

COMMISSION ON AGING  
MEETING SUMMARY MINUTES  
March 28, 2019

<b>Members Present</b>	<b>Alumni Members</b>
Stephanie Edelstein	Pat Lesnick
Beverly Rollins	Isabelle Schoenfeld
Amoke Alakoye	
Neal Brown	<b>Guests</b>
Mort Faller	Seda Gelenian
Amy Harbison	
Alan Kaplan	<b>Liaisons</b>
Miriam Kelty	James Campbell, Commission on Veterans Affairs
Nanine Meiklejohn	Marcia Pruzan, Senior Fellow Age-Friendly Montgomery
Ruby Moone	
Phyllis Rand	<b>Staff</b>
Deborah Royster	Odile Brunetto, Acting Chief, Aging and Disability Services and Director, Area Agency on Aging
Monica Schaeffer	Shawn Brennan, Department of Health and Human Services
Hillery Tsumba	Adriane Clutter, Division Chief, Department of Recreation
Marsha Weber	Denise Isreal, Department of Transportation
Ryan Wilson	Tremayne Jones, Department of Health and Human Services
	Michael Pollard, Department of Transportation
<b>Members Absent</b>	Stacy Sigler, Department of Recreation
Jean Dinwiddie	
Barbara Brubeck	
Richard Joundenais	
Karen Maricheau	
Revathi Vikram	
Tho Tran	

**Welcome and Introductions.** Vice-Chair Stephanie Edelstein welcomed everyone and led introductions of all attendees.

**Approval of Minutes of the February 28 CoA Meeting.** Commissioner Schaeffer requested a slight revision to the February minutes regarding the variances in life expectancies among Montgomery County residents. Her requested revisions were accepted and the minutes were approved unanimously.

**Treasurer's Report.** Vice Chair Edelstein reported that the CoA account has a balance of \$5,109.31.

### **CoA Updates**

- **Annual Report.** The annual report has been finalized and is ready to be sent to the printer.
- **CoA Brochure.** The brochure is currently being updated.
- **New Commissioner Applications.** Commissioners Kaplan, Alakoye, and Edelstein interviewed the candidates and their recommendations were sent to County Executive Elrich, who will make the final decisions. It is unclear how long it will take for him to complete his actions. There were 40 applications for the seven open positions. All of the applicants interviewed were highly qualified and the group was very diverse, both in age and ethnicity.
- **Neal Potter Award.** The “Neal Potter Path of Achievement Award” recognizes residents aged 60 and above for their lifetime of volunteer service in the County. This year’s award will be presented at the “Montgomery Serves” awards event to be held on April 29, 6:30p-9:00p at the Imagination Stage located at 4908 Auburn Avenue in Bethesda. This year’s awardees are Karen Bashir and Jacquette Frazier. All CoA members were urged to attend the event.
- **Meetings with County Council Members.** During the month of April CoA members will meet with County Council Members to discuss the CoA’s priorities regarding the County’s FY20 budget. (Commissioner Edelstein reminded the CoA members that in the Fall of 2018 the CoA developed its budget priorities and sent letters to the County Executive and to the County Council president outlining them.) Mrs. Jones prepared a calendar indicating when the Commission members will be meeting with the various Council Members. The Public Policy Committee will prepare talking points for CoA members to reference during the meetings. The CoA members will also present the Council Members with copies of the CoA’s briefing book and Annual Report. The full Council will hold meetings on April 8, 9, and 10 to hear budget testimony. Chair Jean Dinwiddie is scheduled to testify on the CoA’s behalf in front of the full Council on budget issues on April 8. The Council HHS committee will meet with HHS the morning of April 29 to discuss its budget.
- **March 19 Public Forum Debrief.** About 150 individuals attended the CoA’s public forum on “Older Adults in the County’s Diverse Racial, Ethnic, and LGBTQ Communities.” County Executive Elrich delivered encouraging remarks, there was a good panel of speakers, and about 15 to 20 organizations provided exhibit tables.

Common themes such as language challenges and social isolation were discussed. The CoA workgroup that organized the forum is now preparing a final report that will include recommendations derived from the forum discussions. The workgroup will also make recommendations regarding logistical considerations for holding future forums such as where they should be held, how to deal with the translation needs, and how participants can provide feedback.

---

**AAA Director's Report.** Dr. Odile Brunetto reported on County Executive Elrich's proposed FY20 County Budget which he presented on March 15:

---

- Senior Center programs would receive a 35 percent (\$197,002) reduction in operating expenses. Dr. Brunetto stated that a representative from the Recreation Department will brief her next week about this.
- There is a \$490,000 increase in the Homecare Services contracts. This will allow the County to serve 47 new individuals and provide 2-6 hours of services a week.
- Nurse monitoring services for the Medicaid program would receive over a \$483,000 increase. This is not for an expansion of services but to maintain the services already in place.
- A new Senior Home Sharing pilot program would be created with a budget of \$174,000. One reason it was established was because focus groups in 2018 showed interest and the County decided to develop a pilot project. It is also a program for which the CoA advocated. The comment was made that the County Executive's proposal is a bit different than what the CoA requested (the CoA suggested that the Council look at different models across the country before implementing a program). It was suggested that the CoA Commissioners indicate this difference when meeting with the Council Members and in the CoA's budget testimony.
- Handicap Rental Assistance, which is part of the program for homeless individuals, was reduced by \$329,679. This program may be eliminated. Dr. Brunetto stated that she has asked program officials to let her know how many seniors are currently enrolled in this program. The programs for homeless interventions, however, will receive an additional \$1 million. They help homeless individuals find housing and over 2,000 homeless people were served last year. A significant percentage of those were over the age of 60.
- Over 40 non-profit organizations would receive grants totaling over \$1 million for senior-related programs, Ten Villages are recommended to receive funds next year; in fact, every year more Villages are being funded. The grants range from \$8,000 to \$30,000.
- There is a new \$40,000 grant for the Jewish Council for the Aging. The grant money will pay for staff to recruit/coordinate/train volunteer drivers to transport seniors.
- There will be a wage adjustment for employees across Montgomery County. Union employees will receive a 2.4 percent increase in November 2019, and non-union employees will receive a 2 percent increase. In addition, on their work-date anniversary all employees will receive a 3.5 percent increase.
- Staff in the Montgomery County school system and the fire/police departments will receive pay increases pursuant to their collective bargaining agreements.

- The County Executive’s budget proposed money to hire more staff to implement the MPDU program.
  - Dr. Brunetto noted that the CoA advocated for a number of services and programs that were not included in the County Executive’s proposed budget including more services for early stage memory loss, more money for respite care, and more money for transportation to senior centers. The CoA also advocated for an additional social worker for the advocacy program, a senior fellow to work with diverse communities, more affordable housing, and development of a consumer-friendly database that lists affordable housing units.
  - The proposed budget asked for no reductions for the County libraries.
- 

Dr. Brunetto also reported on the following items pending in the General Assembly or in the Governor’s proposed budget:

- A bill to allow certain SNAP (Food Stamp) recipients to use their benefits to purchase hot meals in restaurants. The bill is intended to benefit homeless individuals, older adults, people with disabilities, and others who cannot cook for themselves. This program is already in place in a number of other States.
  - A proposal for \$1.8 million for a durable equipment loan closet. This would provide for a centralized warehouse where individuals could access equipment such as wheelchairs, walkers, and beds. This proposal would also provide satellite loan closets around the State so that people will not have to drive long distances to access the closets.
- 

**Identification of CoA Priorities and Strategy.** Stephanie Edelstein led a discussion of CoA priorities, and how to present those priorities to the County Council now that we have the County Executive’s budget. For the proposed budget, CoA priorities were grouped under two categories – fight social isolation (primarily social services programs) and promote safe, affordable housing, so as not to compare apples and oranges. Should the CoA keep that strategy? Should we continue to advocate for the budget items presented in the fall at the beginning of the budget cycle? Do we just target proposed cuts or do we ask for more? The consensus was to commend the County Executive’s funding of a home sharing program and other affordable housing initiatives, to express grave concern about cuts to the recreation department budget, and to continue to request additional items that we have prioritized based on research and information received from County agencies. The Public Policy Committee will draft talking points for the meetings with the County Council members.

---

**Other Staff Reports.** The CoA heard from other Montgomery County staff during the meeting including:

- Adriane Clutter discussed the County Executive’s proposed cuts to the Department of Recreation’s budget. She noted that the department will see budget reductions across the board: youth programs will see a \$60,000 cut and funding for recreation facilities will be cut \$165,000. Maintenance and landscaping will see the biggest reductions. \$179,000 of the proposed cuts are targeted specifically for the programs for older adults. The

department will have other programs for seniors, however, that will remain. Staff will look for the department's partners to help fill in the gaps created by the budget cuts. Montgomery County's budget for its senior centers is lower than both Fairfax and Howard Counties. Transportation continues to be a barrier for many seniors to participate in the department's programs. When asked which would be better: having Friday transportation restored but having a reduction in other programs, Ms. Clutter said that she would consult with her staff and respond to the CoA shortly. She also stated that she will provide a break down of all of the department's budget cuts to Dr. Brunetto, who can then share them with the CoA. Ms. Clutter commented that she would like to have a CoA representative to the Recreation Department Advisory Board.

- Denise Isreal stated that the Department of Transportation's budget was left at same level as last year and it should be able to maintain same level of service.
  - Michael Pollard reported that the Department of Transportation held a meeting recently to discuss the Transportation Services Improvement Fund. The Department has looked at comments and recommendations on how the proposed regulation on implementing the fund should look and hopes to send a revised proposal to the County Council by mid-April. Mr. Pollard stated that, hopefully, he can attend the CoA's April meeting to provide a full accounting. He noted that he will check with his boss to see whether the CoA can see the draft regulations and, if it can, when the regulations will be available for the CoA's review. The CoA asked Shawn Brennan if she would draft a letter to the Department of Transportation requesting to see the proposed regulations.
- 

## Committee Reports

- ***Aging in Community.*** Commissioner Schaeffer reported that that the committee will soon be looking at the problem of social isolation. It is also looking at the County's Flexride program, a pilot project which will be launched in June. Flexride is a 1-year pilot program and will be conducted in Glenmont, Wheaton, and Rockville. It will feature smaller vans that will be used on an on-demand basis, called by using an application on cell phones. Users can book the buses in advance. The County is currently considering whether the program should be available only during specific time periods. One reason for the pilot program is because the ridership numbers on the regular Ride On buses are weak and the County may be wanting to increase them and retain the service. The County is interested in CoA feedback on such questions as how suitable the program is for older adults and how it could be made more senior-friendly. The service is not door-to-door so the rider must find a way to get from his or her home to the bus location. Commissioners Kelty and Jourdenais are planning to prepare a CoA letter with recommendations on how to make the Flexride program more age-friendly.

The Committee also plans to look at the issue of rent stabilization in the coming months.

- ***Communications and Community Outreach.*** Commissioner Amy Harbison noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be on April 8 and she invited CoA members to attend. Committee members are working on key messaging for the CoA and how to work

collaboratively with HHS staff. They are also considering ways to leverage the program “Seniors Today” to get the CoA’s message out. Commissioner Harbison is still substituting for alumni member, Austin Heyman, as host of the show.

---

- **Health and Wellness.** Commissioner Neal Brown stated that the committee is trying to finalize its paper on the “gap” population – those individuals who have too much income to qualify for Medicaid yet do not have enough income to afford assisted living. The committee is working on a report and hopes to finalize it, with recommendations, by April.

The next issue that the Committee will be studying is hearing and hearing aids. There are two good resources that have done research on this issue – the Veterans’ Administration and a group that focuses on hearing issues. Hearing loss causes social isolation and individuals who lose their hearing later in life have many stigmas and a greater chance of developing dementia.

- **Public Policy.** Commissioner Ryan Wilson provided a brief update on the status of CoA-relevant legislation that is pending in the General Assembly. The session ends on April 8. The bill to create an elder exploitation unit in the Office of the Attorney General did not get out of committee. The “Nursing Home Patient Rights” bill is moving forward, as are some other bills the CoA has supported.

Other issues that the Committee is considering include:

- A follow-up letter regarding forming a Statewide Association of Maryland Commissions on Aging (AMCoA) will be released next week to all of the Maryland CoAs. The Committee has not received responses from 13 of these CoAs. Howard County is offering to host a meeting of all state CoAs in September, which might be a good idea.
- Voter accessibility issues: The Elections judge who raised this issue received a response from the Board of Elections stating that the Board will look into it. A Board of Elections representative has accepted our invitation to address the CoA at the September meeting.
- State “Age Friendly” status: The Committee is continuing to look at whether and how the State of Maryland could be designated as “Age Friendly.”

## Stakeholder Updates

---

- **Age Friendly Maryland.** Marcia Pruzan reported that the State of Maryland currently only has two municipalities that are Age Friendly – Montgomery County and the City of Hyattsville. Montgomery County has to reapply for recertification in 2020. This is a complex process, and it will take time and effort to get the necessary documentation.
- **CoA Alumni Committee.** Pat Lesnick introduced herself and invited attendees to attend the Alumni Committee meetings.

- ***Call-n-Ride***. Denise Isreal reported that the grant funding for the Call-n-Ride program has been put in place and the grants are good until 2021.
  - ***Veterans' Affairs***. James Campbell noted that there are 42,000 veterans in Montgomery County and the County is being considered for a new Veterans' home. The Maryland State Secretary of Veterans Affairs is trying to locate 20,000-22,000 acres in the County for this purpose. The land has to be donated or allocated out of County land reserves.
- 

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm.