

**Commission on Aging**

**January 28, 2021**

9:30 am – 12:05 pm

**Virtual via Zoom**

**Members Present**

Barbara Selter, Chair  
Edgar Rivas, Vice Chair  
Janice Zalen, Secretary  
Richard Jourdenais, Budget Officer  
Wayne Berman  
Neal Brown  
Jean Dinwiddie  
Joyce Dubow  
Arunima Ghosh  
Miriam Kelty  
Morris Klein  
Nanine Meiklejohn  
Karon Phillips  
Maritza Rivera  
Ann M. Serafenas  
Monica Schaeffer  
Mary Sweeney  
Hillery Tsumba  
Marsha Weber  
Arthur Williams  
Ryan Wilson

**Members Absent**

Ruby Moone  
Katie Smith  
Tho Tran

**Alumni Members**

Stephanie Edelstein  
Austin Heyman  
Chuck Kaufman  
Barbara Brubeck

**Liaisons**

David Engle, GROWS  
Monique Gardner, African-Amer. Health  
Denise Israel, DOT  
Stephanie Moore, Housing Opp.Comm.  
Marcia Pruzan, Age-Friendly Montg.  
Stuart Rosenthal, Beacon  
Arlee Wallace, African-Ameri. Health

**Speakers**

Pazit Aviv, Villages Coordinator, DHHS  
Barry Hudson, Dir., PIO, DHHS

## **Staff**

Odile Brunetto, Chief, Aging and Disability Services

Patrice McGhee Director, Area Agency on Aging

Shawn Brennan, DHHS

Tremayne Jones, DHHS

## **Welcome – Barbara Selter, Chair**

Chair Barbara Selter welcomed everyone and took roll of attendees. She thanked Jean Dinwiddie, Past-Chair, for her wonderful and tireless work. Chair Selter then discussed the Commission's rules of engagement: raise hands to speak, periodically she will ask if people on the phone wish to speak. Also, effort will be made to stay focused on one topic at a time.

## **Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Update – Patrice McGhee and Odile Brunetto**

Director Patrice McGhee provided the following update:

- COVID has negatively impacted AAA services as several staff are assisting other agencies, while demand for services are increasing.
- They answered 20,000 calls this past year, which is a 4% increase from the previous year.
- The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program had a 93% reduction in complaint investigations, likely because Ombudsmen are not allowed into facilities during COVID. However, the Ombudsman presence remains constant via telephone visits.
- The Senior Nutrition Program, with help from the Department of Recreation, delivered over 600,000 meals, which is an increase of 52%.
- The annual report will be available soon with lots more information.

Chief Odile Brunetto provided the following update:

## **Add Odile's notes here**

## **Villages Primer – Pazit Aviv, Villages Coordinator, DHHS**

In this brief primer, Pazit Aviv explained that the reason why villages exist is more important than what they do. The value of community social infrastructure is lacking and this becomes an issue when people age and wish to remain at home. Villages provide the strong social local network needed. There are 20 villages in Montgomery County and 5 more are in development. All are very different and all have done a great job during COVID.

In response to requests for more information, Ms. Aviv stated that she will be speaking at the Aging in Community Committee meeting on February 12 at 10 a.m. She will provide much more information on villages at that time. In addition, she will provide Arthur Williams with the power point presentation in advance, as well as a list of villages with contact information for each.

**Speaker: Barry Hudson, Director, MC Public Information Office (PIO)**

Barry Hudson noted that his office enjoys a good relationship with the Commission on Aging (CoA), with the goal of helping the CoA connect with the community. This is especially important during COVID. He stated that his office provides support by placing ads in the Beacon and with Seniors Today. He would like to expand that assistance, particularly as so much information is provided virtually. Currently, his office is working on a series of virtual town hall meetings and he would like to do a town hall in the age-friendly category. Going forward, he suggests the possibilities of podcasts. Currently, the PIO staff is stressed trying to get out information on vaccines. In addition, the dedicated liaison to the CoA left about a year ago and that position was abolished. Fortunately, they will be filling a couple of positions so there will be additional staff to provide support to the CoA.

Mr. Hudson asked the CoA what the PIO could do to communicate better and received many responses including the following:

- 1) A mass marketing of all the services available in the County. Mr. Hudson agreed that this has not been done in at least two years, but noted that services are housed in different departments and would need to be aggregated. He also stated that money is an issue and the Beacon puts out an annual resource guide. Members pointed out the limitations of the Beacon resource guide.
- 2) Information geared to the African-American community. If the PIO sends information to the local NAACP chapter, the local NAACP could forward it to thousands of people.
- 3) Maintain the liaison position and/or work closely with the Commission's Communications Task Force. While Mr. Hudson could not promise to continue the liaison position, he gave his assurances that the PIO would work with the Commission's Communications Task Force.
- 4) It is essential to target information to older residents, particularly as that group is increasing in size.
- 5) Noting the issues involving social isolation, it was requested that the PIO work with the Commission's Social Isolation and Loneliness of Seniors (SILOS) Task Force. Mr. Hudson wondered how to reach those individuals, without confirming he would work with SILOS.
- 6) There is a need to also address ways to bring forth the assets that the 50+ population bring to Montgomery County.

In closing, Mr. Hudson stated that the PIO relies heavily on electronic communication as follows: large twitter following, facebook, newsletters, county updates, all of which go to lots of people. In addition, there is the ability for podcasting and the PIO could conduct a regular seniors podcast. He is interested in other tools and communication vehicles and agrees that working with the CoA Communications Task Force would be useful.

Arthur Williams requested that the Communications Task Force contact the African-American community who are not, according to Mr. Williams, receiving information or engaged in communications.

In response to suggestions by CoA alumni members, Chair Selter recommended that the Communications Task force work also with interested alumni members, as well as working closely with Mr. Hudson. Chair Selter asked for volunteers for the Communications Task Force. Arthur Williams, Chuck Kaufman and Stephenie Edelstein volunteered.

## **Commission on Aging Business**

### ***Approval of December Minutes***

Minutes were approved unanimously

### ***Budget Report***

Budget Officer Richard Jourdenais reported that the Commission's account information was successfully transferred to him and that he also has received on-line access so that he can check the Commission's account as needed. One \$50 check to the Tommy Raskin Memorial Fund was issued. There is now \$4,695.11 in the account.

### ***COA Letters***

- Beverly Rollins sent letters and meeting packets to delegates who had not attended the Commission's Annual Legislative Breakfast.
- Beverly Rollins drafted a letter in support of HB18, Right to Council for Eviction Actions, which was finalized by the Executive Committee and sent out.
- Edgar Rivas drafted a letter in support of HR255 to encourage potential State funding for villages. This letter was finalized by the Executive Committee and sent out.
- Chair Selter noted that because the legislature is holding hearings earlier this year, the Commission must write our letters of support (or opposition) sooner and faster. She asked that all members review the list of legislation and consider offering to draft letters in their areas of interest. **To volunteer to help draft letters, please contact Ryan Wilson or Barbara Selter.**
- Stephanie Edelstein noted that the Governor released a list of properties receiving low-income housing tax credits. This is an issue that the Commission worked on last year, **Ms. Edelstein will forward this list to Nanine Meiklejohn who will determine if follow-up action is needed.**

## ***Public Forum***

Chair Selter "encourage potential State funding for Villages. reported that the Executive Committee moved the Public Forum from March to May this year and identified "Social Isolation as Affected by Health and Racial Equity" as the topic. The Social Isolation and Loneliness of Seniors (SILOS) Task Force will be designing and planning this Forum. David Engels, SILOS Co-Chair, requested that **anyone with meeting planning experience and any other interested individuals please volunteer to work on the Public Forum. Wayne Berman, Jean Dinwiddie and Marsha Weber immediately volunteered. Arthur Williams suggested that the co-chairs contact Arlee Wallace, African American Health Program, as she might be interested in volunteering. Marcia Pruzan will forward to the Co-Chairs information on a National Institute on Aging presentation and contact information for the Director of Behavioral Social Programs.**

## ***Villages' Concerns About COVID-19 Information and Vaccination Plan***

Chair Selter reported that the Villages wrote a letter to the County stating a variety of concerns including that they are not receiving clear information regarding vaccination plans. The Villages want to be able to coordinate transportation to vaccine sites and need accurate information to do this. To date, they have not received much of a response.

Commission members Miriam Kelty and Nanine Meiklejohn, having noted the importance of the CoA being on record regarding concerns with the vaccine program, drafted a letter to the County for EC review and approval. The EC is in the process of editing this letter. After a lengthy discussion about the problems with the vaccine program in Montgomery County and the strong interest of all Commission members to have input to the letter along with the competing desire that the letter be submitted soon, the following motion was made:

**Motion: Once the edited letter on the vaccination program is released to the EC, the EC will forward it to all CoA members who will have 24 hours to approve or disapprove the letter.**

In response to concern about limiting input to approve or disapprove, the following friendly amendment was added:

**Amendment: CoA members have 24 hours to offer any input or ideas to the letter.**

The Motion as amended passed.

## ***Update on Seniors Today Audition***

Jean Dinwiddie reported that she met with Jennifer Long, County PIO Liaison, who was extremely helpful in providing evaluation criteria. The February program will be a mix of reruns. Ms. Dinwiddie will have a more substantial report at the next meeting.

## ***Update on Task Forces***

- **Social Isolation and Loneliness of Seniors (SILOS) Task Force**

David Engels, Co-Chair explained that this task force was formed from the Health and Wellness Committee and the Aging in Community Committee. SILOS has focused on: 1) life transitions, 2) broken connections, 3) website assessment tools; and 4) underserved communities. SILOS wishes to bring diversity to its work, to be all-inclusive, and to find those individuals who are slipping through the cracks. It recently sent surveys to senior centers in order to identify additional areas of focus.

**SILOS now has the additional charge of creating the CoA Public Forum and, as stated earlier in these minutes, requests volunteers to assist in this effort.**

- **Task Force on Dementia, Policing, and Racial Equity**

Chair Selter announced that the Executive Committee approved a special meeting for all interested Commission members to review and discuss the Task Force recommendations. This meeting will be a final opportunity for Commission input. Following the meeting, the report will go to the Executive Committee for final editing. Ms. Selter noted that there are only three members left on the Task Force and she will make sure the meeting date accommodates the three.

Arthur Williams stated that the recommendations were determined by the Task Force and that they are final. He suggested that if others disagree, they could put forth a minority report. In response, members pointed out that under standard Commission process, documents always go through a review process and may be edited and changed during the process. This is because documents are released by the CoA and not individual task forces. However, because the EC is aware of Arthur William's concerns about editing the recommendations, the EC agreed to the additional step of a meeting to review the recommendations. The specific purpose of this meeting is to help finalize a report that everyone can agree on.

Shawn Brennan announced that Jim Stone has agreed to facilitate this meeting and that she is optimistic that all the Commission members would be able to agree on final recommendations. Mr. Williams expressed hesitancy about attending the meeting. **Ms. Selter offered to discuss Mr. Williams' concerns off-line.**

## ***New Initiatives***

**Barbara Selter plans to send an email asking all members for their input and ideas for new Commission initiatives and is hoping for a robust response.**

## **Committee Reports**

### ***Health and Wellness (HWC)***

Co-Chair Marsha Weber reported that Access Hears will present at the Commission's March meeting. The Committee hopes to learn whether this Baltimore program would

work in Montgomery County. The HWC also will be looking at: home-based services, communications and the SHIP program. Erin Smith will be providing information on the SHIP program and Jennifer Long will present on the County's 3000 number at the next HWC meeting. Co-Chair Neil Berman reported that the February 2 meeting agenda would be sent out shortly and he noted that the Committee meetings are very well attended.

### ***Aging in Community (AIC)***

Monica Schaeffer, AIC Co-Chair, reported that Wayne Berman is the new AIC Co-Chair. The AIC hopes to cover 5 broad areas this year: Affordable Rental Housing and Housing Models, Transportation, Food Insecurity, Seniors Fellow Program, and Technology.

The topic at the January AIC meeting was "Understanding the Challenges Providing Affordable and Accessible Rental Housing for County Residents" with an emphasis on older adults. Frank Demarais, Deputy Director of the Department of Housing and Community Affairs; and Stephanie Moore, Resident Services Supervisor of the Housing Opportunities Commission, addressed the AIC and responded to their many questions including how COVID affected budget plans and rent subsidy programs; and their perspectives on rent increases and stabilization post COVID, as well as the limitations of the HOC's voucher program. These are critical questions given that 65% of renters who are 65+ in the County are rent-burdened (defined as paying more than 30% of income on housing). The AIC learned that there is a cap on rent increases, the moratorium on rent increases is due to end January 31, and evictions are not being processed now although cases will pick up in March.

The AIC will identify action items from the January meeting, which will be discussed at their February meeting. In addition, Pazit Aviv, Village Coordinator, MC Aging and Disability Service will provide an update on the Village movement at that meeting. Finally, their March meeting will focus on transportation where they will look for gaps and needs and identify who the Commission can assist.

### ***Public Policy Committee (PPC)***

Ryan Wilson, PPC co-chair, introduced the new co-chair Morris Klein. Mr. Wilson reported that the General Assembly has begun and that the Commission has already supported two bills, as reported earlier. When the PPC meets on February 11, they will determine which additional bills to focus on this year.

### ***Liaison Updates***

Denise Israel, Department of Transportation, Transit Division, reported that Ride-On buses were being cleaned frequently, fares remain suspended and riders will get plenty of notice when fares are reinstated. Flash buses, which are 60 feet long and go from Burtonsville to Silver Spring are now in use. Call-a-Ride and Medicaid transportation are seeing increases in ridership and are taking riders to food banks and elsewhere. Her

Division is making a strong effort to meet all needs. In addition, they have been publicizing all their cleaning precautions in an attempt to increase ridership.

### **Upcoming CoA Meetings—Confirmed and Potential Speakers**

- February 25, 2021: Greenhouse Nursing Homes--confirmed
- March 26, 2021: Josiah Yiu, Carrie Nieman, and Khoi Le from Access HEARS—confirmed
- April 22, 2021: Speakers on Social Isolation—confirmed
- May 28, 2021: Housing Improvement Program and Barry Friedman, Mental Health Project—to be confirmed.

### **New Business**

Barbara Selter explained that she added this item, “new business,” because something important may arise after the agenda has been approved. This provides the opportunity to bring up such an item.

### **Adjourn**

#### **Action Items**

(These action items are based on a review of the minutes)

1. To volunteer to help draft letters relating to upcoming legislation, contact Ryan Wilson or Barbara Selter.
2. To volunteer for the Communications Task Force, please contact Jean Dinwiddie or Barbara Selter.
3. To volunteer to work on the Public Forum, contact Co-chairs David Engels or Maritza Rivera, or Chair Barbara Selter
4. Stephanie Edelstein will forward a list of properties receiving low-income housing tax credits. to Nanine Meiklejohn who will determine if follow-up action is needed.
5. Arthur Williams suggests that SILOS co-chairs contact Arlee Wallace to inquire if she is interested in volunteering to work on the public forum.
6. Marcia Pruzan will forward to the SILOS co-chairs information for the Public Forum.
7. Barbara Selter will forward a draft of the Commission’s letter regarding the COVID vaccination program to all Commission members who have 24 hours to provide input.
8. Barbara Selter and Arthur Williams will talk on the phone about the meeting to review recommendations of the Task Force.
9. Barbara Selter will send an email asking all members for their input and ideas for new Commission initiatives.



