

**Commission on Aging  
Minutes  
June 22, 2023**

The meeting was held in person at the Wheaton Recreation Center.

David Engel, Chair, called the meeting to order and members and visitors introduced themselves. In attendance: David Engel, Virginia Cain, Mona Greiser, Bob Levey, Wayne Berman, Betsy Carrier, Mary Sweeney, Kendell Mathews, Barbara Selter, Nikiru Ezeani, Marsha Weber, Marcia Pruzan, Art Williams, Ryan Wilson. Staff and members of the public: Peter Flandrau, Tremayne Jones, Monique Gardner, Shawn Brennan, Carol Craig, Patty Hagen, Sara Swarr, Stacy Sigler, Maria Brodsky, Ingrid Lizama, Grace Kim, Kuohwa (Eric) Wang, Beth Shuman, Alekhya Chaparala

**AAA Director update:** Dr. Patrice McGhee, Director Area Agencies on Aging

- *Review of legislation affecting older adults passed by the state legislature during its last session:*
  - Senate Bill 665/House Bill 774 requires the Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ) to conduct an annual unannounced on-site inspection of each assisted living facility in MD. In addition, OHCQ must investigate credible allegations of assisted living residents having been subjected to neglect, exploitation, or abuse when a person is found to be knowingly operating, maintaining, or owning an unlicensed assisted living program
  - Senate Bill 228/House Bill 614 requires each AAA, subject to the limitations of the funding, to develop a long-term care and dementia care navigation program that will include providing information and referrals to long-term care and chronic diseases services, cognitive screening, programs that engage individuals who demonstrate symptoms of dementia that interfere with activities of daily living, and support for caregivers. Beginning in fiscal 2025, the Governor must include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$2.4 million to manage the navigation programs statewide and fund the programs locally. Funding must be distributed based on a formula that considers the number of individuals who will likely need long-term care or dementia care services in each jurisdiction.
  - Senate Bill 797/House Bill 1191 requires MDOA to establish a Task Force on Preventing and Countering Elder Abuse. The task force must: (1) study existing laws, policies, and practices relating to elder abuse and other crimes commonly committed against older adults, and (2) make recommendations regarding changes to State law, policy, and practice that

would aid in preventing elder abuse. The task force must submit a preliminary report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 31, 2023; a final report is due by December 31, 2024.

- *Impacts of recently enacted county budget for FY24.*
  - Strengthen the Assessment, Evaluation and Review Services program (AERS) by adding 6 New Full-Time Employees (FTEs) (1 Nurse Manger/ 5 Community Health Nurses) to accommodate increased demand as a result of FY23 legislation (SB639/ HB1403) to reduce waiver waitlist by 50%.
- *ARPA update-* Montgomery County received \$3.5million in ARPA funding. ARPA-funded projects end September 2024.
  - Access Hears provides services to those 60+ with mid-to-moderate hearing loss, and whose income is below 250% of the federal poverty level. The program is fully underway.
  - Home Care Partners provide light chore services to older adults on a short-term basis until clients regain their abilities or qualify for more permanent assistance. There is no income requirement to receive these services. The program is currently at 5 housing facilities (Inwood House, Victory Crossing, Randall Village, Willow Manor Fairland, and Victory Oaks. They hope to expand to additional sites.
  - Senior Nutrition Program (SNP) Restaurant Initiative – There is no income requirement to participate in the SNP congregate meal program. The restaurant initiative is intended to encourage participation in group lunch programs by offering periodic restaurant meals that offer diverse menus on a regular schedule. (Note: see discussion of Carol Craig’s presentation, below.)
  - County Office of Broadband Programs (OPB) Chromebook Distribution Partnership with County OBP to help older adults sign up for a free Chromebook and access to Senior Planet lifelong learning. OBP will partner with My Active Senior to setup Chromebook education/ signup events in Senior Housing facilities.
- Home and Community-based Service Workforce Task Force- The County Executive and councilmembers were briefed on the contents and recommendations of the report. Additional briefings are planned with potential partners and interested parties to raise their awareness of the issues and the recommended steps to address home care workforce issues. Dr. McGhee noted that she presented to the commission’s Health and Wellness Committee, providing an in-depth description of the recommendations and ways the commission could be most effective in advancing implementation of the

recommendations. The county is awaiting the release of the state HCBS taskforce report which is expected shortly.

## **Liaison Reports**

- Montgomery County Fire Department. On behalf of Jim Resnick, David presented his report:
  - Scott Goldstein, County Fire Chief, is retiring on June 30<sup>th</sup>. No replacement has been named yet.
  - The Fire and Rescue Services budget for FY24 includes two new positions for Community Risk Reduction. These will support the expansion of outreach services to older adults and people with disabilities.
  - There has been a spate of residential fire deaths in FY23- 6 of 7 deaths were people older than 60 years of age. Causes of these fires varied but in most of the cases, there was a failure to immediately evacuate or take self-preservation action; and failure to call 911 immediately. He emphasized the importance of having working smoke alarms in critical areas of the home, such as sleeping areas and on every level of the house; having a pre-planned escape route; and sleeping with doors closed. Free home safety checks are available by calling 311 or going online at [mcfrs.org/mcsafe](http://mcfrs.org/mcsafe)
- Recreation Department -Stacy Sigler
  - The Barbeque Bonanza will take place on June 23.
  - A senior adventure camp took place at White Oak; two additional camps are planned.
  - A farmers market coupon program for low-income older adults is being planned that will have a \$50 dollar value applied to purchases at farmers' markets. Application for the voucher is required.
- Transportation Department, Denise Isreal
  - MCDOT received \$140,000 for Two Technical Assistance Awards from Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Transportation Planning Board
    - The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Transportation Planning Board (TPB) technical assistance award of \$60,000 will be used to study the County's Ride On Flex service. Flex is a shared ride service, offering on-demand transit service in defined areas of Rockville and Glenmont/Wheaton.
    - \$80,000 was awarded to advance a comprehensive assessment and design study for safety improvements along Bel Pre Road in Aspen

Hill. The application was in partnership with the County's Vision Zero office.

- MCDOT Awards \$800,000 in Grants to Assist Disabled, Senior, Limited-Income Residents with Transportation Needs Funding will be for 23 community-based nonprofits to expand access to transportation to disabled, senior and limited-income residents through the Targeted and Specialized Mobility (TSM) Grant Program.
- The TSM Capital Grant program awarded \$640,000 for capital projects to 17 nonprofit organizations that serve priority populations within their communities. The grants will fund capital investments to increase access to transportation services for vulnerable community members.
- An additional \$160,000 was awarded through the TSM Operating Grant Program to six nonprofit organizations. The funding from these grants will support the day-to-day operating costs associated with increasing access to transportation assistance.
- On June 20<sup>th</sup>, WMATA launched a reduced fare program 'Metro Lift,' to create more equitable and affordable access to transit across the region. Customers in DC, Maryland and Virginia who qualify for the US Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) are eligible to enroll. Customers enrolled in Metro Lift will receive a 50 percent discount for any travel on Metrorail and Metrobus.
- On Monday, June 5, MCDOT announced the soft launch of a new [Ride On Trip Planner app](#). The new Ride On Trip Planner app features trip planning across multiple modes including Ride On buses, Metro rail, and buses, scooters, and Bikeshare. Additionally, the app will have crowd sourcing information for Ride On buses to give live reports on arrival times and ridership levels to alert riders if an incoming bus is at, or near, capacity.
  
- African American Health Program- Monique Gardner
  - Smithsonian- quilting program will present its quilt shortly
  - A trip is planned to the National African American History and Culture Museum
  
- Latino Health Initiative- Lizama announced their program has been nominated for an EMMY award.
  
- JCA Interages- Kathi Dennis noted that her organization has operated for over 35 years. They are conducting summer programs in partnership with the libraries

and other groups. Summer reading programs will be held in five libraries that will involve student volunteers. In August, in partnership with the African American Health group, they will conduct a two-day tech program. They have received funding from AmeriCorps to support a foster grandparents program targeted at low-income older adults. A small stipend is offered to qualifying participants whose incomes do not exceed \$52,000.

- Wise Cities- Marie Brodsky, a student from the University of Maryland, described the origins of a program she designed and initiated to engage older adults and to address their loneliness and social isolation. In the course of her research, she discovered that many organizations have difficulty communicating or reaching potential users of their programs. She developed a program to consolidate information to make it easy for the public to learn about the programs and, in many cases, also arranged transportation to these programs. Her project is intergenerational and uses young people to help. Wise Cities primarily serves areas in Virginia but Marie would like to expand into Montgomery County. She is also seeking financial assistance for the program.

**Presentation and Discussion:** Councilmember Gabe Albornoz and Legislative Analyst, Tara Clemons Johnson

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Councilmember Albornoz expressed appreciation for the work of the commission and stated that the council takes into account the recommendations of the CoA. He then addressed the budget and predicted that there will be challenges ahead. He cited the need to address education and the need to remain competitive regarding salaries for teachers. Much of the enacted tax increase for FY24 will go to education. However, the Department of HHS fared well too, particularly because it provides direct services to racially and culturally diverse residents. The councilmember described the need for the council to adopt a different strategy during the forthcoming budget challenges, particularly, the need to address problems more systemically as was the case during the 2008 recession.

Mr. Albornoz expects cuts for next fiscal year and stated that we must be strategic about ensuring that vulnerable people are not disadvantaged as cuts are considered. It will be important for the county departments to collaborate to ensure that mutual and cross-cutting goals are identified and advised that this would be a productive approach in considering programs for older adults. He noted, in particular, mental health issues and predicted that the current political environment could have adverse effects on many people, such as social isolation, despair, etc.

The Pedestrian Master Plan could greatly benefit older adults and advised the commission to focus on the elements in the pedestrian master plan. He also was hopeful that the new state administration will be more responsive to the needs of the county and urged the commission to be aggressive in advocating to our representatives in Annapolis because there are many challenges that the county cannot resolve without state assistance and input.

He then entertained questions.

-Bob Levey described two areas of great concern—the WMATA deficit and the fact that wealthy residents of the county are moving to other states. Bob wanted to know how the tax increases would affect these concerns. Mr. Alborno stated that additional tax increases would be dead on arrival. He noted that the recordation tax has just been substantially increased for homes over \$600k. He shares Bob’s concerns but hopes the county will make adjustments that will include some reductions. There are some places to make cuts, such as not filling certain vacancies. He stressed the importance of continuing to address quality of life issues, like crime reduction, good libraries.

-Art Williams observed that the county school enrollment is no longer comprised of a majority of white students. He urged that the school system not be starved of funds because the majority of students are now Black and Latino. He expressed consternation that we are unwilling to increase taxes to pay for schools. Mr. Alborno replied that we just raised taxes and funded the superintendent’s budget request. Further, the Board of Education has acknowledged that they have received funding to pay significant portions of their funding needs. He also noted that other county programs benefit children such as the likely rent control proposals that are now being considered by the county council.

-Wayne asked about requiring universal design in new housing and the role of technology. The councilmember said neither of these issues resides in any one county department and will thus require collaboration across departmental lines to advance these issues.

-Mona observed that Prince Georges County has mandated some universal design elements.

-Beverly stated that we need an ambassador program to share information with county residents. To launch and maintain the program, a designated staff person is necessary. Mr. Alborno thought this was feasible.

Tara Clemens Johnson discussed the FY24 budget process. She first described the sequence of events leading to a final vote: the County Executive transmits his operating budget to the council in mid-March. The council, in turn, holds public hearings, conducts work sessions, and reconciles all expenditures and revenues across operating and capital budgets prior to the budget's final approval in May. Of note: the budget must be balanced. The council must hold public hearings. The council may not set a property tax rate greater than the previous year's property tax unless all councilmembers vote in favor of an increased rate.

For the FY24 budget, the budget process included an Operating Budget Equity Tool that was required of all departments in developing their budgets. Specifically, proposals were evaluated on how they addressed and reduced/eliminated disparities or improved outcomes for communities of color and low-incomes.

The approved budget for DHHS Aging and Disability Services included the following:

- Increase in the Developmental Disabilities (4%) and Adult Medical Day Care (2%) supplement
- Medicaid Long-term Care Services - \$1.2 million
  - SB636 requires Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to create and execute a waitlist reduction plan and registries by FY28. The Governor is required to include enough funding in the FY24 budget to reduce the waiting lists by 50%.
  - Includes increases or enhancements to the Community First Choice program (CFC) Nurse Monitoring program, the Assessment, Evaluation and Review Services (AERS) and the Autism waiver program
- The Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) Commission was funded, including a .5 FTE
  - The IDD Commission was established through Bill 10-23 approved March 2023. Councilmember Albornoz was the lead sponsor. The IDD Commission consists of 19 members and can advocate at the state and federal level.
- There were no cuts to the Aging and Disability Services budget from FY23 FY24 Related County Grant programs. The Grants office gives priority to programs/efforts not covered by the County elsewhere.
  - \$1.5 million in grants for organizations supporting people with disabilities: grants will target needs of the people with disabilities providing an opportunity for innovative and experimental

programs, address gaps in services, and provide resources to support nonprofit partners serving persons with disabilities.

- \$1.5 million in Senior Support grants
- \$1.2 Million in Underserved Community

Ms. Clemons Johnson and Ms. Shuman, chief of staff to Mr. Albornoz entertained questions.

-David asked for advice and guidance on how commission members should think about budget priorities for FY 25. Ms. Clemons Johnson suggested that the priority should focus on the consequences of failing to fund a particular budget item: "Describe a need that will go unmet, the gap that would be created in the absence of funding." Who would be affected? If it is a new budget item, what is innovative about it? Who will benefit from its implementation? Try to quantify the impact. She predicted that it will be hard to cut the HHS budget because it funds vital direct services.

Beth Shuman advised that the nursing home inspection issue requires continued CoA advocacy. She suggested that it is helpful to show that several departments or levels of government are involved in an issue. It is useful to make these connections in advance and to start at the department level and work up to council staff and members. Partnerships are key. The commission needs to be creative. She sees housing and transportation as key issues.

Tara Clemons Johnson advised that in crafting budget priorities the commission should work on filling existing vacancies. Otherwise, these slots will be eliminated. She suggested that commission members could meet with OMB staff to ask about how to cost-out a particular position

## **Old Business**

- *Approval of May CoA minutes*- The minutes were approved as presented.
- *Chair's Report*
  - David attended the town hall meeting attended by members of the county council. Questions from the public covered a broad range of topics and concerns. David reiterated his conviction of the importance of the need to continue to forcefully advocate at every opportunity for Montgomery County to be a "Community for a Lifetime."



- David expressed condolences to all who knew Jack Sprague. Jack was co-chair of the COA Public Policy Committee, and he organized and hosted the COA Legislative breakfasts during his tenure. He helped the CoA understand the policies that impacted older adults and he used his acumen to advance those issues.
  - A handout on upcoming events was distributed. In addition, Jenna Crawley the Director, Multisector Planning and Age Friendly Initiatives for MD Dept of Aging will be the guest along with Patrice and Barbara at an upcoming GROWS meeting on June 26<sup>th</sup> to discuss Multisector Planning and the HCBS Workforce Task Force recommendations.
  - David urged members to consider how the CoA can strengthen relationships and build social connections and cited the recent statements from the US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD, concerning the adverse effects of social isolation on health and well-being.
- *Budget Report*
    - Niki reported that the current balance in the CoA account is \$3545.12. The most recent expense was in the amount of \$220 for the technology forum.
  - Update on Summit on Aging- Shawn Brennan
    - The purpose of the Summit to be held on October 26, is to foster conversations that inspire action among residents, advocates, elected officials, and staff of government and community organizations/businesses; and to reenergize and focus the Age Friendly movement in Montgomery County with priority recommendations. The Summit will feature plenary sessions that address changing demographics, intergenerational relationships, and opportunities; and creating a community for a lifetime. Breakout sessions will include: Building a Community Designed for Longevity; Caring and Supporting Each Other and Staying Connected and Engaged.
- FY25 Budget Priorities - A description of the process the commission will use to determine budget priorities for the forthcoming fiscal year was described and discussed, including the elements required to describe the proposed priority. Each CoA committee will develop budget priorities that will then be presented to the full commission on July 20. Ballots will be sent to each commission member who will be requested to rank their preferred priorities. Advocacy priorities that do not have budgetary implications will be considered separately.
  - Acknowledgement of Odile Brunetto's service to the county and commission.

Marcia Pruzan read a letter of appreciation and noted the commission's donation to Manna in Dr. Brunetto's honor.

### **Committee Reports**

· *Ageing in Community* -Wayne summarized the committee's June meeting at which Shawn Brennen discussed Age-Friendly Montgomery. She suggested ways commission members can collaborate with Age-Friendly working committees. The AIC also began its discussion of possible budget priorities for FY25. The next meeting July 13.

· *Health and Wellness* - Marcia reported that the Life Transition package is finished and will be available in the fall. At its June meeting, the committee received an in-depth debriefing on the home health workforce taskforce report from Patrice McGhee and Barbara Selter. The committee identified one budget priority related to this report and will reconvene on July 10 to follow-up on identifying budget priorities.

· *Communications* - Beverly reported that 50+ will play a rerun in July. The August show will be on solo aging. The Ambassador pilot will start in September. A staff person is needed to coordinate the program. The Library liaisons have all been identified.

· *Public Policy* - Janice summarized the discussion at the last meeting. The nursing home inspection issue remains a concern. There has been no response to the commission's letter to the State Secretary of Health. Affordable housing is under consideration as a possible advocacy focus Mary Sweeney will be invited to brief the committee on potential areas and to educate the committee.

### **New Business**

- Carol Craig, Director, Senior Nutrition Program (SNP)

During COVID, it became readily apparent that isolation is a huge threat to older adults. SNP worked with the Department of Recreation to deliver packs of 7 frozen meals to seniors the entire time the senior centers were closed. Their return to socialization at senior centers was very slow. Many are still very fearful about COVID. Eventually, people began to return to the centers. To encourage that trend, Ms. Craig developed an activity that individuals needed "to be present to win" style. Each month there are two or three "surprises". It could be a double dessert, a SNP-branded flashlight, or snowman lollipops etc. The response to this activity has been favorable. After the first quarter of FY23, SNP had a 7% increase in attendance. After the second quarter, it was 20%. The

senior center directors and site managers are attributing the increase to the special activities.

SNP is about to use a new and better caterer to provide restaurant-quality meals, and they predict a 35-40% increase in attendance before the end of 2023. They are also rolling out the restaurant initiative to congregate dining in August and have been piloting that in home-delivered meal locations since November by delivering meals from various restaurants once per week instead of the normal Meals on Wheels fare. It has been well received. The goal of the restaurant initiative is to provide variety, expose participants to other cultures and cuisines, and to support local businesses in doing so. The majority of this has been funded with ARPA or HDC5 special grant funding.

The rising cost of food has increased hunger among low-income elders, driving the need for more and more meals. Many SNP beneficiaries report that the SNP meal is all they eat each day. That is why it is so crucial to reach more older adults and bring them into the program. A recent survey of County residents showed that fewer than 5% are even aware of the Senior Nutrition Program. That means there are more than 175,000 people over the age of 65 in Montgomery County and only 9,000 of them know about SNP.

SNP is partnering with Cecily Coleman and Dr. McGee on an outreach campaign that will make use of variety of communications approaches, including Twitter, Facebook, email blast, YouTube, and in-person presentations, etc. Once people come for lunch, there is a better opportunity to connect them with other programs and services.

What does SNP need from the Commission on Aging? Advocacy for more funding. The SNP program is experiencing rises in the cost of food and increases in meal prices from various home-delivered meal operators and from SNPs own caterer. The meal price under the current caterer rose to \$7.05 and under the newly awarded contract will rise to \$7.99.

Currently, SNP is relying on ARPA funding. But in September 2024, that funding will disappear. What then? Older American's Act funding and state funding are awarded using a population-based formula. USDA or NSIP (Nutrition Services Incentive Program) funding is based on how many meals were served the previous year, so that will grow as SNP participation does. But NSIP returns only about 74 cents for every \$8 meal.

The innovations and ideas of the Montgomery County SNP are being copied by other counties. In the last six months, Ms. Craig has been requested by the

National Nutritionist at the Administration for Community Living to talk with RTI International about Montgomery County's program. This includes a Quality Control position created that is currently being done by a broker with tremendous success. They will be adding two more of these positions after the new fiscal year starts. Positions that are funded by ARPA will disappear when that grant ends. Currently, half of the team are contractors. And one is only a part-time position (although the need is for full time.) The program needs additional permanent staffing, food safety equipment, and expanded training and hours for Nutrition Site Managers.

**Adjourn-** 12:10 p.m.– Lunch with Senior Nutrition Program