to present it to the full CoA for approval at the CoA's July meeting. Committee members are also working on a distribution strategy for the Fact Sheet.

Public Policy Committee

Committee members prepared two letters that were approved by the Executive Committee: a cover letter that expressed the CoA's approval of a statement to legislators prepared by the N4A in favor of COVID-19 legislation, and a letter to Montgomery County's Office of Planning providing comments on the Thrive Montgomery initiative. Several of the bills that the CoA supported in the General Assembly passed.

Upcoming Activities

In March 2020 all CoA activities were suspended because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Although the CoA started holding virtual meetings in May, its activities are limited. A virtual Townhall meeting in collaboration with the County Council on racial justice has been discussed. The CoA will continue to hold virtual meetings throughout the Fall and will submit written and oral FY22 budget priorities to the County Council.

Collaboration with Other Boards, Commissions, and Committees

CoA collaborates with other Boards, Commissions, and Committees, as appropriate. CoA also welcomes representatives of other Boards, Commissions and Committees at its standing Committee meetings. These representatives are invited to report on their B/C/or C's activities at CoA's monthly meetings.