

**CoA Executive Committee Meeting  
March 21, 2019**

**CoA Member Attendees:**

Stephanie Edelstein, Vice Chair  
Beverly Rollins, Secretary  
Revathi Vikram, Treasurer  
Mort Faller, Co-chair, Public Policy Committee  
Amy Harbison (by phone), Co-chair, Communications and Community Outreach Committee  
Alan Kaplan, Co-chair, Health and Wellness Committee  
Nanine Meiklejohn, Co-chair, Aging in Community Committee

**Staff:**

Odile Brunetto, HHS, Acting Chief, Aging and Disability Services

**Welcome/Vice-Chair's Remarks**

Because Chair Jean Dinwiddie is out of town, Vice Chair Stephanie Edelstein presided over today's meeting and will preside over the March 28 full CoA meeting.

A reporter from NPR/WAMU has expressed an interest in joining our March 28<sup>th</sup> meeting. Sasha Simon, the reporter, might interview CoA members. If it can be arranged, she will also speak with Commissioner Revathi Vikram by telephone as a follow up to the CoA's March 19 Public Forum on diversity. The reporter would also like to interview Chair Dinwiddie as well as the two LGBTQ panelists who spoke at the forum. She will be asking why the CoA decided to host a forum regarding Montgomery County's diverse older adult population, what was learned, and why the LGBTQ community was included. She will also be asking about the other communities who were featured and what issues were raised. The Commissioners decided they should provide the interviewer with a copy of the CoA report from the June 2018 meeting on diversity and also a copy of the CoA's recently revised briefing book.

Commissioner Nanine Meiklejohn commented that she thought the March 19 forum went well. The statement was made that even though about 40 people did not show up it appeared that there were barely enough seats at the plenary session. It was also noted that there were not enough microphones. For future forums the planning process should begin earlier and that the attendance should not be underestimated. In addition to the NPR/WAMU reporter, there were reporters/crews from Montgomery Community Media and WDVM-TV at the forum.

Recommendations on candidates to fill the seven CoA vacancies were sent to the County Council two weeks ago. All of the applicants interviewed were highly qualified and the group was very diverse, both in age and ethnicity.

Dr. Brunetto stated that the CoA's quarterly report is not due at this time. She will inform the members when it is due.

## **February 2019 Executive Committee Minutes**

The minutes were approved.

### **AAA Director's Report**

Dr. Brunetto discussed County Executive Elrich's FY20 proposed budget. Dr. Brunetto pointed out a number of important budget items including:

- Senior Center programs would receive a 35 percent (\$197,002) reduction in operating expenses. Dr. Brunetto stated that a representative from the Recreation Department will brief her next week about this.
- There is a \$490,000 increase in the Homecare Services contracts. This will allow the County to serve 47 new individuals.
- Home and Community Based MA waiver services will receive a \$483,918 increase. This is not for an expansion of services but to maintain the services already in place due to census increase.
- A new Senior Home Sharing pilot program would be created with a budget of \$174,000. One reason it was established was because focus groups in 2018 showed interest and the County decided to develop a pilot project. It is also a program for which the CoA advocated.
- Handicap rental assistance, which is part of the program for homeless individuals, was reduced by \$329,679. This program may be eliminated. Dr. Brunetto stated that she has asked program officials to let her know how many seniors are currently enrolled in this program. The programs for homeless interventions, however, will receive an additional \$1 million.
- Non-profit organizations can apply for grants through Montgomery County for senior-related programs. Ten Villages are recommended to receive funds this year; in fact, every year more Villages are being funded. The grants range from \$8,000 to \$30,000.
- There is a new \$40,000 grant for the Jewish Council for the Aging. The grant money will pay for staff to recruit/coordinate volunteer drivers to transport seniors.
- There will be a wage adjustment for employees across Montgomery County. Union employees will receive a 2.4 percent increase in November 2019, and non-union employees will receive a 2 percent increase. In addition, on their work-date anniversary all employees will receive a 3.5 percent increase.
- Staff in the Montgomery County school system and the fire departments will receive pay increases pursuant to their collective bargaining agreements.

Dr. Brunetto finished her report by noting that Sam Oji from Montgomery County's Transportation Department will address the CoA at its March 28 meeting to discuss the Transportation Services Improvement Fund. She also said that she is expecting an email from Leslie Marks regarding the increase in housing allowances.

## **CoA Member Meetings with County Council Members**

During the month of April, CoA members will be meeting with County Council members to discuss relevant budget concerns regarding the FY20 budget. The Public Policy Committee will prepare the talking points for the CoA members. Dr. Brunetto will email the talking points that were prepared last year to Mort to use as a model. Many of the Commissioners have already signed up to meet with specific Council members but that list may have to be revised to balance the number of attendees going on the visits. Chair Dinwiddie is working on this.

## **Debrief of March 19, 2019 Public Forum**

At its March 28 meeting Commissioner Deborah Royster will debrief the CoA members on the activities and results of the March 19 CoA public forum on older adults and diversity in Montgomery County.

## **Committee Reports**

### ***Communications and Community Outreach Committee***

Commissioner Amy Harbison asked that whenever the CoA receives requests for interviews to please forward those requests to the Communications Committee. The Committee will then coordinate with a CoA member to do the interview and will prepare talking points. She noted that it is good to build relationships with reporters; the CoA can get a track record with them and this will build the CoA's reputation and work. The Committee could possibly develop a roster of CoA members who will talk to the press. There is a new managing editor at the Beacon that Commissioner Harbison met at the CoA's recent forum who wants to connect with CoA members.

It was suggested that the CoA place the names of the members of the press on its email list for future events. Also, names of individuals who speak at CoA meetings could be placed on that list.

Commissioner Harbison stated that with regard to the NPR/WAMU interview, if follow up is needed or if Commissioner Vikram does not feel comfortable doing it, she (Commissioner Harbison), will be happy to step in. The reporter is interested to learn why the CoA focused on diversity issues, in particular LGBTQ issues. The original impetus for the forum was to look at issues in marginalized communities; the CoA held a meeting on diversity issues in June 2018 and it wanted to expand and learn more. Participants were invited based on Montgomery County's demographic data. The LGBTQ community was invited because CoA members believed that it needs a voice, too.

Commissioner Vikram should have the CoA's briefing book available when she talks to the NPR/WAMU reporter. Tara Davis-Rama, who participated at the March 19 forum, could be the LGBTQ point person that the CoA refers to the NPR/WAMU reporter. Statistics about the growing diversity in Montgomery County would be good to share with the NPR/WAMU reporter. The report from the CoA's June 2018 meeting on diversity has that information in it and the Communications Committee is asking Dr. Brunetto's staff to share it with her. Commissioner Harbison will make sure that Commissioner Vikram has talking points about the CoA's work.

The “Seniors Today” tapings are going well and have an interesting mix of guests. The goal is to balance lighter information with more serious matters. A recent show featured the Olney Theater. In the near future they hope to interview County Executive Elrich and members of the County Council. The Committee wants to find out who the show’s audience is so that it can get better ratings. It needs statistics to do that but how can it be done? There must be statistics on viewership somewhere. On Verizon’s cable TV guide, the name “Seniors Today” is not indicated, it only shows the words “Public Access.” The CoA should advocate that it needs these viewership statistics, especially the ones that show demographics. That way, the Committee can better target the show to the audience. Many of the diverse communities in the County do not know about it. If the County knew who watches the show, then appropriate interpretation/translation could be requested. The Public Information Director position is currently vacant.

Commissioner Harbison stated that the Communications Committee is still getting its sea legs. It is attempting to define what the CoA’s strategic communications should look like. Members want to develop a strategy of what would be most beneficial to the CoA, and not just create a CoA message. It wants a plan that is proactive. Committee members will be working on some documents in the CoA’s briefing book. They will also be reaching out to the press and featuring CoA members on “Seniors Today” prior to CoA forums. The Committee hopefully can develop a list of reporters that can further CoA interests and build a relationship with them – keep them apprised of what’s going on in the aging world. More reporters today are covering longevity issues.

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

Commissioner Meiklejohn reported that representatives from the County’s transportation program did a presentation at the Committee’s March 12 meeting. They discussed the Flexride program, which will be launched in June. Flexride is a 1-year pilot program and will be conducted in Glenmont, Wheaton, and Rockville. It will feature smaller vans that will be used on an on-demand basis, called by using an application on cell phones. Users can book the buses in advance. The County is currently considering whether the program should be available only during specific time periods. One reason for the pilot program is because the ridership numbers on the regular Ride On buses are weak and the County may be wanting to increase them and retain the service. The County is interested in CoA feedback on such questions as how suitable the program is for older adults and how it could be made more senior-friendly. The service is not door-to-door so the rider must find a way to get from his or her home to the bus location. Commissioners Miriam Kelty and Dick Jourdenais are going to prepare a COA letter with recommendations on how to make it more age-friendly.

The Committee is considering discussion rent stabilization. The County is getting further behind on this issue. County Executive Elrich provided Commissioner Meiklejohn with the name of an individual on his staff with whom she could follow up.

The Committee is also looking at the issue of alternative housing models and what a project regarding this topic would look like. The project may include home sharing. In many minority families older adults live with them. Would it be possible for these families to get a tax credit or some other type of credit? Could this be considered home sharing? Although home sharing does not currently offer financial incentives, it could be considered in the future. Or perhaps instead of financial incentives some other types of services could be offered to the family.

The suggestion was made that the Committee may want to research the “Grandfamilies” housing complex in DC, a housing facility that sets aside units for grandparent caregivers. The complex recognizes that grandparents often provide care for their grandchildren.

The Committee may also want to look at “co-housing,” a concept where tenants have their own apartment but there are common areas, such as a dining room and a TV lounge. The co-housing communities in the County are inter-generational. This concept has been around for a while and there is no government involvement except for planning/zoning, etc. The apartments can be co-ops or individually owned. Currently, there are two of these facilities in Montgomery County. Sara Lovinger is a contact, and there is an organization for co-housing nationwide.

### ***Health & Wellness Committee***

Commissioner Alan Kaplan stated that the committee is trying to finalize its paper on the “gap” population – those individuals who have too much income to qualify for Medicaid yet do not have enough income to afford assisted living. The committee is working on a report and hopes to finalize it, with recommendations, by April.

The next issue that the Committee will be studying is hearing and hearing aids. Because of Gallaudet University’s proximity to Montgomery County, the County has one of the largest hearing-impaired communities in the Nation. Hearing loss causes social isolation and individuals who lose their hearing later in life have many stigmas and a greater chance of developing dementia.

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

Commissioner Edelstein provided a brief update on the status of CoA-relevant legislation that is pending with the State legislature. The bill to create an elder exploitation unit in the Office of the Attorney General did not get out of committee. The “Nursing Home Patient Rights” bill is moving forward, as are some other bills the CoA has supported. The “Waiver Issue” legislation is moving forward. This is the week that the State legislature will be taking a lot of actions.

Other issues that the Committee is considering include:

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- The FY20 County budget: more detail is needed from Dr. Brunetto before the CoA can decide on what its budget priorities are. The CoA will make a decision at its March 28 meeting on what its top priorities are.
  - AMCoA: A follow-up letter regarding forming a Statewide Association of Maryland Commissions on Aging (AMCoA) will be released next week to all of the Maryland CoAs. The Committee has not received responses from 13 of these CoAs. Howard County is offering to host a meeting of all state CoAs in Sept, which might be a good idea. The Committee needs to get this on the CoA’s agenda to discuss.
  - TSIF bill: No word has been received regarding the Transportation Services Improvement Fund bill. A response was promised in December 2018. It is pending with the Department of Transportation. CoA members are looking forward to hearing from Sam Oji (Transportation Department representative) at the March 28 meeting.

- Voter accessibility issues: The Elections judge who raised this issue received a response from the Board of Elections stating that the Board will look into it. A BoE representative has accepted our invitation to address the CoA at the September meeting.
  - State “Age Friendly” status: The Committee is continuing to look at whether and how the State of Maryland could be designated as “Age Friendly.”
  - 2019 legislative breakfast: The Committee is starting to consider dates for the breakfast. That date needs to be locked in.
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### **Review of March 28, 2019 CoA Meeting Agenda**

Committee members discussed the agenda for the CoA’s March 28 meeting and possible approaches to our budget advocacy. It was decided that Dr. Brunetto will discuss County Executive Elrich’s proposed budget and the CoA members can decide on the primary issues it wants to address. Dr. Brunetto will provide a list comparing the dollar amounts the members requested on priorities in the FY20 budget to what the County actually allocated.

One priority “ask” the CoA could request would be to restore the funds of the older adult programs that are cut in the FY20 budget. The CoA could request that the funds be kept at the current levels. A second “ask” could be for the budget to continue funding issues that the CoA supports. During the meeting the CoA will vote on its priorities. The Committee members ended the discussion by approving the 3/28 agenda.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 am.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beverly Rollins, Secretary

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