



## Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

### Director's Quarterly Leadership Meeting with Boards, Commissions and Committees

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**Date: December 31, 2020 (FY21 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 older adults can make a difference. The CoA appreciates the County's efforts to deal with the COVID-19 Pandemic and its resulting health and economic crises. The Commission stands ready to provide services and assistance in any way it can.

In March 2020 all CoA activities were suspended because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. It resumed its deliberations in May 2020 by Zoom calls.

#### **Age-Friendly Montgomery County**

The CoA continues active participation in the Age-Friendly Montgomery County initiative. In October, the initiative celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary and was recertified by AARP. It has received much praise for the work that has been completed under its auspices. The Commission Chair is a member of the Age-Friendly Advisory Group, a CoA alumnus is the Senior Fellow who 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.

#### **Recap of FY20 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.

During the second quarter, the CoA met with County Executive Marc Elrich where he discussed his vision and seven goals for the County and explained the position and actions he has taken on such CoA priorities as affordable housing, employment for older adults, and transportation. The CoA also sent a letter to Gabe Albornoz, 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.

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. Also in November, at the CoA's regular monthly meeting, Commission members met with County Council Member, Evan Glass, who discussed the *Housing Impact Fairness Act*, and with Rona Kramer, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging, who discussed recent initiatives that her Department has instituted.

Also during the second quarter, Chair Dinwiddie and other CoA members met with a number of 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; Al Roshdieh, Director of the Department of Transportation; Fred Lees, Chief of Management; 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.

During the third quarter, at its January 2020 meeting, the CoA met with Recreation Department Director, Robin Riley, and Recreation Department staff member, Phil Smakula, who discussed older adult programs and activities at County recreation facilities. At its February meeting the CoA met with a number of County officials including Montgomery County Council Member, Gabe Albornoz; Special Assistant to the County Executive, Chuck Short; Khalid Afzal, Special Projects Manager for the Maryland-National Capitol Park and Planning Commission; Daniel Jones, Partnership Specialist for the Bureau of Census; and Walton Harris, Policy Analyst for Taxicab Regulation and Special Transit Services. CoA members were briefed on initiatives such as the Montgomery County Property Tax Credit for Senior Citizen Volunteers (MC 23-20) and "Thrive Montgomery;" and learned about the County's 2020 U.S. Census efforts and the status of the Transportation Services Improvement Fund.

Also, at the February meeting, CoA members discussed plans for the CoA's annual forum. The theme of the 2020 event was to be "What Can Racial Equity Look Like in an Age-Friendly Community?" Unfortunately, the forum and the March and April CoA meetings were cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis.

In the fourth quarter, the CoA resumed its deliberations in May by holding meetings by conference and Zoom calls. It will continue to hold virtual meetings for the foreseeable future.

At the May meeting CoA members heard from Lylie Fisher, facilitator of Montgomery County's Caregiver Support Program. In June, the CoA's meeting featured a panel discussion with Sidney Katz, President of the Montgomery County Council, and Rich Madaleno, Director of Montgomery County's Office of Management and Budget. The discussion centered around the County's financial and budget situation and the impact the Pandemic has had on the economy.

### **FY21 First Quarter Activities**

During the first quarter of FY21, the Commission concentrated its efforts on setting its budget priorities for FY22. A special meeting was held on July 9 where CoA members discussed at length a list of possible budget priorities for which the CoA could lobby in the FY22 budget. That draft list included:

#### Public Guardianship/Adult Protection Services

- 2 new social worker positions

#### Affordable Housing

- Maintain funding for Housing Initiative Fund
- Funding for legal assistance with evictions

#### Recreation Budget

- Early stage memory loss/Senior Center Plus
- Senior adult programs

#### Health and Wellness

- Expand senior nutrition programs
- Increase payment rates for Adult Foster Care program
- Funding for consumer education on hearing loss and hearing tests

#### Senior Fellows

- Senior Fellow position for diversity
- Restore 2 positions eliminated in FY20 budget

#### Other

- Employment/training and retraining of older adults
- Campaign to advertise services available for older adults

The CoA members agreed that the items on the list should be prioritized and after the meeting they voted and arrived at the following six budget priorities:

Adult protective services/public guardianship – add two social worker positions  
Provide legal information and/or assistance to renters who are at risk of eviction

Expand senior nutrition programs  
Develop a campaign to advertise County services for seniors  
Maintain the Housing Initiative Fund  
Maintain and expand senior adult programs

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. The CoA will continue to advocate for these items as appropriate. Some additional issues – e.g., hearing loss, social isolation, and older adult employment – will be studied further by CoA committees.

At its September meeting the CoA members heard from Tiffany Ward, Montgomery County’s Chief Equity Officer, and Betty Lam, Chief of Montgomery County’s Office of Community Affairs. Ms. Ward discussed Montgomery County’s recent racial equity initiatives and Ms. Lam provided background on the efforts that her department has made regarding those initiatives.

Also during the first quarter, two CoA Task Forces were convened to address important issues affecting the community and older adults: the Dementia, Policing and Racial Equity Task Force that is studying the use of a police unit in the County’s Silver Alert program; and a Transportation Task Force that looked at County transportation initiatives. The Transportation Task Force wrote CoA letters to County officials regarding two initiatives and the Dementia, Policing and Racial Equity Task Force is in the process of preparing a report with recommendations. A third Task Force has been formed to study the issue of older adults and social isolation.

In addition, CoA members are participating in County workgroups that are studying issues that affect older adults. Chair Jean Dinwiddie is a member of the County Executive’s COVID-19 recovery workgroup that is looking at ways to get the County back on its feet from the effects of the COVID Pandemic. Commissioner Eddie Rivas attended meetings of the Racial Equity and Climate Change workgroup, a group whose goal is to minimize greenhouse emissions by 2035.

Finally, because of the Pandemic, the taping of “Seniors Today” was on hiatus from March until the end of September. The show’s host and former CoA member, Amy Harbison, got it back on track and production began the week of September 28. The first show featured the head of the County’s Board of Elections, and information on food resources. The production was broadcast via Zoom.

### **FY21 Second Quarter Activities**

At its October meeting, the CoA received a public health update from Sean O’Donnell, Administrator of the County’s Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Program. Mr. O’Donnell specifically addressed what the County has been doing for older residents during the COVID-19 crisis.

Also at the October meeting, CoA members received status updates from a few of its County liaisons:

- Marcia Pruzan, a Senior Fellow with the Age-Friendly Montgomery initiative, reported that the program was recently recertified by AARP and that the individuals involved during the five years it has been in place received much praise for the work that has been accomplished.
- Denise Israel of the County’s Department of Transportation reported that staff have been involved in several vital operations during the Pandemic, including keeping buses clean and safe for passengers. She noted that many bus service levels had to be dropped because of lack of riders and also for safety reasons, but more routes will be added in January 2021. She also stated that the County started a new bus service – its Flash bus service – on October 14 in eastern sections of the County.
- Sara Swarr of the County’s Department of Recreation staff reported that the Department has been helping on several County projects including working with other organizations to deliver services such as meals to older adults and other individuals who need assistance. She also noted that the Department has developed a list of programs that it will be offering during the winter.

In addition, during the October meeting the CoA voted on and approved the proposed slate of officers for 2021. Those officers included:

Chair	Barbara Selter
Vice Chair	Eddie Rivas
Secretary	Janice Zalen
Treasurer	Dick Jourdenais

At the November CoA meeting, Dr. Jack VanDerhei, Research Director of the Employee Benefit Research Institute, gave a presentation on the status of the Social Security Trust Funds. Ms. Helane DiGravio of the Social Security Administration also sat in to answer questions regarding Social Security benefits. Dr. VanDerhei discussed the solvency of the Trust Funds, what actions could be taken to solve the problem, and when those actions could be taken.

Also during its November meeting, the CoA received an update from Arlee Wallace, a liaison with the African American Health Program. Ms. Wallace stated that AAHP is hosting COVID testing at three apartment complexes and working directly with African American families who are in need. CoA members also heard from alumni member, Austin Heyman, who voiced concern about the need to get information to the public regarding older adult issues.

In December, CoA members met with Montgomery County Council Member, Will Jawando. Mr. Jawando discussed the topics that he is currently focusing on in the Council including housing issues, renter protection, and other issues of interest to the CoA such as how to keep a new budget, that has been greatly impacted by the Pandemic, from impinging on the needs of older adults.

## **Committee, Task Force, and Other Activity**

### ***Aging in Community Committee***

Aging in Community Committee members joined with members of the Health and Wellness Committee at their October meeting and met with E.A. Casey from the AARP Foundation to discuss older adults and social isolation. In November, the Committee invited Erica Lee, a Marketing Associate from Habitat America, to talk about Willow Manor at Fairland, the new apartment building for older adults that is being built in Silver Spring. In December, Committee members discussed the County's Home Sharing pilot program. Mary Hunter and Michelle Higgs of the Housing Initiative Partnership (HIP) gave a presentation. The HIP's official launch date is January 5, 2021 and will extend to June 30, 2021. In the next few months Committee members will discuss affordable rental housing, food security, and the Villages.

### ***Health and Wellness Committee***

As stated above, the Health and Wellness Committee joined the members of the Aging in Community Committee and met with E.A. Casey from the AARP Foundation to discuss older adults and social isolation. In November, Committee members held a planning session to prioritize future study issues including home-based healthcare, nursing home regulations, COVID-19 testing, suicide prevention, and other mental health issues. In December, they focused on home-based health care and met with two speakers: CoA member, Morris Klein, who discussed options and challenges for paying for long-term care outside of nursing homes, and Raphael Espinoza of the State Housing Initiatives Partnership program who talked about the Medicare program and how to qualify for the different parts of it.

### ***Public Policy Committee***

At its October meeting the Public Policy Committee discussed the CoA's budget priorities and, subsequently, members developed a memo for the CoA to submit to the County Council regarding those priorities. Members also helped draft letters and testimony that Chair Dinwiddie provided to the Gaithersburg City Council and to the County Council regarding affordable housing. In November, the Committee started planning for the CoA's annual Legislative Breakfast which was held December 10. The Committee's December meeting was pre-empted by the Legislative Breakfast. The Breakfast was well attended.

### ***Task Force on Dementia, Policing, and Racial Equity Recommendations***

The Dementia, Policing and Racial Equity Task Force is studying the use of a police unit in the County's Silver Alert program. Task Force members heard from three presenters; a representative from the Alzheimer's Association who discussed disparities in the affliction, treatment, and care of dementia in the African American and Latino communities; Officer Laurie Reyes, Program Manager for the service unit of the Montgomery County Police Department that handles dementia issues; and a representative from the County's Search and Rescue Team which is a subset of the

police department and works to find individuals who are wandering. Members are currently drafting a report of their findings that will include recommendations.

### ***Social Isolation Task Force***

The Health and Wellness Committee and the Aging in Community Committee joined together to develop a Task Force to study social isolation among older adults. Currently, speakers are being recruited to address the members. The group plans to look at fixing broken connections.

### ***Seniors Today***

This monthly cable access television program 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:

- Marla Caplon, Director of Division of Food and Nutrition Services at Montgomery County Public Schools
- Frank Demarais, Deputy Director of Affordable Housing at Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs
- Micki Gordon, Assistant Chief Executive Officer of the Jewish Council for the Aging
- Shivali Haribhaktiwith, Senior Planet Montgomery
- Mitsuko Herrera, Senior Planet Montgomery
- Suzan Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer of the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County
- Jane Markley, Advanced Care Planning Expert
- Kathleen Meaney Stobie, Montgomery County Volunteer Center
- Tracy Rezvani, Administrator for the Montgomery County Office of Consumer Protection
- Stephanie Svec, Montgomery County Seniors' Services Affiliated Sante Group
- Anita Vassallo, Director of Montgomery County Libraries
- Gilberto Zelaya, Montgomery County Board of Elections

### **Upcoming Activities**

In March 2020 all CoA activities were suspended because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Although the CoA started holding virtual meetings in May, its activities are limited. The CoA will continue to hold virtual meetings for the foreseeable future and will submit written and oral FY22 budget priorities to the County Council in the Spring of 2021. Invited guests during the winter session include Barry Hudson, Director of Montgomery County's Public Information Office; Robert Jenkins of Greenhouse Nursing Homes; and a representative from the Home Sharing Project. The CoA is also planning to hold its annual Public Forum virtually in March.

### **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.