

**Meeting of the
Montgomery County
Commission on Aging
May 23, 2019
Minutes**

Members Present	Alumni Members
Jean Dinwiddie, Chair	Marcia Pruzan, Senior Fellow Age-Friendly Montgomery
Stephanie Edelstein, Vice Chair	
Beverly Rollins, Secretary	Guests
Revathi Vikram, Treasurer	Elisse Barnes
Amoke Alakoye	Seda Gelenian
Neal Brown	
Mort Faller	Liaisons
Arumina Ghosh	Jim Campbell, Veterans Affairs
Amy Harbison	Denise Isreal, Department of Transportation
Richard Jourdenais	Phil Smakula, Department of Recreation
Miriam Kelyt	
Morris Klein	
Ruby Moone	Staff
Edgar Rivas	Odile Brunetto, Acting Chief, Aging and Disability Services and Director, Area Agency on Aging
Deborah Royster	Shawn Brennan, Department of Health and Human Services
Monica Schaeffer	Tremayne Jones, Department of Health and Human Services
Barbara Selter	
Odessa Shannon	
Mary Sweeney	
Tho Tran	
Hillery Tsumba	
Marsha Weber	
Arthur Williams	
Syed Yusuf	
Members Absent	
Barbara Brubeck	
Karen Maricheau	
Ryan Wilson	

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Jean Dinwiddie welcomed everyone and led introductions of all attendees, including the seven new Commissioners. Chair Dinwiddie noted that Maryland Governor Larry Hogan recently issued a proclamation that May is “Older Marylanders Month.”

Age Friendly Presentation

Marcia Pruzan, Senior Fellow with Montgomery County’s Aging and Disability Services and CoA alumna, led a discussion on the Age-Friendly Montgomery County initiative. Ms. Pruzan provides ongoing support for the County’s participation in this World Health Organization/AARP program, helping to coordinate the work of County government and community leaders across the 10 domains of the Age-Friendly focus. She noted that Montgomery County was recently featured in the AARP *Bulletin* for its Age-Friendly efforts.

Ms. Pruzan stated that Montgomery County’s status as Age-Friendly is one of the many achievements of the CoA. The County is very good about advocating for older adults and the CoA is often the impetus behind the County’s actions. She distributed a fact sheet that described the Age-Friendly initiative, noting that its mission is “to enhance the County as a wonderful diverse community for a lifetime—a place where all residents can age, thrive to their full potential, and contribute as a powerful resource in making our County a better, stronger, more inclusive community for everyone.”

The World Health Organization and AARP started the program in 2006 to help communities prepare for their aging populations. Today, more than 20 countries across the world and more than 200 communities in the U.S. participate in it including Montgomery County, which enrolled in December 2015. Since it joined the initiative the County has added 22,000 senior residences, or about 20 residences per day. In 2017, the County also enrolled in the Dementia Friendly America initiative to address the needs of persons with cognitive impairments and their caregivers.

Montgomery County got involved in the Age-Friendly program after former County Executive, Isiah Leggett, established a “Senior Sub-cabinet” and held a Senior Summit in 2008. At the Summit participants discussed the issues and challenges that older adults face, and steps on how to go forward. In 2012, the CoA developed a Senior Agenda to promote senior-related initiatives. The Senior Agenda was adopted by the County Council. In 2014 the CoA held a summer study to look at how municipalities support older adult communities. In 2015, Mr. Leggett held a second Senior Summit and based on these activities the County decided to take the necessary steps to become Age-Friendly. In 2018 the County issued a status report that outlined the initiative’s mission statement, priorities, and the action statements of its 10 domains.

A large advisory group was established to monitor the County’s Age-Friendly activities, and workgroups were set up to ensure that the requirements of the 10 domains are met. The groups meet quarterly. Last year, the advisory group conducted a survey of the Age-Friendly stakeholders and they expressed a high level of enthusiasm for the program.

The Age-Friendly domains include:

- *Communication and outreach.* This workgroup is striving to get the word out about the Age-Friendly initiative. “Seniors Today” is one of its activities.
- *Civic and social engagement.* Workgroup members recruit volunteers for the Age-Friendly program.

It is doing an outstanding job of recruiting volunteers for different community organizations.

- *Elder abuse prevention.* One issue this group is looking at is the increased number of elder abuse and neglect cases in the County (it has seen many elder abuse prosecutions in recent years). The group is sponsoring an Elder Abuse Awareness Day in June.
- *Employment.* This workgroup is engaged in outreach with organizations to maintain older workers in the workforce. Employers can be certified to be Age Friendly. This group recently sponsored a workshop discussing ageism in the workplace.
- *Health and wellness.* One focus of this workgroup is medication management. Members work with emergency responders, and also study fall prevention, programs dealing with early stages of cognitive decline, and social isolation issues.
- *Home- and community-based services.* This group monitors programs such as those regarding support for family caregivers. Members have developed a brochure and information for family caregivers and established a County caregiver coalition.
- *Housing.* This group works to promote affordable senior housing, train managers for senior housing, and develop incentives for builders to install accessibility devices. A Montgomery County Senior Fellow is the group's chair.
- *Open spaces and buildings.* A focus of this group is to make buildings and parks senior accessible. It also promotes park prescription programs to encourage individuals to spend time in nature to improve their health and well-being.
- *Senior public safety.* This workgroup is engaged in public outreach on fire and other safety issues. Their efforts are aimed at increasing safety awareness in public and private places.
- *Transportation and mobility.* Members of this group are working to increase the number of wheelchair accessible taxis and other transportation options for older adults and disabled individuals.

Ms. Pruzan stated that there are two additional initiatives currently being pursued with regard to the Age-Friendly program:

- Advocates are working to make the entire State of Maryland an Age-Friendly State. Several Counties have expressed interest, including Baltimore County. The advocates are lobbying Maryland Governor Larry Hogan to help with this designation.
- Montgomery County is due to be re-certified as Age-Friendly in October 2020. All of the program's workgroups are looking at what needs to be done. Ms. Pruzan noted again that the CoA has been very active in the past to help with this initiative, and if any Commissioners want to participate they should contact her.

Discussion

The comment was made that there is concern that the African American community is not getting the outreach that the Age-Friendly program requires. Ms. Pruzan responded that the Age-Friendly advisory group would appreciate any suggestions on how to better reach the African American community. Dr. Brunetto stated that it has been a challenge to communicate with older adults throughout the County. The CoA now has an active Communications Committee, however, and the Age-Friendly program also has its own communications committee so, hopefully, there will be more successful outreach efforts to the County's diverse communities. A Commissioner noted that the CoA conducted a diversity forum in March and is looking at identifying the needs of these communities. The CoA has also asked the County to establish a Senior Fellow position to work with diversity issues. A Commissioner requested that the Age-Friendly program include the findings of the racial equity initiative report recently issued by the County Executive and the County Council. Another Commissioner stated that the CoA's

Communications Committee will be looking at the touch points in the different communities and seeing whether the correct metrics are being collected. She noted that the data needs to be stratified to make sure relevant information is being obtained.

A comment was made that the CoA's Public Policy Committee has identified election site accessibility as a potential issue and that the Age-Friendly program may want to consider adding voting accessibility to its agenda. There was also a comment that the official senior "age" needs to be clarified; in different publications and situations the age at which a person is identified as a senior citizen ranges from 55 to 65. Dr. Brunetto responded that the age question is a common frustration, and is often due to different definitions in various government programs. A Commissioner noted that the reason age 55 is used for the Age-Friendly program is because it is a worldwide initiative. In some countries 55 is considered older. Also, "retirement age" is defined differently in different countries. Another Commissioner stated, however, that we must be careful when stipulating an official "age" for senior citizens because a significant challenge related to ageism is the need to put people in boxes. We should clarify that age is not about a number but it is a life stage. Each individual has a different approach to be an "older adult."

It was noted that other regions of Maryland, such as the eastern shore and western Maryland, must be considered in the efforts to make the State Age-Friendly.

AAA Director Updates

Dr. Brunetto's updates focused on the County budget. She noted that the County Council was having its final budget meeting the morning of May 23 and that she will notify the CoA if the Council makes any last minute changes.

Specific budget items included:

- \$490,000 was allocated for home care services for eligible adults; this will serve 47 individuals
- \$483,000 was allocated for nurse monitoring services
- \$69,446 was allocated for respite care (the CoA advocated for \$130,000); although the County Council wanted \$130,000, the County Executive did not include it
- \$5 million approved for the Housing Initiative Fund
- \$2 million was allocated for rental assistance
- The MPDU program was extended to include 2 additional FTEs (\$135,540)
- \$87,000 was allocated for the Homesharing program for which the CoA advocated; the County Executive requested \$174,000 but the County Council reduced the amount by half
- The general human resources (HR) budget was reduced by \$50,000 to eliminate two Senior Fellow positions; Dr. Brunetto stated that she will alert the CoA which positions those will be.

Items that the CoA lobbied for but were not approved included:

- The request to restore Friday transportation to senior centers
- The request for another social worker for Adult Protective Services
- Establishment of a Senior Fellow position to work with the County's diverse communities
- A database listing affordable housing
- Additional monies in the Dept. of Recreation budget for an additional day for individuals with early memory loss (the CoA advocated for additional money). The CoA was also unsuccessful in opposing a proposed reduction of \$179,000 in the Dept. of Recreation budget.

Discussion

The question was raised about why the County Executive and the County Council approved budget items that the CoA did not advocate for, yet did not approve items that the CoA did advocate for. Dr. Brunetto replied that the CoA members can discuss this with the Council staff who will be attending the CoA's July meeting. A Commissioner stated that he is very concerned about the budget because no money was dedicated to diversity outreach. Dr. Brunetto stated that staff does have a little money for outreach and they can go where they are invited to speak. They meet with different organizations and senior centers and other places where they are invited. They welcome suggestions on who they should reach out to.

A CoA member commented that the approved budget is not positive to the CoA's issues. Does the CoA have an advocate on the County Council who can be the go-to person? The response was that this can be discussed at the CoA's July meeting where budget priorities will be discussed. It was noted that the CoA needs to start earlier than October on the budget process and making the County Council members understand what the CoA's issues are. It also needs to show how aging issues intersect with other important community issues and affects everyone. A statement was made that the words "older adults" is not in any of the budget documents. This a shift from what has been in the past, when budget items affecting older adults were compiled into a senior budget.

Commission Business

Approval of April CoA meeting minutes. The minutes of the April meeting were approved unanimously.

Budget report. Commissioner Revathi Vikram reported that the CoA has a budget of \$5,109.31. This money is to be used for such CoA expenses as its year-end party, to send flowers, or to donate money.

Public forum 2019 and 2020. The report of the 2019 forum is almost complete. The 2020 forum will be held at Bohrer Park in Gaithersburg from 10:00a until 2:00p on March 18. The CoA will partner with the City of Gaithersburg and a light lunch will be served. The topic will probably be advocacy.

Reminder of June meeting date/location. The CoA will meet on June 13 in the first floor conference room of the Rockville library from 9:30a to 12:30p. There will be no refreshments. The topic will be the Maryland Primary Care Program and Howard Haft, M.D. will be the speaker. The June meeting of the Executive Committee will be held on Monday, June 10, 11:00a-12:30p.

Maryland Gerontological Association's conference on June 6, 2019. The topic of the conference will be social isolation and Commissioner Vikram will be a speaker. The cost will be \$90 per person, \$50 for older adults.

Meeting July 25 to set budget priorities. Chair Dinwiddie proposed that the CoA hold a meeting on July 25 to develop its budget priorities for consideration for the County budget. She suggested that Linda McMillan of the County Council staff and Rich Madaleno of the County Executive's staff be invited to speak. Council member Gabe Albornoz has also agreed to attend. The first half of the meeting will be devoted to meeting with the invitees, and the second half will be a session where the CoA can discuss its budget priorities. Multiple County Council members have commented to CoA members that the CoA should begin advocating its priorities earlier in the budget process. At its July meeting CoA members will reference charts of how neighboring Counties' budgets compare with

Montgomery County's with regard to older adult programs and resources. The meeting will be scheduled for 9:00a-12:00p. Holding the meeting in July will allow the CoA time to develop a written statement of budget priorities earlier than it did last year. CoA alumni members will be invited to the meeting. We will invite County Council members to meet with us in October. The topic of ageism will also be discussed at the July meeting.

Discussion

A comment was made that the CoA should focus its efforts to advocate for budget items earlier in the year beginning at the County Executive level. Another comment was made that the CoA needs to realize that the County Executive is looking at how the budget affects programs that span all ages, and not just older adults. The Council members' current budget priorities seem to be focused on children. It was noted that the CoA should try to have personal relationships with the County Council members. A suggestion was made that the CoA initially approach HHS staff to discuss their budget needs and suggestions, and then approach the County Executive, and then later approach the Council members.

When CoA members met with Council Chair Nancy Navarro, she invited the CoA to host a session in the Fall to develop a senior budget. She also suggested that the CoA identify multi-year budget priorities. Former County Executive Ike Leggett included a senior budget in his agenda but County Executive Elrich does not have one. The CoA needs to regroup; with the new legislature, Council members, and County Executive it has a new audience to address.

COA key messages. Commissioner Amy Harbison discussed a slate of key, gateway messages that the Communications Committee has proposed for the CoA. The purpose of it is to ensure consistency of language for CoA business. The language that the Committee developed is to serve as a launching point; Committee members are not advocating for boilerplate language but CoA members can use the messages to start a conversation. The messages are intentionally very basic language.

Discussion

A suggestion was made that the words "Senior Agenda" should be referenced. Commissioner Hillery Tumba responded that in some situations it is appropriate to use "Senior Agenda" but not all. This slate of key messages are meant to be a beginning point, not the whole discussion. Commissioner Harbison stated that something the Communications Committee could do in future meetings is to provide examples or sub-messages that the different CoA committees can use.

A Commissioner noted that she would like the messages to indicate that the CoA is knowledgeable about what it is advocating; maybe an overarching statement about what the CoA is and does. A comment was made that the scope of the CoA's enabling legislation is extensive and the overarching statement can be broad..

After much discussion, Communications Committee members modified the slate of key messages. A motion was called to approve the messages as revised and the CoA members approved them, with two members abstaining.

Committee Reports

Aging in Community. Commissioner Nanine Meiklejohn reported that at its last committee meeting members discussed affordable rental housing; in the future they plan to research rent stabilization. They

have learned that six percent of individuals over the age of 65 are rent burdened and Montgomery County has one of the largest number of rent burdened populations in the State. At the meeting members got an overview of rent stabilization efforts that are taking place throughout the country. Suzanne Ludlow, Takoma Park's City Manager, gave a presentation on how rent stabilization works in that community, which is one of only a few communities that has a rent stabilization law. Commissioner Meiklejohn noted that an outgrowth of the meeting was that committee members learned that Montgomery County has a voluntary rent cap which now only permits a 1.5 percent annual rent increase. Some County rental units, however, have seen rent growths as much as 39 percent, especially near the Metro stations. The committee plans to learn more about the voluntary guideline and consider ways to get the word out about it. Members have discussed a possible joint effort with the Commission for People with Disabilities.

Commissioner Meiklejohn continued, stating that about 40 percent of Montgomery County's population earns less than \$40,000 a year. Unfortunately, the committee does not know what the demographics are of that population and the members are not sure whether the County has that information. The CoA could ask the County to produce it if it is available.

Commissioner Meiklejohn finished her report by noting that at the next meeting of the Aging in Community Committee on June 11 members will discuss employment discrimination. She invited new CoA members to attend.

Communications and Community Outreach. Commissioner Harbison reported that the Committee is looking at all of the CoA's vehicles of communication and trying to get a handle on the audience for each piece. Committee members want to meet with staff in the County's Public Information Office; they would like to collect metrics on who is being reached and whether it *is* reaching the desired audience. She noted that Committee members will be meeting with the new managing editor of the *Beacon* to learn more about that publication.

Commissioner Tsumba stated that the committee wants to look broadly at the demographics of older adults and caregivers in Montgomery County. The members are trying to obtain those metrics and are looking at things such as website hits. They want to get a baseline of what the CoA's audience looks like. She commented that if CoA members have questions about outreach or want to know about the committee's outreach efforts to contact the committee members. They are hoping that the metrics will help them learn what the committee should be doing and who it should be targeting. A comment was made that the CoA needs to consider diversity with regard to economic situation as well as race.

Commissioner Harbison completed her report by inviting the new CoA members to attend the next committee meeting which will be held on June 10. The committee has been meeting every other month in person, and by telephone the other months. At upcoming meetings members plan to discuss senior nutrition, elder abuse, and advance directives. She also reminded everyone that *Seniors Today*, the monthly Montgomery Cable informational interview program co-produced by the CoA and the County, can be viewed several times a month and is also available online.

Health and Wellness. Commissioner Neal Brown reported that the committee is currently editing its "Gap" paper and will soon be presenting it to the full CoA. The paper describes services available to individuals whose income is too high for Medicaid but below what is needed for assisted living, including group homes. Committee members will be ready soon to study other issues such as social isolation and the effect that hearing impairments have on that. They are also looking at standards

established for assisted living and have invited Eileen Bennett, the County's Long Term Care Ombudsman, to discuss this at the next committee meeting.

The committee meets the first Tuesday of every month at 9:00a at Calhoun Place. Commissioner Brown invited the new CoA members to join.

Public Policy. Commissioner Mort Faller introduced the committee to the new CoA members stating that it works closely with the other CoA committees. The Public Policy Committee is the advocacy arm of the CoA, drafting written statements and advocating for CoA priority issues at the County and State (and sometimes Federal) levels. The committee is on summer hiatus and will not meet again until September.

Commissioner Faller reported that he has been pursuing a State association of Commissions on Aging but has not had good luck. After sending out invitations to each County (and Baltimore City) CoA, the final tally of the responses was that six said they would be interested in forming a Statewide association, five said they would not be interested, and the other 13 jurisdictions failed to respond. Some Counties replied that they are limited in the extent to which they are permitted to advocate. The Baltimore City CoA did reach out to Commissioner Faller, so there may be some opportunities. Howard County will be holding a meeting of all Commissions on Aging in the State in September and Chair Dinwiddie and Commissioner Faller plan to attend. Commissioner Faller is now trying to establish a list of Statewide contacts.

Commissioner Faller also discussed the Transportation Services Improvement Fund (TSIF) and explained that it is a fund created by a surcharge on Uber and Lyft that is to be used to make County taxis accessible to people with disabilities. In the first few years, over \$2 million in funds were collected and last year the County had only spent \$60,000 toward its intended purpose. The remaining funds were reallocated by the County Executive. The fund now has \$5 million and the CoA wants to ensure that the money is spent appropriately. Last year, it lobbied for regulations, stating that the monies can only be used as intended; however, without informing the CoA, the Department of Transportation issued proposed regulations in March for comment. In their recent meetings with County Council members, CoA members have expressed their concern about this fund, and at its June 11 meeting, Council member, Tom Hucker, will meet with the CoA to discuss the matter.

Commissioner Faller noted that the committee commented on the State's recent "A Better Maryland" draft proposal With a general statement that the proposal needs to address older adult issues.

A question was raised about whether the Governor plans to sign a bill regarding caps on the prices of prescription drugs. Commissioner Stephanie Edelstein responded that the CoA did not take a position on this. She noted that she thought the reference might be to the bill that would establish a commission to set prescription drug costs for individuals who pay for their insurance through the State and local government insurance programs (and maybe the Maryland Health Exchange, although that is uncertain), similar to the way the State now sets hospital rates.

Commissioner Faller finished by stating that the committee hopes to set a date soon for the annual CoA legislative breakfast for members of the Montgomery County Delegation to the General Assembly. He reminded everyone that the focus of the event is on State – not County – issues.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm.