

**Commission on Aging
Meeting Minutes
September 24, 2020**

Location: Zoom Call
Time: 9:30a – 12:30p

Members Present	Members Absent
Jean Dinwiddie, Chair	Nanine Meiklejohn
Amoke Alakoye, Vice-Chair	Karon Phillips
Beverly Rollins, Secretary	Tho Tran
Ryan Wilson, Budget Officer	
Wayne Berman	Alumni Members
Neal Brown	Austin Heyman
Joyce Dubow	Isabelle Schoenfeld
Stephanie Edelstein	Revathi Vikram
Mort Faller	
Arunima Ghosh	Guests
Richard Jourdenais	David Engle, GROWS
Miriam Kelty	Seda Gelenian
Morris Klein	
Karen Maricheau	Liaisons
Ruby Moone	Pazit Aviv, Village Coordinator
Edgar Rivas	Adrienne Clutter, Department of Recreation
Maritza Rivera	Denise Israel, Department of Transportation
Barbara Selter	Betty Lam, Office of Community Affairs
Ann M. Serafenas	Marcia Pruzan, Age-Friendly Montgomery
Monica Schaeffer	Robin Riley, Department of Recreation
Katie Smith	Sara Swarr, Department of Recreation
Mary Sweeney	Arlee Wallace, African American Health Program
Hillery Tumba	Tiffany Ward, Racial Equity Program
Marsha Weber	
Arthur Williams	Staff
Janice Zalen	Odile Brunetto, Chief, Aging and Disability Services
	Shawn Brennan, Department of Health and Human Services
	Tremayne Jones, Department of Health and Human Services

Welcome–Jean Dinwiddie, Chair

Chair Jean Dinwiddie welcomed all members to the call and reminded them of the Zoom rules of engagement. She informed the CoA members that, sadly, Iris Elizabeth Roberts Royster, the mother of former Commissioner, Deborah Royster, recently passed away at the age of 101.

Chair Dinwiddie took roll and introduced the featured speakers, Tiffany Ward and Betty Lam.

Invited Speakers

Tiffany Ward, Chief Equity Officer

Ms. Ward discussed Montgomery County’s recent racial equity initiatives, including why the County has decided to develop and use a racial equity framework, and the role of her department and County employees in this work.

A key goal of the initiative is to close the gap so that race does not predict the outcome of an action, situation, or an individual’s achievement level. The program wants to transform institutions, structures, and systems. The County is using the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) model, which is a national network of government working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunity for all. Ms. Ward currently works alone but the County is in the process of hiring staff to work with her.

Ms. Ward stated that although Montgomery County has diversity, it does not have inclusion. The different communities need to be at the table to have a voice and power on how policies are implemented and are also centered in the power structure and decision making. *The Racial Equity and Social Justice Act*, co-sponsored by Council members Elrich and Navarro, was signed into law on December 2, 2019. It requires all County employees to receive racial equity training and for the different County departments to develop an action plan. It also established a committee to look at social justice and racial equity within the County; this committee will help to educate the greater community and recommend policies and procedures for the County to follow. It consists of community members and County employees.

Ms. Ward stated that the role of her department is to conduct the training for County employees. She is currently developing a “Train-the-Trainer” program and there are 9,000 employees to train. She is also providing technical assistance for the different County departments on how to analyze their rules.

Betty Lam, Chief, Chief of DHHS Office of Community Affairs

Ms. Lam provided background on the efforts that her department has made regarding the racial equity initiative. She stated that the impetus of the initiative’s work is to help staff make tough decisions and to allow them to understand the root causes that continually impact communities and necessitate them to ask for services. The goal is to look at preventing the problems from happening.

The government is one system where inequities are produced. If that can be changed then perhaps it can be stopped from happening in society. To address it at HHS, staff are receiving continuous training on equity definitions at meeting forums, discussions, and debates. Tools have been developed to help staff put knowledge into action; they are asked to analyze budget or policy decisions to determine who will benefit or be burdened by the decisions. Actions are now being viewed in the large social context, and staff are considering where affected individuals live, work, and play.

Ms. Lam noted that the equity initiative is a continuous effort and the implicit bias training is one out-growth of it. That training is now being conducted as an online workshop. A grass roots level of understanding is needed to achieve equality.

AAA Director Updates

Odile Brunetto, Chief of Montgomery County's Department of Aging and Disability Services, provided the following updates:

- A few HHS staff, CoA chair, Jean Dinwiddie, and members of the Commission on People with Disabilities participated in the County Executive's Recovery Work Group. Its report includes recommendations regarding COVID testing, access to technology, social isolation, financial assistance, and emergency relief.
- Montgomery County has increased subsidies from \$500 to \$1,000 in the State-run, group home subsidy program that pays subsidies directly to group homes on clients' behalf. The new amount goes into effect on October 1.
- The State's Department of Human Services has begun a pilot project to provide devices to individuals who do not have access to the Internet. Forty-two people have received these devices and, hopefully, more devices will be available after the pilot is completed.
- The County's Senior Nutrition Program was converted to a delivery service when the Pandemic struck. Over the past few months about twice the number of meals have been served than before the Pandemic. The County is going to start prioritizing who gets the meals and will then look at the impact of that prioritization. Prioritization will be based on individuals with lower income levels and few means of transportation.
- HHS will invest in Zoom telehealth. The County plans to purchase Zoom for some providers to access it. Staff are now developing a budget request for it.
- COVID testing is still a huge need. The County is trying to open more testing sites and is currently conducting "pop-up" sites. The sites use the nasal swab test.
- There are two vacancies in the County's Senior Nutrition Program. Those positions are now being advertised.
- The County is also advertising to fill the position of HHS director.

Commission on Aging Business

Approval of July CoA Minutes

CoA members voted to approve the July 2020 meeting minutes.

Budget Report

Commissioner Ryan Wilson reported that the CoA has \$4,945.11 in its budget.

Task Forces

Dementia, Policing & Racial Equity

The Task Force is drafting its report and currently finalizing its recommendations. The report will be shared with the full CoA when it is completed.

Transportation

The Transportation Task Force prepared a response to Wade Hollard, the County's Vision Zero Coordinator, regarding that initiative. Vice Chair Alakoye moved that the letter be approved, and Commissioner Williams seconded the motion. The CoA approved the letter.

The Task Force also prepared a letter addressed to the President of the County Council on legislation regarding eScooters. The CoA approved the letter.

Chair Dinwiddie asked the CoA members whether anyone else would like to work on the Task Force. Commissioner members Morris Klein and Marsha Weber volunteered. A request was made that information arising from the Task Force's work be shared with the entire CoA.

Social Isolation

Both the Aging in Community and Health and Wellness Committees are interested in this topic. The two Committees will discuss the issue and determine whether they can make it a joint project or whether a task force is in order.

County Executive's Recovery Work Group

Chair Dinwiddie is participating with this group and has attended the several meetings it has held. Group members are looking at topics such as social isolation, childcare, and voting.

Seniors Today

Because of the Pandemic, the taping of "Seniors Today" has been on hiatus. In addition, the Director of the show, Michael Bruen, has retired. The show's host and former CoA member, Amy Harbison, has gotten it back on track and production will begin the week of September 28. The first show will feature the head of the County's Board of Elections, and information on food resources. The production will be handled via Zoom.

Nominating Committee

Commissioners Hillery Tumba, Arthur Williams, Katie Smith, and Barbara Selter volunteered to be on the Committee. Commissioner Williams reminded members to include Liaison, Arlee Wallace, in all emails.

Racial Equity and Climate Change Meetings

Commissioner Eddie Rivas has attended two meetings of this group and has represented the CoA. The County's goal is to minimize greenhouse emissions by 2035. The group recognizes that there is an issue of balance between keeping green space and the need for housing. Members hope to have a final report completed by the beginning of 2021.

Expectation of Commissioner Participation

Chair Dinwiddie stressed that there is an expectation that all CoA members will serve on at least one committee.

Results of Vote on FY22 Budget Priorities

Votes were received from 82 percent of the CoA members regarding what budget priorities the Commission should advocate for in the FY22 budget.

The priorities, as ranked, were:

Public Guardianship/Adult Protection Services

Two new social worker positions 16 Votes, 6 x #1

Affordable Housing

- Maintain funding for the Housing Initiative Fund 12 Votes
- Funding for legal assistance with evictions 12 Votes, 6 x #1

Recreation Budget

- early stage memory loss/Senior Center Plus 8 Votes
- Senior adult programs 14 Votes, 1 x #1

Health & Wellness

- Expand senior nutrition programs 13 Votes, 1 x #1
- Increase payment rates for Adult Foster Care Program 7 Votes
- Funding for consumer education on hearing loss and hearing tests 7 Votes

Senior Fellows

- Senior Fellow position for diversity 8 Votes
- Restore 2 positions eliminated in FY 20 budget 6 Votes

Other

- Employment/Training & Retraining of Older Adults 6 Votes
Research and address older adult unemployment issues
- Campaign to advertise services available for older adults 12 Votes, 3 x #1
- Formation of County task force/work group to assess community alternatives for congregate and institutional living arrangements 10 Votes, 2 x #1

Commissioner Edelstein volunteered to prepare the CoA's testimony regarding the budget priorities that will be presented to the County Council. It was suggested that the testimony make a blanket statement regarding how the priorities will affect and address the needs of minority populations and individuals of

color. Commissioners Maritza Rivera and Katie Smith volunteered to assist Commissioner Edelstein in preparing the testimony. They will consult with HHS staff member, Dennis Lenders, who may have access to relevant data regarding the impact of the priorities on the County's different racial communities.

Committee Reports

Aging in Community

Committee members received a COVID-19 update from County employee Pazit Aviv at its September 20 meeting. Among the topics discussed was meal delivery. The Committee is also considering the issue of social isolation and is looking at possible projects with the Health and Wellness Committee to address it. Earlier in the year the Committee recommended that the County mail postcards to older adults to provide information regarding available services, and, to that end, 4,000 postcards were sent to individuals living in congregate homes.

The Committee also recently heard about housing issues from Lisa Govoni, the Housing Research Planner at the Montgomery County Planning Department. The Planning Department completed two studies in the past year, one on the preservation of affordable housing and another on housing needs, and both rendered much useful data. Ms. Govoni is also working on an affordable housing fact sheet that the CoA could help distribute.

In addition, the Committee is looking at the County's Senior Fellows Program. Members would like to explore it as a fellowship program, and not concentrate on it being simply an employment program; they would like to make it more robust. The Committee will develop a mission statement and determine whether a task force to look at the Program would be appropriate.

Health and Wellness

Over the summer the Committee developed a Hearing Loss Fact Sheet that it is now distributing. Currently, Committee members are considering the issue of social isolation and, as stated, may join the members of the Aging in Community Committee in a joint project. Health aging and social isolation expert, E.A. Casey, will be addressing the Committee on October 6.

Public Policy

The Public Policy Committee discussed the following at its September meeting:

Voting in nursing homes: Voting is becoming an issue for nursing home residents; they need assistance when voting and there is confusion about how to apply for a mail-in ballot and when the ballot has to be returned. Members suggested that the Department of Health and Human Services send a note to the facilities reminding them that voters will need more help this year. Also, it was learned after the Public Policy Committee meeting that the County's Board of Elections will deliver ballots, in a plastic pouch, to a representative at the participating facilities. Those representatives will assist voters and return voted ballots to the Board of Elections.

Employee leave for eldercare: Committee members discussed the fact that, because of the Pandemic, the County is making provisions for County employees with childcare responsibilities yet there do not appear to be similar provisions for employees with eldercare responsibilities. Members agreed to

research Montgomery County's family leave laws and, depending on what is learned and the interest of the CoA, the CoA may want to approach the County Council to suggest amending the County law to add eldercare provisions. The topic will be included on the Public Policy Committee's agenda for October.

Legislative Breakfast: The Public Policy Committee is working to set a date and time for the annual CoA event. It will be a Zoom meeting and could be held any time of day.

Invited Speakers for Upcoming Meetings

October 22, 2020: Councilmember Will Jawando

November 19, 2020: Jack VanDerhei will discuss the Social Security Trust Funds

Adjourn