

**Commission on Aging
Meeting Minutes
June 25, 2020**

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

| Members Present | Members Absent |
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| Jean Dinwiddie, Chair | Karen Maricheau |
| Amoke Alakoye, Vice-Chair | Ruby Moone |
| Beverly Rollins, Secretary | Deborah Royster |
| Ryan Wilson, Budget Officer | Monica Schaeffer |
| Wayne Berman | Hillery Tsumba |
| Neal Brown | |
| Joyce Dubow | Alumni Members |
| Stephanie Edelstein | Austin Heyman |
| Mort Faller | Isabelle Schoenfeld |
| Arunima Ghosh | |
| Richard Jourdenais | Guests |
| Miriam Kelty | David Engle, GROWS |
| Morris Klein | Sidney Katz, President, Montgomery County Council |
| Nanine Meiklejohn | Rich Madaleno, Director, Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget |
| Karon Phillips | |
| Edgar Rivas | Liaisons |
| Maritza Rivera | Elisse Barnes, African American Health Program |
| Barbara Selter | Adrienne Clutter, Department of Recreation |
| Ann M. Serafenas | Denise Israel, Department of Transportation |
| Katie Smith | Robin Riley, Department of Recreation |
| Mary Sweeney | Marcia Pruzan, Age-Friendly Montgomery |
| Tho Tran | Jim Resnick, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue |
| Marsha Weber | Stacey Sigler, Department of Recreation |
| Arthur Williams | |
| Janice Zalen | Staff |
| | 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 attendees and provided the rules for participating in the Zoom call.

Panel Discussion: Sidney Katz, President of the Montgomery County Council and Rich Madaleno, Director of the Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget

County Council President, Sidney Katz, stated that he is frustrated with the impact the Pandemic has had on the economy. Because of the Pandemic and other problems, the FY22 budget could go down as the worst County budget in history. It will have more expenses than it has ever had. The County Executive has already stated that there will be at least a \$200 million shortfall, and it could be as much as a \$600 million. Budget cuts will have to be made.

President Katz stated that there is an entire section on the County’s website describing what services for older adults are available (montgomerycountymd.gov/senior). Many services on hold, however, because of the health crisis, but some are still operating. Montgomery County has many community grants, including to some non-profit organizations, that provide services to older adults.

The County recently received a Federal grant of \$183 million to be spent on services directly related to the Pandemic. It has until the end of the year to spend the grant and has allocated about one-half of the money already, with it going toward food service and to keep businesses afloat (\$25-30 million has been spent on that). There has also been some allocation to individuals toward rental assistance.

Office of Management and Budget Director, Rich Madaleno, stated that COVID-19 has created many issues, and there is good news and bad news. The good news is that the current fiscal year ends on June 30 and the County’s budget is surviving better than anyone thought it would three months ago when the crisis began. The economy was helped by the passage of the CARES Act and other legislation. Unemployment benefit levels went up from about \$380 to \$1,042 a week, and unemployment benefits are taxable so the County is still getting money from income tax.

The bad news is, however, that the higher unemployment benefit rates expire at the end of July and they will fall by \$600 a week. If Congress does not do anything, the County will lose income tax revenue and business revenue.

Mr. Madaleno stressed that if Congress does not act to continue to add relief for individuals and State and local governments, Montgomery County’s economy will be less stable. Without Federal assistance the economy could lose another 4 million in jobs. If State and local governments do not get more help, kindergartners will not be able to start school this Fall.

He stated that the County had \$540 million in reserve before the Pandemic hit. It had to use some of that money over the past few months, but the reserve is not depleted. However, more Federal assistance is needed for the economy to survive. Over the next few months, as money comes in or does not come in, the County hopes to cut \$200 million from its budget.

Following the presentations, the CoA and the speakers engaged in discussion. One question that was raised was whether the County is equipped to handle another spike of COVID cases if one happens in the Fall. President Katz responded that, hopefully, the County will be in a better situation than it was when the Pandemic initially hit. There is now a stockpile of respirators and personal protective equipment and hospitals have been re-configured. The County, emergency, and medical services organizations are now more experienced in treating the disease.

Mr. Madaleno added that the County is in a much better position with personal protective and other equipment; it has gotten so much that it had to rent a warehouse to store it. Nursing homes and hospitals have been provided with it. The County is much better prepared now.

AAA Director Updates

Chief Odile Brunetto reported the following:

The two primary issues that the County government is concentrating on are budget cuts and Pandemic recovery efforts.

Budget cuts: All County departments were asked to propose a 6 percent cut in their budgets. For the Department of Aging and Disability services it amounts to a \$2.6 million cut. Staff are now sorting out what these cuts will mean. Home care services and services for individuals with disabilities are a big worry. Staff must propose a balance among the programs, and they recently submitted their proposal to the Office of Management and Budget for review. It will then go to the County Executive and the County Council. The employee union is partnering with the County Executive on the cuts. They are trying to avoid layoffs and furloughs.

Recovery efforts: The County moved into Phase 2 of its reopening on Friday, June 19. Some businesses have been allowed to reopen in a limited way as well as some County organizations. The County Executive and the County Council are working on this together and the County has organized a structure to follow for the reopening. The structure affects many areas such as the economy, education, and housing (e.g., to prevent evictions). The Courts will be reopening in the middle of August. HHS has established several workgroups to help with the recovery efforts and they are looking at things such as childcare, daycare centers, and evictions. Among the workgroups are a suicide prevention group, a public health group, and an Aging and Disability Services group.

The charter for the Aging and Disability Services group is to develop a plan for older adults and individuals with disabilities to be safe. The group will work together until the end of October, or longer if necessary. A plan is due by June 30. The group is looking at things such as mask-fitting activities and plans to consider ideas for individuals with hearing impairments. Members are also looking at testing for COVID; they are concerned about the length of time (10-15 days) to get results, especially since there are new tests that are produced locally. Results from those tests can be seen within 48 hours.

The Aging and Disability Services Committee feels uncomfortable with organizations and businesses referring to “opening up” during this crisis; they believe it would be more appropriate to use the term “recover.” Individuals’ health must be addressed first, and face-to-face services

may no longer be available. Individuals may have to engage in virtual meetings from home for a long time. Some face-to-face meetings, such as home care services, are still happening and the County will continue those. HHS and DTS have applied for Federal grants to get IT for those individuals who do not have access to it. The County is still waiting to hear about the grants.

The workgroup is hearing that traditional forms of communication are no longer working well during this crisis; for example, individuals are not getting out to buy newspapers. The CoA's Aging in Place Committee recommended using the mail – postcards – to connect with socially isolated people, and the group is considering that.

Members of the workgroup are also considering other issues that older adults and disabled individuals are encountering, such as unemployment, mental health access, food access, availability of staff in high need areas, and the sustainability of eligibility for programs like medical adult daycare. The group is planning to prepare a survey to collect data to formulate a plan to send to the County Council.

The County is investigating ways to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus through things such as more availability of COVID testing, more personal protective equipment, and the use of quarantine. The workgroup is partnering with Public Health Services to develop these strategies.

Commission on Aging Business

Approval of May CoA Minutes

The CoA approved the May meeting minutes.

Budget Report

The CoA has a budget balance of \$4,945.11.

Plan for Setting Budget Priorities

Chair Dinwiddie will send a Survey Monkey request to all CoA members prior to the July 9 Commission meeting and ask for preferences of what the CoA's FY22 budget priorities should be. A draft list will be developed and then discussed at the meeting. After the July meeting another Survey Monkey request will be sent and the CoA members will vote on the top six priorities.

Letter re: COVID-19 Testing

A CoA Task Force made up of Commissioners Miriam Kelty, Joyce Dubow, Neal Brown, and Arunima Ghosh researched COVID testing in assisted living facilities. Commissioner Dubow drafted a letter addressed to the Maryland Department of Health and to the County Council members, which was approved by the Task Force, urging that testing be conducted in these facilities. The Executive Committee approved it.

Joint Letter re: Suicide Prevention

The CoA was asked to co-sign a letter prepared by the Suicide Prevention Subcommittee of the Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee addressed to County Executive Marc Elrich. The memo was reviewed and revised by Commissioners Ghosh and Eddie Rivas and was subsequently approved by the Executive Committee.

Vision Zero Response Letter

Montgomery County's Vision Zero kickoff meeting was last week. Vision Zero goal is to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries by 2030. That group would like CoA comments on its draft plan. Commissioners Wayne Berman, Eddie Rivas, Janice Zalen and Dick Jourdenais volunteered to be on a Task Force to review the plan and develop comments.

Upcoming Meetings/Events

July 9 CoA Meeting via Zoom

The CoA will discuss its FY22 budget priorities at this meeting. Commissioners will subsequently be asked to vote via Survey Monkey on the priorities they believe the CoA should advocate for.

County Council Town Hall Meeting on Racial Equity—July/August

Chair Dinwiddie spoke with County Council Senior Legislative Aide, Beth Shuman, about the Council's proposed Town Hall meeting and Ms. Shuman stated that there have been no planning efforts made on that yet. The CoA members discussed the meeting and a comment was made that the word "racism" should have been included in the County Council's recent racial equity legislation. Another comment was made that "implicit bias" also needs to be understood and addressed in legislation.

Committee Reports

Aging in Community

The Committee is looking at social isolation and what role the CoA can play in reaching isolated older adults. The Committee is also looking at affordable housing and evictions. It will begin meeting again in September.

Health and Wellness

At its June meeting, the Committee discussed the State's "Go Teams," the specialized component of Maryland's Statewide emergency medical system that provide testing and gowns for COVID patients in nursing facilities and explain how to disinfect and separate infected residents. Eileen Bennett, a program manager in the County's Ombudsman Program, spoke with Committee members at the meeting. The Committee is also resuming its research on hearing loss. Members have decided to develop a fact sheet on this topic.

Public Policy

The Committee will not be holding meetings again until September.

Liaisons

Stacy Sigler and Adrienne Clutter of the Department of Recreation reported that the Department has shifted many of its activities since the COVID emergency began. For one thing, staff are working to get more older adults connected with technology. Since program's inception a few years ago, they have served about 1700 older adults through the "Tech Connect" program. Also, because the COVID crisis has forced the Department to shut down many of its in-person programs, it is now offering platforms such as online fitness and yoga classes. Department staff have also been helping with the Senior Meal Program. It has been working great; during this emergency the County has served about 52,000 meals, mostly through home delivery. Over a total of 900 older adults have been served and an average of 660 seniors are served each week.

The Department will be affected by budget cuts, but staff do not know yet where the impact will be seen. It will be some time before the senior centers will reopen and staff are seeing the side effects of social isolation. The Department is working to get pools and other facilities reopened, and launching small group, out-door classes.

The Department is working with community organizations and agencies such as the police and fire departments to render services.

Jim Resnick of Montgomery County Fire and Rescue reported that his organization is seeing a continuing trend during this COVID emergency where family homes are getting stressed; they are serving not only as the family home but also as the school, daycare, and workplace. They have seen a rise in electrical fires because of this and are working to get the word out about fire safety.

Fire and Rescue is also concerned about pool safety. Pools around the County will be allowed to open soon and there will be a potential for drownings and near-drownings. One scenario they are uneasy about is that, for various reasons brought on by the Pandemic, grandparents may have to serve as lifeguards if they are babysitting, and that could be a danger. Fire and Rescue is trying to warn the public about this.

Mr. Resnick closed by noting that Fire and Rescue, too, is partnering with community organizations and agencies to get the word out about fire and rescue services, and smoke and carbon dioxide monitoring.

Denise Israel of the Department of Transportation reported that the County Ride On bus services have extended their routes. They are now offering 53 weekday routes and several weekend routes.

Marcia Pruzan of Age-Friendly Montgomery reported that the organization has been meeting by Zoom regularly during the COVID crisis. The program is up for recertification in October and

the initiative's different workgroups have engaged in several cross-efforts. A final version of the proposal for the recertification should be available soon.

Dr. Elisse Barnes of the African American Health Program stated that a video of her organization's June 12 Town Hall meeting entitled "Racism: A Public and Mental Health Crisis" is now available on YouTube.

Adjourn