



## Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

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

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**Date: March 31, 2020 (FY20 Third 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. Currently, it is unclear when the CoA will resume its deliberations.

#### **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.

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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.

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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 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis.

### ***Aging in Community Committee***

The committee decided to focus on two areas in 2020: housing affordability and older adult employment. In January, committee members met with Stephanie Roodman, Senior Project Manager and Legal Counsel, HMP (formerly Montgomery Housing Partnership); Mark Dunham, Principal, Novum Strategies; and Sarah Constant, Sr. Vice President, Real Estate Development, Mission First Housing Development Corp to discuss Affordable/Accessible Intergenerational Housing Models. They examined the challenges and successes in developing various models of older adult and intentional intergenerational housing, including compliance with the *Fair Housing Act* and other HUD requirements.

In February, the committee devoted its meeting to learning more about the Senior Fellows program, a program implemented in 2007/2008 to take advantage of the talent pool of the age 50+ segment of the County's population. At the meeting, members heard about the genesis of the program from Chuck Short, Special Assistant to the County Executive; its early implementation from Gail Nachman, one of the first Senior Fellows; and then from current Senior Fellows representing the Department of Housing and Community Affairs, the Office of Aging and Disability, and the Montgomery County Volunteer Center. The committee is in the process of compiling the information as to how it can use it to advocate for broadening and/or upgrading/revising the use of the position in multiple departments of the County government.

### ***Health and Wellness Committee***

The committee is now researching hearing loss and its implications on health, dementia, and social isolation. In January members heard from Lise Hamlin of the Hearing Loss Association of America, and in February they met with Carrie Nieman, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Otolaryngology, Johns Hopkins and her colleague, Khoi Lee. Dr. Nieman's work is directed at understanding and addressing hearing health disparities among older adults, particularly among vulnerable populations. She and Khoi Lee are involved in the Aging and Cognitive Health Evaluation in Elders (ACHIEVE) study.

Committee members also heard about Access HEARS which is a pioneer social enterprise working to disrupt the current hearing care industry by providing affordable, accessible hearing care through a sustainable, community-delivered model. The Committee is exploring providing a 1-page fact sheet on hearing loss and other things to the CoA as a project proposal.

### ***Public Policy Committee***

In January, the committee began monitoring bills filed both in Montgomery County and in the Maryland General Assembly. At the County level, the committee continued to follow up on the Transportation Services Improvement Fund and consulted with Council Member Tom Hucker about establishing an accounting system to monitor how the funds are used. In addition, members learned that the Home Share Program that the CoA advocated for in 2019 is moving forward. The committee also drafted and sent a letter to the Rockville Mayor and City Council in support of a donation of 25 acres on which to develop a Veterans Administration nursing home. Committee members also discussed the format, location and scheduling of the annual Legislative

Breakfast, including its goals, effectiveness in meeting those goals, and any other options for reaching the same goals.

At its February meeting, the committee reviewed a number of bills filed to-date in the Maryland General Assembly and discussed several that would impact older adults in Montgomery County and that are also within the CoA's priority areas. The committee recommended supporting the following:

- **HB 304** – would make criminal exploitation of vulnerable adults an unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice in violation of the Maryland Consumer Protection Act subject to enforcement by the Office of the Attorney General.
- **HB 745/SB 407** – would establish and fund a Senior and Vulnerable Adult Asset Recovery Unit in the Office of the Attorney General. CoA supported a similar bill last year.
- **HB 489** – would require the Governor to include \$1 million in the State budget for aging in place grants to Area Agencies on Aging and nonprofit organizations and require that at least 10 percent of the funds be used to support senior villages.
- **HB 821** – would enable Montgomery County to enact a law prohibiting landlords from evicting tenants absent good cause. The CoA supported a similar bill last year, but the bill did not pass.
- **HB 1163/SB 462** – requires Maryland to expand the Home- and Community-Based Waiver program.
- **HB 1326** – would exempt hearing aids and other devices from State sales tax.
- **HB 1567** – would create a State low income housing tax credit program.

The committee also discussed **HB 745**, which would enable Montgomery County to enact a law providing a property tax credit to senior homeowners who volunteer with schools or non-profits a certain number of hours each year. The committee also discussed a 2019 bill, **SB 645**, which the CoA supported, and which was enacted. This bill allows Counties to amend the existing tax credit program requiring 40 years of ownership to reduce this number. To our knowledge, Montgomery County has not taken steps to amend its program.

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### *Communications and Community Outreach Task Force*

“**Seniors Today.**” A Task Force member is currently guest hosting this monthly cable access television program which is co-produced by the CoA and the County. The program airs several times each month and is also available on the County's YouTube channel. Recent guests included:

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- Susan Yaffe-Ozeil, Audiologist
  - Khalid Afzal, Montgomery County Planning Department
  - Jean Dinwiddie, Chair, Montgomery County Commission on Aging
  - Suzan Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer, Arts and Humanities Council
  - Dolores Ustrell, Acting Director, Wheaton Senior Center
  - Austin Heyman, Former Chair, Montgomery County Commission on Aging

- Rona Kramer, Secretary, Maryland Department of Aging
  - Ben Kramer, Member, Maryland State Senate
  - Sylvia Balderas, Professional Organizer
  - Daniel Jones, Partnership Specialist, Bureau of Census
  - Seth Morgan, Chair, Commission on People with Disabilities
  - James Stowe, Director, Office of Human Rights
  - Larissa Johnson, Residential Energy Program Manager, Department of Environmental Protection
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### **Upcoming Activities**

In March 2020 all CoA activities were suspended because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Currently, it is unclear when the CoA will resume its deliberations.

### **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.