



Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Director's Quarterly Leadership Meeting with Boards, Commissions and Committees (BCC)

Date: December 31, 2019 (FY20 Second Quarter Report)

BCC: Commission on Aging (CoA)

BCC Representative: Jean Dinwiddie, Chair

Montgomery County's Commission on Aging continues to serve as an advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of the County's older residents by identifying significant issues where its voice on the needs of seniors can make a difference. The CoA appreciates the County's efforts to provide programs such as home care and nurse monitoring services, respite care, and rental assistance, and also the County's efforts to recognize the needs of its increasingly diverse communities. During the next fiscal year we will continue to advocate for strong budgets to finance services that are vital to our older adult population.

Age-Friendly Montgomery County

The CoA continues active participation in the Age-Friendly Montgomery County Initiative. The Commission Chair is a member of the Age-Friendly Advisory Group, a CoA alumnus is the Senior Fellow that staffs the Initiative, and individual CoA members participate on the various committees. All have the ultimate goal of continuing to make the County a community for a lifetime.

FY20 First Quarter Activities

During the first quarter of FY20, the Commission concentrated its efforts on setting its budget priorities for FY21. A special meeting was held on July 25 where CoA members discussed strategies for advancing those priorities with Gabriel Albornoz, Member, Montgomery County Council; Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director, Montgomery County Health and Human Services; Richard Madaleno, Director, Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget; and Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst, Montgomery County Council. Following this discussion – and taking into consideration previous CoA research and recommendations, FY20 priorities that were not funded but where the need continues, input from agency directors, and other information – the Commission adopted the following budget priorities for FY21:

HHS: (1) Expand home delivered Senior Nutrition programs to include weekends; (2) add two social worker positions: one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public Guardianship program; and (3) increase the subsidy for small group homes and Adult Foster Care.

Recreation: (1) Restore FY20 cuts affecting programs serving older adults; and (2) increase hours of service for senior programs.

Housing: Continue to increase the Housing Initiative Fund to further expand affordable housing options for older adults.

While the CoA may not be able to advocate for all issues, especially since it is often asked to identify its top two or three budget priorities, the list is important because it provides additional guidance for advocacy moving forward. Some budget items for which the CoA has advocated in the past received some support in the voting process, but they did not rise to the highest level of priority this year. These include Friday transportation to senior centers; restoring the senior fellow positions and adding one more position on diversity issues; and expanding funding for the early stage memory loss program at senior centers. We will continue to advocate for these items as appropriate. Some additional issues – e.g., hearing loss and social isolation, older adult employment, the new Flex Ride program – will be studied further by CoA committees.

The CoA was pleased to learn that the County will receive additional State funding to cover the costs of expanding the home delivered meals program.

During this quarter, the Commission welcomed two new members: Karon Phillips and Janice Zalen.

FY20 Second Quarter Activities

The CoA began its second quarter of FY20 by meeting with County Executive Marc Elrich where he discussed his vision and seven goals for the County. Mr. Elrich also explained the position and actions he has taken on such CoA priorities as affordable housing, employment for older adults, and transportation. He noted that he wants to start restoring senior programs at the County recreation centers, and that the CoA's request for additional staff for Adult Protective Services and the Adult Evaluation and Review Service is reasonable.

On October 7 the CoA sent a letter to Gabe Albernoz, Chair of the County Council's HHS Committee, outlining the CoA's budget priorities for FY21 as described above. CoA Chair, Jean Dinwiddie, presented these priorities to the Council at its October 10 hearing.

Also in October, Chair Dinwiddie and other CoA members met with various Montgomery County Department Directors and staff to discuss issues of concern to the CoA. These sessions included meetings with Aseem Nigam, Director of the Department of Housing and Community Affairs and Deputy Director, Frank Demarais; and Al Roshdieh, Director of the Department of Transportation, and Fred Lees, Chief of Management.

In November the CoA held its annual Legislative Breakfast where CoA members had the opportunity to meet with Montgomery County's State legislators. About one-third of Montgomery County's State delegation attended. CoA members discussed the CoA's recent paper, "Too Rich to be Poor, Too Poor to be Rich: The "Senior Gap," and also issues related to

the Adult Evaluation Review Services and Adult Protective Services programs, and the Age-Friendly Initiative.

At its November 21 meeting, CoA members met with County Council Member, Evan Glass, who discussed The *Housing Impact Fairness Act*, legislation he hopes will generate \$10 million a year by closing a loophole in the collection of impact fees when newly rebuilt homes are constructed. Mr. Glass noted that, as proposed, the legislation would generate an additional \$5.7 million a year for school construction and \$4.3 million a year for the County's affordable housing programs.

Also at its November 21 meeting, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging, Rona Kramer, addressed the CoA on initiatives that her Department has instituted. These programs include Senior Call Check, Maryland Communities for Life, and the Durable Equipment Lease program.

Again in November Chair Dinwiddie and other CoA members met with more Montgomery County staff to again discuss CoA priorities. Staff they met with included Barry Hudson, the new Director of Montgomery County's Office of Public Information; HR Director Berke Atilla; Tiffany Ward, Racial Equity Program Manager in the County Executive's office; and Elaine Bonner Tompkins, Senior Legislative Analyst for the County Council.

In December the CoA held its annual holiday party. Retiring CoA members were recognized as well as HHS staff who loyally assist the CoA in its deliberations.

Aging in Community Committee

The Committee members heard from a number of speakers during the quarter including Leslie Marks, a Program Manager in Montgomery County's Division of Housing, with whom they discussed affordable housing issues. They also met with James Stowe, Director of the County's Office of Human Rights, who discussed how the CoA and his office can work together against age discrimination.

Upcoming research. One project that Committee members are looking at are activities that seniors can do outside of paid employment. The Committee will also continue to monitor County activities concerning affordable housing and Montgomery County's Flex Pilot transportation program and is considering whether to undertake an examination of food insecurity among older adults in the County.

Health and Wellness Committee

The Committee researched the issues faced by the "Gap" population – those individuals whose income is too high to qualify for Medicaid but too low to afford assisted living – and released a paper on its findings and recommendations. The paper was presented at the CoA's October meeting as well as at the annual Legislative Breakfast.

Upcoming research. The “Gap” paper leads to many other topics that the committee could explore. Committee members have learned that Leslie Marks, Program Manager in the Department of Housing and Community Affairs, would like to send the paper to the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit workgroup. The committee is also considering researching social isolation as it relates to hearing impairments and, to that end, met with audiologist David Barwell to discuss it. The Aging and Community and the Health and Wellness committees may work together on a project regarding issues surrounding social isolation.

Public Policy Committee

Legislative Breakfast. Members of this committee coordinated the CoA’s annual Legislative Breakfast where CoA members had the opportunity to meet with Montgomery County’s State legislators.

State Legislative Session. When the General Assembly was in session earlier this year, Committee members monitored and reported to the CoA on proposed State legislation that would affect older adults in the County. On behalf of the CoA, the Public Policy Committee advocated in support of several bills.

Transportation Services Improvement Fund. The TSIF is the result of a surcharge imposed on Uber and Lyft rides, intended to support transportation options for persons with disabilities and older and low-income persons. The CoA and the Commission on Persons with Disabilities (CPWD) advocated for the creation of this fund and were disappointed to learn in 2018 that money that was supposed to be dedicated to the fund was used for other budget purposes. At the urging of the CoA and the CPWD, the Department of Transportation issued proposed regulations intended to protect the fund. Committee members will continue to monitor the situation.

Other Issues. The Committee is researching how and whether AARP’s “Age Friendly” status will be possible for the State of Maryland.

Communications and Community Outreach Task Force

“Seniors Today.” A Task Force member is currently guest hosting this monthly cable access television program which is co-produced by the CoA and the County. The program airs several times each month and is also available on the County’s YouTube channel. Recent guests included:

- Marc Elrich, County Executive
- Ryan Rilette, Artistic Director at Roundhouse Theater
- Edwardo Mendez, Montgomery County Community Action
- Shawn Brennan, Transportation and Mobility Manager, Department of Aging and Disability Services
- Pazit Aviv, Villages Coordinator, Department of Aging and Disability Services
- Diane Vy Nguyễn Vũ, Director, Office of Community Partnerships
- Seth Morgan, Chair, Commission on People with Disabilities
- James Stowe, Director, Office of Human Rights
- Larissa Johnson, Residential Energy Program Manager, Department of Environmental Protection

Upcoming Activities

Commissioners will be monitoring efforts to re-certify Montgomery County as Age-Friendly and also the efforts to certify the State of Maryland as Age-Friendly. In addition, CoA members will monitor the activities of the State Legislature's General Assembly on other proposed State legislation that would affect older adults in the County. Also, during the winter and spring, CoA members will be meeting with County agency directors, Council members, and the County Executive to advocate for the CoA's FY21 budget priorities. The CoA Chair will testify at the County Council' budget hearings in the Spring.

During the winter, Commissioners will begin planning for the CoA's annual public forum which will be held on March 18, 2020. It will be held in collaboration with the City of Gaithersburg; its focus will be determined in the near future. Invitees will include members of the public, the County Executive, County Council members, agency directors, and other interested officials.

The CoA will release its Annual Report during the winter of 2020.

Upcoming CoA meetings will include the following speakers/topics:

- January 23, 2020: Robin Riley, Director of Montgomery County's Department of Recreation
- February 27, 2020: Thrive Montgomery 2050
- March 26, 2020: Will Jawando, Montgomery County Council Member
- April 23, 2020: Jack VanDerhei, Research Director for the Employee Benefit Research Institute

Collaboration with Other Boards, Commissions, and Committees

CoA collaborates with other Boards, Commissions, and Committees, as appropriate. CoA also welcomes representatives of other Boards, Commissions and Committees at its standing committee meetings. These representatives are invited to report on their B/C/or C's activities at CoA's monthly meetings.