



**Commission on People with Disabilities
Meeting Summary Minutes
January 8, 2025**

**** MEETING WAS HELD VIA ZOOM ****

Welcome and Approval of December 2024 Meeting Minutes

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the December 2024 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the December 2024 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd.

Prince George's County Universal Housing Bill CB-085-2024: Challenges and Possible Incentives for Montgomery County to Establish Same Legislation – Sarah Reddinger, Vice President of Housing & Community Strategies, Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland

Habit for Humanity Metro Maryland Website: <https://habitatmm.org/>

Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland (HFHMM) is a nonprofit corporation that was formed under the laws of the State of Maryland on November 3, 1982, for the purpose of creating decent and affordable homeownership opportunities in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. HFHMM's unique homeownership model provides a solution to this problem by breaking down barriers through community partnerships, increasing access to homeownership opportunities through the rehab of vacant, distressed properties, new construction, home repair programs, and advocacy for additional housing units.

HFHMM's homes are built, rehabilitated or repaired by a largely volunteer workforce. Built and rehabilitated homes are then sold to qualified families at no-profit and financed with affordable, no interest mortgages. Repaired homes are currently owned by low to moderate income families whose income is 30%-80% of the current median income, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for Montgomery County and Prince George's County. The families' monthly mortgage payments or repayments are paid directly to HFHMM and go into a revolving fund which helps to build even more Habitat homes. In addition to a down payment and monthly mortgage payments or repayments, homeowners invest anywhere between 200 to 500 hours of their own labor – "sweat equity" – into building their homes. HFHMM oversees the lending arm to make sure buyers are successful.

Through the Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs, HFHMM administers [HARP \(Home Accessibility Rehabilitation Program\)](#) which is a free program designed to assist low-income people with renovating their homes to make them more accessible to those with disabilities and to older adults with or without a demonstrated disability. While there are income limits to the program, older adults and disabled individuals of any age can qualify. Work is performed by local non-profit groups Habitat for Humanity or Rebuilding Together.

Prince George's County Council Bill – Universal Design for Housing:

<https://princegeorgescountymd.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6862707&GUID=CD9AA9D2-6E0C-4B84-B1A4-A9AE47F33A8E&Options=ID|Text|&Search=CB-085-2024>

During the Prince George's County Council's 2023 Legislative Session, CR-70-2023 was adopted which established a Universal Design Implementation Work Group to assist the County in implementing the required procedural and design requirements of Universal Design set forth in CB-65-2023 (DR-2) – "An Act Concerning Universal Design for Housing – Revisions". This bill is the culmination of the work of the Work Group and revises CB-65-2023 (DR-2) in five main ways: definitions, waiver, appeal, an administrative fee, and civil fines.

There is a companion resolution that amends DPIE's Table of Fees and establishes the Universal Design for Housing Waiver Request Fee. The bill was accepted by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

Universal Design shall apply to all new single-family attached, single-family detached, two-family, two-over-two's, three-family, and multifamily residential dwelling units constructed in Prince George's County on and after January 1, 2026. There shall be a step-free route of travel to at least one step-free entrance to the dwelling unit. Entrance to the unit by way of a garage would qualify as an acceptable route. Multifamily dwelling units located within a building that are above the first floor of the building and are only accessible via stairway are exempt from this requirement. Regarding interior accessible routes:

- (a) At least one accessible route shall connect all spaces and elements that are a part of the accessible entry level floor of the dwelling unit.
- (b) The kitchen shall be on the accessible level and on the accessible route.
- (c) Hallways on the accessible level shall have a 42-inch-wide minimum clearance width measured from wall to wall.
- (d) Doorways on the accessible route shall have a minimum door width of [clearance of] 36-inches and all doors shall contain levers for accessible access.
- (e) Interior thresholds with levels which exceed ¼-inch high, shall be beveled, with a slope not steeper than one-inch rise to a 2-inch run (1:2).
- (f) Accessible routes shall have flooring that allows resistance-free use of a wheelchair or similar mobility aid or device.
- (g) At least one separate room on the accessible entry level floor of the dwelling unit shall include architectural or design features that include but are not limited to a door that closes and a window to ensure [accessibility] egressibility.

There are also requirements for a bathroom to be located on the entry level and as well as minimum clearance space in the kitchen.

The Universal Design Implementation Work Group met throughout 2024 to discuss builder challenges. Due to concern from builders regarding zero step entry, the final bill includes that if a builder indicates that they cannot satisfy the step-free route of travel to at least one-step free entrance to the dwelling unit requirement, they can apply for a waiver. A waiver can be applied for up to 50% of the total units, but not more than 50%. Another concern was having a room on the first level that could be converted into a bedroom as well as requiring home models to be retrofitted to universal design.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

- **What were the specific concerns regarding zero step entry?** There were concerns about engineering and how to design the site. Depending on the grading of the site, there could be significant additional costs if dirt needed to be added or removed. A fairly flat site would make building a zero step entry fairly simple and not as expensive. There is still some lack of clarity about the waiver process.
- **How did the workgroup start and how did people get involved?** The initial bill required the formation of a workgroup to make recommendations. The workgroup consisted of representatives from H4HMM, the Maryland Building Industry Association, permitting services, parks, planning, AARP and a non-profit agency that works with individuals with disabilities.
- **What are the eligibility requirements for the HARP program?** Be a current resident of Montgomery County; home must be owner occupied for at least one year; at least one permanent occupant of the home must be either 1) aged 65 years old or above, or 2) disabled at any age; household income must be at 80% or below Area Median Income though priority will be provided to households earning 50% of AMI or below ([see chart](#)); be current on the mortgage; and have a current homeowner's insurance policy. Funds are available to immediately assist applicants.

- **HARP was primarily funded through federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds.** The County gave \$750,000 to HFHMM and \$750,000 to Rebuilding Together to administer HARP. That funding will eventually run out and it is important to advocate to the County Council and the County Executive to keep this program going. The County had been investing \$300,000 of their own funds into the program. There was a waiting list prior to the ARP funds being implemented. HFHMM and RT have been advocating additional funds that can be flexible in their use for additional health or safety issues, like repairing a roof due to leaks. HFHMM looks at the home holistically.
- **How does one apply for HARP?** Interested individuals can reach out to Shauna Lowe, Home Preservation Client Coordinator, at 301-990-0014 ext. 1019 or email lashauna.lowe@habitatmm.org.
- **Are there cut offs with the income guidelines?** Due to federal funding, there are strict income guidelines and HFHMM cannot accept private pay. HFHMM does work with and hires occupational therapists.
- **How will the Prince George's County Universal Design Bill affect Montgomery County and could it be passed here?** HFHMM is supportive and would like to see a bill passed in Montgomery County. Given the current landscape, it could be challenging to implement the same law in Montgomery County. Building housing has never been more expensive and there are upcoming budget cuts that will likely affect affordable housing at the federal, state and local level. Offering incentives may be the way to move forward. It will be interesting internally to see how the bill is implemented in Prince George's County through the waiver checklist, permitting process, and how to functionally grant waivers as it is more complicated than it seems.
 - Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported Montgomery County's Department of Permitting Services (DPS) is analyzing Prince George's County's bill and determining how Montgomery County should proceed. Staff from DPS are also attending this meeting tonight and will be briefing their Director about the discussions. DFL has stated they want to make it easier for people to apply by changing the application. The County Council has been supportive as well. Prior to the meeting, Betsy shared several documents from DPS with Commissioners via email including a response to recommendations for DFL made by this Commission.
- **Does HFHMM offer any programs specific to veterans?** HFHMM Veteran Repair program is a construction-based resource aimed at identifying and addressing health and safety related repairs to the homes of qualified families in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. Funding for the Veteran Repair Program comes, in part, from the Home Depot Foundation, and allows HFHMM to serve the critical repair needs of Active Duty and Veteran households in the community. In order to be considered for the Veteran Repair Program a household must have an active duty or general/honorable discharge vet living in the home as their primary residence.
<https://habitatmm.org/how-to-apply/home-repair-services-for-homeowners/veterans-repairs.html>
- **It was asked if HFHMM could share economic analysis reports with the Commission,** particularly the cost to not build a house with universal design. It may be more economically beneficial to build a house with universal design versus the costs associated with having an individual remain in a hospital or a nursing facility because their home is not accessible. There is a huge public cost in maintaining individuals in institutions when they cannot return to their homes. There is also a emotional and economic drain on the family.
- **It was suggested that the Commission convene a committee that would focus on housing issues.**
- **Are builders expecting costs to go up in Prince George's County due to this new mandate?** The Maryland Building Industry Association does expect an increase in costs but did not indicate that those costs would be astronomical.
- **Most people who are over the age of 55 are living in their own home and want to stay there.** It is important to make sure the DFL program continues as it allows for tax credits for installation of accessibility features.

Update on Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles as Taxicabs – Walton Harris, Program Manager, Taxicab Regulation Unit, Montgomery County Department of Transportation

In 2015, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation regulating Transportation Network Companies (TNC), including ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft. In addition to its regulatory function, the legislation also authorized a county or municipality to impose an assessment on TNC trips that originate within the county or municipality. Montgomery County's Transportation Services Improvement Fund (TSIF) revenue is derived from a \$0.25 per ride surcharge on all trips initiating in the County provided by TNCs such as Uber and Lyft. The County uses funds from TSIF to provide financial incentives to taxicab drivers, Passenger Vehicle License (PVL) holders, and taxicab vehicle fleet operators to provide transportation services for individuals who are disabled, seniors, and individuals with limited incomes. Montgomery County is the only jurisdiction in Maryland that has designated the fund to this purpose.

There are often higher costs associated with providing accessible passenger service that are not reflected in a standard taxicab meter rate. These costs include the greater travel distances accessible taxicabs experience at the time of dispatch to the service pickup location due to the lower density of accessible taxicabs throughout the County, as well as additional time to safely load and unload passengers in wheelchairs.

The initial disbursement rate for drivers of accessible taxi cabs was \$10 per trip completed and a reimbursement of \$0.10 per mile for every mile that the accessible taxicab travels while in service, whether or not a passenger is in the accessible taxicab, and regardless of passenger type. Drivers were also able to receive up to \$15,000 per eligible vehicle. In Fiscal Year 2022, the total TSIF expenditures for these programs was \$718,228.

In February 2023, the Montgomery County Council approved an Executive Regulation that revised the financial incentives. Currently, the County will reimburse drivers of accessible taxicabs who successfully transport passengers requiring wheelchair service at a rate of \$25 per trip completed. Drivers of accessible taxicabs are eligible for disbursement from the Fund at the rate of \$0.40 per mile for every mile that the accessible taxicab travels while in service, whether or not a passenger is in the accessible taxicab, and regardless of passenger type. In order to address the higher initial costs and ongoing maintenance costs of accessible taxicabs, up to \$45,000 per eligible vehicle may be available for reimbursement. Drivers are also guaranteed a \$10 fare when providing short distance trips through the County's Call 'n Ride program. In Fiscal Year 2023, the total TSIF expenditures for these programs was \$2,087,313.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the County reimbursed \$1.08 million towards the purchase or retrofit of 24 wheelchair accessible vehicles; reimbursed \$1.25 million for mileage travel while in service (over 3 million miles); and provided approximately 42,000 wheelchair accessible vehicle trips total.

Montgomery County has 200 active taxicabs between three taxicab fleets. 80 vehicles (or 40% of the total fleet) are wheelchair accessible vehicles. In comparison, Arlington County reports 447 total taxicabs with only 29 wheelchair accessible vehicles; Fairfax County reports 150 total taxicabs with only 9 wheelchair accessible vehicles; Washington, DC reports 1,570 total taxicabs with only 70 wheelchair accessible vehicles; and Prince George's County reports 100 total taxicabs with approximately 3 or 4 wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Several years ago, a bill was introduced by former Councilmember Roger Berliner who urged Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) to set forth a plan for the County to reach 100% of wheelchair accessible vehicles by 2025. That goal will ultimately not be met, but at 40% of the current fleet being wheelchair accessible Montgomery County is still ahead of neighboring jurisdictions. One area of focus for MCDOT is equity and some older adults have difficulty using wheelchair accessible vehicles and are not able to enter the vehicle due to the raised elevation.

The floor was opened for questions and comments.

- **Is there a way to track the number of trips people have not been able to receive?** The only way to track is through customer complaints. Oftentimes, the customer will make a direct complaint to the company and the County does not receive the complaint.
- **Do individuals use Uber and Lyft to access these wheelchair accessible vehicles?** This program is for the taxicab industry and private PVL holders. Drivers submit handwritten trip manifests including whether the individual needed a wheelchair accessible vehicle. Reimbursement is only given for verifiable trips. The County does reach out to a certain percentage of residents to ask about their experience and if the driver was competent.
- **Cindy LaBon, Commissioner, and President of the Capital Area Guide Dog Users (CAGDU) reported that once or twice a month CAGDU receives complaints about drivers denying guide dogs.** The Taxicab Commission will deal with the complaint if it is made directly to them. Walton noted that if an individual is denied a trip, drivers are required to notify the County in 24-hours. MCDOT ensures that taxicab operators are aware of their responsibilities. Cindy noted that a service animal can be denied if it is not under control.

Walton was invited to speak at a future Commission meeting to continue discussions on this topic.

Chair and Vice-Chair Updates

The Steering Committee will be meeting virtually via Zoom next Wednesday January 15 from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. The Committee will discuss outcomes for the upcoming year.

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission (IDDC) – John Whittle, Commissioner and Liaison to IDDC

IDDC was well represented at the annual Road to Independence Resource Fair for Youth & Adults with Disabilities held Sunday November 10 at the College Living Experience in Rockville. The resource fair, organized by the Montgomery County Transition Work Group, featured over fifty exhibitors, and attracted over 300 participants. The IDDC has elected Susan Hartung as a new Vice-Chair. IDDC has established 3 sub-committees for this year. These committees will begin to organize and work over the next several months. No Chairs for the Committees have been appointed yet.

- **Community Engagement Committee** – responsible for Commission’s external communications, including communications to County government and others, and work designed to raise the public profile of the Commission and raise public awareness of issues of concern to the I/DD community in Montgomery County. The work previously handled during 2023/2024 by the Community Engagement Subcommittee would continue during 2024/2025 within this Committee.
- **Programs & Policies Committee** – responsible for (1) monitoring County, State, federal and private sector programs that serve and policies that impact individuals with I/DD; (2) providing recommendations to improve existing programs and policies and stimulate the development of new policies and the creation of new programs that benefit people with I/DD. In its work, the Committee will pay particular attention to the needs of underserved and under-resourced segments of the I/DD community. The work previously handled during 2023/2024 by the Employment Subcommittee, the Workforce Development Subcommittee, the Developmental Disability Policy & Legislation Subcommittee, the Promoting Quality Services Subcommittee and the I/DD Hospitalization & Dual Diagnosis Subcommittee would continue during 2024/2025 within this Committee.
- **Special Education Committee** – responsible for monitoring public and non-public education and related services for learners with I/DD, suggesting improvements/changes and advocacy with Montgomery County Public Schools, the Montgomery County Board of Education, and the Maryland Department of education.
 - Betsy Luecking, Staff, noted that Commissions do not have authority over Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). CPWD has a non-voting MCPS member to provide an exchange of information. The Board of Education has authority over MCPS. IDDC does have the ability to

advocate with the state and federal government written in its enabling legislation. Betsy also noted that all Commissioners are considered to be County employees. The next IDDC meeting will be held virtually on January 16 from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Updates – Ex-Officio Members, Updates – Commission Members

Denise Isreal, MCDOT, reported Ride On will be adjusting bus routes changes beginning January 12 to improve efficiency and on-time performance. MCDOT has also released the finalized Ride On Reimagined Study which was a comprehensive, forward-looking assessment of the bus network that resulted in significant recommended changes to how transit operates in Montgomery County based on current and future needs. Recommendations will be implemented over the next five years and will include an increase in the on-demand service Flex. The fixed Flex zones are new proposals that would let riders begin at a set location such as the Germantown Transit Center, and ride to the destination of their choosing at an end zone. Riders can go shopping in Germantown and then take the flex bus directly to their home in Damascus or Poolesville. The South Olney zone connects from Montgomery Medical Center and finishes at the Colesville Park & Ride; note that this may be altered to serve the White Oak Transit Center. Read the full report: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Transit/reimagined/reports.html. Denise reported that the County recently hired bus drivers that had been employed by the now defunct DC Circulators. MCDOT currently has reached a full complement of bus drivers after hiring bus drivers that had been previously employed by the DC Circulator which ceased operations this month. Metrobus is relaunching some services and adding capacity to accommodate DC Circulator customers.

David Engel, Chair, Commission on Aging (COA), thanked the Commission and Betsy Luecking for their perseverance and advocacy for Design for Life. Affordable and accessible housing continue to be priorities for COA. It was suggested that the Commission designate a liaison to the COA to attend their meetings and to encourage further collaboration.

Cindy LaBon, Commissioner, will be participating in the Polar Bear Plunge on February 1 hosted by the Maryland State Police. The event raises awareness and money for Special Olympics Maryland.

Public Comments

No member of the public signed up to speak.

Meeting Adjourned – 7:32 p.m.

Attendees

Commissioners Present: Azeb Adere; Shameen Anthanio-Williams; Jennifer Berzok; Felicia Brannon; Tonya Gilchrist; Tria Gray; Samuel Korper; Cindy LaBon; Ricardo Lopez; Jamila Michael-Sobratti; Deborah Rozell; Richard Shermanski; Teresa Villani; John Whittle

Commissioners Absent: Karen Goss; Leslie Green Lyles; Rebecca Murphy; Christian Navarro; Nina Russell; Mary Simons; Christopher Sinsheimer

Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Present: Jennene Blakely, Montgomery Parks; Patricia Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools; Rebecca Grayson, Housing Opportunities Commission; Candace Groudine, Human Rights Commission; Angelisa Hawes, Montgomery County Public Libraries; Denise Isreal, Department of Transportation; Angela Luskey, Department of Recreation; Soumya Nukala, Office of Human Resources

Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Absent: Matthew Barkley, ADA Compliance Team

County Staff Present: Walton Harris, Department of Transportation; Peter Illig, Department of Health and Human Services

Commission Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

Public: Josh Stresing (Sign Language Interpreter); Jenni Jackson (Sign Language Interpreter); Sarah Reddinger, Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland; Tushara Anthanio; Seth Morgan; Jackie Simon; Karen Morgret

**Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities
February 2025 Meeting and Events Calendar**

Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday February 12

6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday February 19

5 p.m. to 6 p.m. to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Program Specialist II
Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager