



Commission on People with Disabilities
Wednesday, March 12, 2025
6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair
Jamila Michael-Sobratti, Vice-Chair

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/7390017153?omn=88071522917>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 739 001 7153 followed by #. Those calling into the meeting can press *6 to mute and unmute their phone.

If an attendee would like to speak during the meeting, they must use the “hand raise” function. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the Zoom link to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press *9 to raise your hand.

- 6:00 Call to Order & Approval of February 2025 Meeting Minutes – Tonya Gilchrist, Chair**
- 6:10 Design for Life Property Tax Credit Application Process & the Prince Georges County Universal Design Legislation – Rabbiah Sabbakhan, Director, Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services**
- 6:45 Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission (IDDC) – John Whittle, Commissioner and Liaison to IDDC**
- 7:00 Review and Finalize FY 26 County Budget Priorities Testimony for April Hearings – Tonya Gilchrist** Please review and be prepared to discuss the testimony that was presented to the County Council HHS Committee on October 16, 2024 on next page
- 7:10 Chair and Vice-Chair Updates**
Topics for Next Meeting Discussion and Next Steps for Designated Bike Lanes - Sidewalks and Floating Bus Stops, Accessible Parking
- 7:20 Updates – Ex-Officio Members, Updates – Commission Members**
- 7:25 Community Speaks**
Public invited to make comments, 2-minute limit, time permitting. For profit companies who want to speak should contact the Commission in advance. The Open Meetings Act does not afford the public any right to participate in the meeting, it does assure the public right to observe the deliberative process and the making of decisions by the public body at open meetings. Public participants generally are not invited to speak during presentations and time is set aside at the end of the meeting to allow the public to speak. This policy will be strictly enforced moving forward.
- 7:30 Adjourn**

ADA Reasonable Accommodations

Sign language interpreter services and other auxiliary aids or services will be provided upon request with as much advance notice as possible, preferably at least five (5) full business days before the meeting. To request any reasonable accommodation to participate in the meeting, please contact Carly Clem in advance at carly.clem@montgomerycountymd.gov or call 202-853-1109. In all situations, a good faith effort will be made to provide accommodations. For any additional questions or concerns, please contact Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison at betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov or please call 240-418-4865, MD Relay 711.



**Commission on People with Disabilities
FY26 Policy Priorities
Montgomery County Council HHS Committee
October 16, 2024
Tonya Gilchrist, Chair**

1. Transportation Safety & Enforcement Issues: Transportation needs to be accessible and safe so people with disabilities can participate in community life.

- We recommend that the County prioritize pedestrian safety over all other Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) projects (such as installation of bicycle lanes and floating bus stops). **Sidewalk installation should be the top priority in all parts of the County with pedestrian safety being the prime emphasis of all MCDOT projects.** This emphasis must begin especially on roads leading to schools where there is no bus service and must continue until all roads in the County are made safe for all pedestrians. This will require the County to take legislative action to make sidewalks mandatory preventing homeowners from blocking sidewalk installation. Pedestrians being forced to walk in the street amongst car traffic should not be tolerated. Adequate lighting over crosswalks should be part of making sidewalks safer.
- Given the high pedestrian severe injury and death figures from vehicular accidents published by MCDOT, sidewalk installation must be accomplished before efforts at opening up County roads to bicyclists. By and far, the number of severe pedestrian injuries outstrip those of bicycle accident injuries in number and must be addressed immediately.
- For safety, cessation of designated bike lane installation and removal of existing bike lanes along major roads as a first step is advised. These bike lanes are a safety issue particularly for individuals who are blind or who have low vision. The Commission has made their concerns regarding bike lanes known to MCDOT multiple times over the years. MCDOT reported previously they would install signals that would indicate to pedestrians, particularly those who are blind or who have vision disabilities, where to cross at bike lanes. It has been reported some of the new signals have been installed but have been repeatedly turned off, especially along Muddy Branch. The American Council for the Blind has been having discussions on the inaccessibility of the bus stop app.
- Lack of enforcement of accessible parking is another issue as County police officers have told us that they cannot write a ticket for parking illegally in an accessible parking space if the space is not properly marked. Parking lot owners and companies that stripe parking lots in Maryland must comply with the Maryland Accessibility Code adopted under 12-202 of the Public Safety Code. ADA-compliant information is provided on the County's Department of General Services ADA Accessible Parking page at: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dgs-ada/AccessibleParking.html. According to regulations, when a parking lot is resurfaced or repainted, accessible parking must be in compliance with the Maryland Accessibility Code. This includes:
 - There must be a visible sign to identify each accessible space.
 - Free-standing signs must be mounted at least 7 feet above the ground with a symbol of accessibility, and include a supplemental sign indicating, "Maximum Fine \$250."
 - A sign mounted flush to a building or wall must be at least 6 feet but no more than 10 feet above the ground.
 - The sign must have the international wheelchair symbol of accessibility and the words, "Reserved Parking".
 - Van accessible spaces are to be identified with a supplemental "Van Accessible" sign and are accompanied with a supplemental "No Parking in Access Aisle" sign.

We recommend that enforcement of existing Accessible Parking laws be prioritized by Montgomery County Government. The Permitting Office, Police Department and Office of Human Rights all play a role in this enforcement. We ask that you advise us as to the County's current enforcement of accessible parking requirements in the Maryland Accessibility Code

2. Increase Accessible, Affordable, Integrated Housing: Locating accessible housing units is a nearly impossible challenge for people who need it.

- Accessible housing: The Design for Life Montgomery program was established to provide a financial incentive for people to modify their homes. The online application in the Department of Permitting Services is not user friendly and the application process needs to be simplified so it is easier to access. People need to pay for a building permit to install accessibility features such as a grab bar and the least expensive is \$280.
- Accessible and Affordable housing: The HARP program provides grants for accessible items to be installed in homes and has either Habitat for Humanity or Rebuilding Together do the paperwork. This program is for people who are 65 years old or people with disabilities of all ages and must meet an income requirement.
- Accessible and Affordable housing: MPDU's should have an accessibility requirement for approximately 20% of the units. It was suggested that an amendment be made to the moderately priced dwelling unit program to include more accessible and affordable housing.



**Commission on People with Disabilities
Meeting Summary Minutes
March 12, 2025**

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

Welcome

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair, convened the meeting.

Design for Life Property Tax Credit Application Process & the Prince Georges County Universal Design Legislation – Rabbiah Sabbakhan, Director, Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (DPS) and Gail Lucas, Division Chief, Customer Support and Outreach, DPS

The Commission had previously requested that DPS simplify the application process for residents applying for a tax credit for installing accessible features. Gail shared her screen to show the DPS testing site for the online application and walked Commissioners through the new application process, which will be made available to the public by the end of the month. It was noted that residents must have an account with DPS prior to applying. The following changes have been made to the online application process:

- 'Apply for Design for Life Features' has been added to the list of available online services.
- Applications no longer require use codes or construction type and can now be requested for dwelling type – single family home, townhome, duplex, four-story townhouse and residential condominiums.
- Applicants must acknowledge limitations and requirements, which are legally required to be on the application. Applicants can list themselves or their licensed contractor as the primary source of contact.
- Applicants must acknowledge that if they live in a homeowner's association (HOA) or community association they may have covenants, rules or regulations they must abide by and they are responsible for approval from their association. DPS does not have the staff to get involved with HOAs. Sometimes there are conflicts between HOA restrictions and County code and regulations. HOA restrictions tend to be more architectural in nature. HOAs cannot refuse a homeowner accessibility modifications or modifying the home for use with mobility devices.
- Applicants must check off the accessibility features they are applying for. Some features such as no step entrances, ramps and widening exterior doors require construction drawings. Other features such as grab bars, door handles or chair height toilets do not require construction drawings.
 - If construction drawings are required, the system will automatically create an electronic project and the homeowner or contractor can upload those documents.
- Applicants are required to write a brief description of the scope of the work and an estimate of how much the work will cost.
- Permits for features not requiring construction drawings will be issued immediately after the permit fee is paid. All accessibility feature permits have the minimum permit fee of \$286.60 which can be paid via electronic check or credit card.
- Permit technicians will review the permit and ensure it was properly issued.

The Public Information Office is working with Department of Permitting Services (DPS) on a media campaign to include a press release, a podcast episode and an advertisement campaign. Part of the outreach campaign includes working with Lowe's and Home Depot to identify items that qualify for tax credits and making them more visible in stores to customers.

The DPS website is currently being updated to include additional information on visit-ability and live-ability features. Currently homeowners and builders apply for those tax credits through a residential or commercial building permit. All DPS applications are being streamlined across the board.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

- **It was suggested that more explanation be given regarding 'no step entrance'** as that can mean any exterior door, not just the front door.
- **It was suggested that the section regarding costs be noted as a 'cost estimate' as the homeowner may not have purchased items at that time.** Gail noted homeowners should have contractors and a cost estimate already when requesting a permit. DPS will request receipts and proof of payment when submitting for the tax credit.
- **What are the requirements for a construction drawing?** They are more detailed than a sketch and more akin to a mechanical drawing. Contractors can submit the drawing or a homeowner can if the drawing is to scale and legible. Drawings should not be submitted on graph paper. DPS needs to know if the construction will conflict with zoning and will fit structurally.
- **It was suggested adding a link to the Human Rights Commission for further explanation regarding the Fair Housing Act and HOAs.** It was reported that the County as a whole is currently redesigning all of its websites to make them more accessible. Departments have been discouraged from including too many links on their websites, but Gail will look into this further.
- **How does this process work for residents in the City of Rockville or the City of Gaithersburg?** Homeowners in Rockville and Gaithersburg will have to go through the permit process of their municipality. DPS certifies the tax credits for Rockville and Gaithersburg and works with those municipalities to confirm the work was completed. DPS meets quarterly with the permitting offices for the City of Rockville and the City of Gaithersburg to discuss program changes and collect the impact taxes for Rockville and Gaithersburg. It was suggested that DPS encourage the City of Rockville and the City of Gaithersburg to advertise the program more as there is no indication on their websites that this program exists.
- **It was suggested that DPS make available sample letters for reasonable accommodation requests** based on disability that homeowners can use when notifying HOAs of their accessibility features permit application. The Housing Subcommittee will discuss developing reasonable accommodation templates for residents to use when submitting accessibility feature modifications to their homes in HOAs, if needed.
- **Is DPS involved with the Prince George's County Universal Design program and how can Montgomery County implement similar legislation?** DPS has not had the time to review the program. DPS would have to talk with the executive branch legislative liaison. Similar legislation would have to be proposed by the County Council or at the state level. DPS typically only creates and enforces regulations such as building or fire codes and zoning or land development regulations. DPS is considering incorporating some of the existing building code and would like to work with this Commission on proposed language. DPS is also interested in speaking with Prince George's County to find out how the legislation is being enforced and how it is being received. It was noted that builders have been pushing back on newer requirements like energy due to its adverse impact on costs. If legislation were to be proposed, it should be done in a manner that is cost prohibitive for builders.

Tonya thanked DPS for making the application process more user-friendly. Gail reported more changes will be coming as DPS is updating its permitting system and the online process will become more user-friendly across the board. Betsy Luecking, Staff, said that the Commission wants to be partners and advocates with DPS regarding Universal Design legislation.

Approval of February 2025 Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the February 2025 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the February 2025 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd.

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

IDDC has submitted a letter to County Executive Marc Elrich supporting full funding of the developmental disability (DD) provider supplement of \$23,125,845 for fiscal year 2026, which is an increase of 6.6% from last year. The amount was calculated by Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee on Developmental Disabilities (InterACC/DD) using the Consumer Price Index of 2.8% plus the increase in Montgomery County citizens served in all programs, which is an annual average of 3.8% increase over the last four years.

The Commission discussed supporting the DD provider supplement funding proposed by InterACC/DD. Several years ago, the Maryland Department of Health and the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration hired a consultant to conduct a cost of business study for rate setting purposes. The study published in 2017 showed that wages for direct support workers in Montgomery County were significantly higher than any other county in the state. Betsy noted that County funding is not eligible to receive a match from the federal government whereas state funding can receive a match in federal funds. It was reported that there could be a 22% overall deduction in funding cuts to DDA in 2026. The potential cuts could have an impact on the number of providers that will be able to stay in business. There is currently good capacity of providers and quality services due in part to the DD provider supplement.

A motion was made for the Commission to write a letter in support of the proposed increase in the DD provider supplement funding due to capacity building, quality of care and the state wage study. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken.

John offered to draft the letter. Commissioners can send suggestions for the letter to Tonya and Betsy. The support would also be included in the Commission's testimony for the operating budget.

Review and Finalize Fiscal Year 2026 County Budget Priorities Testimony for April Hearings

The County Executive will release his proposed FY26 Operating Budget on March 14. The Commission will provide testimony regarding its budget priorities to the County Council in April. The final budget will be approved by the Council in May.

According to a recent meeting of the Maryland's Board of Revenue Estimates, Maryland officials expect about 28,000 federal workers in the state to lose their jobs as a result of the current administration. Those numbers do not account for federal contractors or workers whose jobs rely on federal grants. It is estimated that 70,000 federal workers reside in Montgomery County. It was asked if the County has any projections for the implications on the County budget due to the number of federal workers who have been laid off.

The Commission discussed including designated bike lanes in the testimony. It was suggested stating that safety issues stemming from designated bike lanes affect drivers as well as people with disabilities. Old Georgetown Road in particular has become congested due to the removal of a traffic lane to install a designated bike lane. A family member of a Commissioner has reported that several times while driving on Old Georgetown Road there has been an ambulance that is unable to maneuver around traffic to get to Suburban Hospital. Old Georgetown Road, also known as Route 187, is a numbered road maintained by the State and the designated bike lane installed along there was installed by the State.

It was suggested including testimony from the blind community about how they are impacted by the installation of these designated bike lanes. It was suggested asking the County to conduct a study on safety issues and work with the cycling community to determine safer means for them to cycle throughout the county that gets the bicyclist off the road. It was asked if stop signs had been installed at cross sections to notify drivers to stop before crossing a designated bike lane or if tactile signage had been installed to indicate to persons with visual disabilities that they will be crossing into a designated bike lane. It was suggested that the Commission be involved with the design of designated bike lanes. It was also suggested that members of the disability community conduct a walkthrough of Old Georgetown Road and that Commissioners review bicycle accident records.

Betsy reviewed last year's budget testimony which included supporting the increase of accessible, affordable and integrated housing.

A motion was made for the Commission submit budget testimony regarding the safety issues caused by designated bike lanes and supporting the increase of accessible, affordable and integrated housing. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the motion was passed unanimously.

Commissioners can email Tonya and Betsy with additional budget testimony suggestions.

Chair and Vice-Chair

Tabled due to time constraints.

Updates – Ex-Officio Members, Updates – Commission Members

Tabled due to time constraints.

Community Speaks

None.

Adjournment – 7:36 p.m.

Attendees

Commissioners Present: Shameen Anthanio-Williams; Felicia Brannon; Tonya Gilchrist; Tria Gray; Samuel Korper; Cindy LaBon; Ricardo Lopez; Jamila Michael-Sobratti; Rebecca Murphy; Deborah Rozell; Christopher Sinsheimer; Teresa Villani; John Whittle

Commissioners Absent: Azeb Adere; Jennifer Berzok; Karen Goss; Leslie Green Lyles; Christian Navarro; Nina Russell; Richard Shermanski; Mary Simons; Jeneva Stone

Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Present: Matthew Barkley, ADA Compliance Team; Jennene Blakely, Montgomery Parks; Rebecca Grayson, Housing Opportunities Commission; Angelisa Hawes, Montgomery County Public Libraries; Angela Luskey, Department of Recreation

Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Absent: Patricia Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools; Candace Groudine, Human Rights Commission; Karen Hochberg, Office of Human Resources; Denise Isreal, Department of Transportation

County Staff Present: Rabbiah Sabbakhan; Department of Permitting Services; Gail Lucas, Department of Permitting Services; Anil Saini, Department of General Services

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

Public: Cynthia Seemiller Miser (Sign Language Interpreter); Julie Miller (Sign Language Interpreter); Karen Morgret; Francie Gilman; Pat Sheehan; Frank Kirkland; Zhali Kamara; Misty Johnson Oratokhai; Wendy Lewis

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

Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday April 9

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

Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday April 16

5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager