

Commission on Aging Montgomery County, Maryland 2020 Annual Report



Department of Health and Human Services
May 2021

Montgomery County Commission on Aging 2020 Annual Report

Enabling Legislation

The Commission on Aging was established by Montgomery County in 1974 pursuant to a requirement of the Federal *Older Americans Act* of 1965 that there be an Advisory Council to the Area Agency on Aging. (42 U.S.C. Sec. 3001 et. seq.; MC Code Article III, Sec. 27-34.) In creating the Commission, the Council declared:

It is hereby declared to be the public policy of the County to promote and initiate programs to improve conditions of the aging or elderly in the County; to work toward elimination of restrictions which impede older citizens from full participation in the mainstream of community life; and to assist and stimulate all levels of government and the community to be more responsive to the needs of the County's older citizens.

Among the powers granted to the Commission are the following:

(f) To study and investigate by means of public or private meetings, conferences and public hearings, conditions which may result in unmet needs or in discrimination or prejudice because of age.

(g) To advise and counsel the residents of the County, the County council, the County executive and the various departments of County, State and Federal governments on matters involving the needs of the aging, and to recommend such procedures, programs or legislation as it may deem necessary and proper to promote and ensure equal rights and opportunities for all persons, regardless of their age.

(h) To work to remove the unmet needs or discrimination or prejudice on the basis of age in such areas as housing, recreation, employment, education, community services and related matters. (MC Code Article III, Sec. 27-34)

Commission Membership

The County Code requires that the Commission include at least 18 members appointed by the County Executive, subject to confirmation by the County Council. Members must be County residents, and a majority must be age 60 and older. Members are to include: those who participate in or who are eligible to participate in programs under the *Older Americans Act*; local elected officials or their designees; individuals who are or who have been active in government, business, industry, labor, community service, religious, social services, education, and representatives of major organizations or agencies concerned with aging.

Collaborations and Partnerships

The Commission collaborates with other boards, committees, commissions, and stakeholder groups. Several such entities send liaisons to Commission meetings, and some Commission members serve as liaisons to other boards, committees and commissions. The Commission looks for opportunities to collaborate with other groups on common issues. In addition, most Commission members are active in other organizations supporting senior services.

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Letter from the Chair



The Honorable Marc Elrich
The Honorable Tom Hucker

The Montgomery County Commission on Aging is pleased to provide its Annual Report for 2020. The Report describes the key activities of the Commission as an advisor to County officials and as the Advisory Council to the Area Agency on Aging as mandated by the *Older Americans Act*. The Commission also serves as an effective advocate for the interests and concerns of the County's older adults and their families.

In 2020, despite the many challenges presented by the global pandemic, the Commission continued to monitor the County's progress in achieving the goals and vision of the *Senior Agenda: A Community for a Lifetime*. We were honored to have Council President Sidney Katz and Councilmembers Gabe Albornoz and Will Jawando speak at Commission meetings. We were pleased that some of the Commission's budget priorities were included in the FY21 County Operating Budget. We thank the County Executive and County Council for your initiatives and support of older adults.

The Commission's significant activities in 2020 included:

- Despite the challenges faced due to the global pandemic, after a brief pause in activities, the CoA continued to meet virtually to advocate for issues facing older adults in Montgomery County.
- We produced a fact sheet on "Age-Related Hearing Loss" that has been widely distributed throughout the County and the State.
- We hosted a virtual Legislative Breakfast for legislators including members of the Montgomery County Delegation to the State's General Assembly and of the Congressional Delegation.
- CoA members met individually with the County Executive and members of the County Council to advocate for older adult programming and resources.
- We testified twice before the County Council in support of the CoA's budget priorities on issues affecting older adults.
- The CoA lobbied for resources to be included in the County budget for: two additional Social Worker positions in HHS, one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public

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Guardianship program; legal assistance for older adults to avoid eviction from their homes; expanding senior nutrition programs; raising awareness of older adult services; maintaining the Housing Initiative Fund; and maintaining and expanding senior adult programs.

The Commission acknowledges the significant revenue challenges affecting the County budget. While budget recommendations in 2020 focused on continuing to improve and enhance both current programs and new efforts, we remain sensitive to economic issues affecting the County.

The Commission's Aging in Community and Health and Wellness Committees explored topics with invited experts to identify areas of study to be further investigated and/or recommended for Commission action and advocacy. The Public Policy Committee monitored relevant County and State bills and sent letters of support as appropriate.

We could not have accomplished all that without the support of County staff. In this regard, we express our deep appreciation to Department of Health Human Services director Raymond Crowel. In addition, it is with great respect and admiration that we acknowledge the wise counsel and outstanding support and guidance of Dr. Odile Brunetto, Chief of Aging and Disability Services and previous Director of Montgomery County's Area Agency on Aging (AAA). The following AAA staff also provide outstanding assistance to the Commission: Tremayne Jones, Office Services Coordinator; Pazit Aviv, Village Coordinator; Shawn Brennan, Mobility and Transportation Manager; Lylie Fisher, Caregiver Coordinator; Tina Purser-Langley, Senior Health and Wellness Coordinator; and Erin Smith, Program Data Manager. Their contributions are invaluable to the Commission and to the well-being of all older adults in the County.

The Commission looks forward to engaging with you on matters that significantly affect the quality of life of the County's older adult residents and their families.

Respectfully,

Jean Dinwiddie, Chair



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Commission Officers

Jean Dinwiddie, Chair
Amoke Alakoye, Vice Chair
Beverly Rollins, Secretary
T. Ryan Wilson, Budget and Finance Advisor

Committee Chairs

Aging in Community: Nanine Meiklejohn and Monica Schaeffer
Health and Wellness: Neal Brown and Marsha Weber
Public Policy: Stephanie Edelstein and Ryan Wilson

Task Force Leaders

COVID Testing in Assisted Living Facilities: Eddie Rivas
Dementia, Policing and Racial Equity: Karen Maricheau
Social Isolation: Maritza Rivera and David Engle
Transportation: Wayne Berman

Commission Members

Amoke Alakoye, Wayne Berman, Neal Brown, Jean Dinwiddie, Joyce Dubow,
Stephanie Edelstein, Morton Faller, Arunima Ghosh, Richard Jourdenais, Miriam Kelty,
Morris Klein, Karen Maricheau, Nanine Meiklejohn, Ruby Moone, Karon Phillips, Edgar Rivas,
Maritza Rivera, Beverly Rollins, Deborah Royster, Monica H. Schaeffer, Barbara Selter,
Ann M. Serafenas, Katie Smith, Mary Sweeney, Tho Tran, Hillery Tumba, Marsha Weber,
T. Ryan Wilson, Arthur Williams, Janice Zalen

Staff

Odile Brunetto, Chief, Aging and Disability Services; Pazit Aviv, Village Coordinator;
Shawn Brennan, Mobility and Transportation Program Manager; Lylie Fisher, Caregiver
Coordinator; Tremayne Jones, Office Services Coordinator; Tina Purser-Langley, Senior Health
and Wellness Coordinator; Erin K. Smith, Program Data Manager

Liaisons

Elise Barnes, African American Health Program; Adriane Clutter, Montgomery County
Department of Recreation; David Engle, GROWS; Denise Israel, Montgomery County
Department of Transportation; Betty Lam, Montgomery County Office of Community Affairs;
Leslie Marks, Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs;
Aseem Nigam, Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs;
Marcia Pruzan, Age-Friendly Montgomery; Jim Resnick, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue;
Robin Riley, Montgomery County Department of Recreation; Stacey Sigler, Montgomery
County Department of Recreation; Phil Smakula, Montgomery County Department of
Recreation; Sara Swarr, Montgomery County Department of Recreation; Arlee Wallace, African
American Health Program; Tiffany Ward, Montgomery County Racial Equity Program

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2020 Commission on Aging Accomplishments

- Through the use of Zoom and conference calls, the CoA continued to meet and advocate for issues facing older adults in Montgomery County even during the throes of the global COVID-19 pandemic.
- The CoA identified, researched, and developed solutions to problems that older adults face because of the COVID-19 crisis.
- The Health and Wellness Committee developed a “Hearing Loss Fact Sheet” that was posted on the website and distributed via e-mails and listservs.
- The Commission hosted a virtual Legislative Breakfast for members of the Montgomery County delegations to the Maryland General Assembly and to Congress.
- The CoA lobbied for resources to be included in the County budget for: two additional Social Worker positions in HHS, one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public Guardianship program; legal assistance for older adults to avoid eviction from their homes; expanding senior nutrition programs; raising awareness of older adult services; maintaining the Housing Initiative Fund; and maintaining and expanding senior adult programs.
- Members met individually (virtually) or via conference call with the County Executive and the members of the County Council to advocate for older adult programming and resources.



culture that is continuously and comprehensively supportive of a diverse and inclusive workforce.

- The Commission sent several letters to State and local legislators in support of laws, programs, and services affecting older adults.

Commission on Aging Budget Priorities

The CoA develops annual budget priorities that take into consideration the mission as set forth in the enabling legislation as well as information and data from County agencies, elected officials, and outside experts.

Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Priorities

- *HHS*: (1) Expand the home-delivered Senior Nutrition program to include weekends; (2) add two social worker positions: one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public

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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.

Fiscal Year 2022 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

Area Agency on Aging

The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is responsible for the provision of continuum of home and community-based services and provides staff support to the Commission on Aging.

In conjunction with community partners, the AAA is involved in administering County and State grant awards to contractors for services, public education/outreach, networking, and referrals.

AAAs were established under the Federal *Older Americans Act* in 1973 to respond to the needs of Americans ages 60 and older in every local community. The AAA strives to develop a range of options that allow older adults to choose the home and community-based services and living arrangements that suit them best. The AAA is part of a national network of over 670 AAAs established under the *Older Americans Act* to improve the quality of life for older persons by a network that maintains a holistic view of aging. The AAAs are mandated to "foster the development and implementation of comprehensive and coordinated systems to serve older individuals..."

Highlights of AAA Activities in Fiscal Year 2020

2020 will forever be etched in history as the year that challenged the human spirit. The COVID-19 pandemic, racial unrest, and record loss has forever changed our nation. During the first and second quarter of both the County/State Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) and the Federal Fiscal Year 2020 (FFY20) the AAA provided traditional services, i.e., business as usual. The third quarter brought normal business to an abrupt halt due to the Coronavirus outbreak. However, amid the uncertainty of the pandemic and racial reckoning, the AAA continued to serve vulnerable residents with compassion and heartfelt dedication. The AAA stood socially distanced in solidarity with our peers and allies in the Department of Health and Human Services, and with our strong and robust provider network embracing change. The AAA pivoted to virtual services and limited face-to-face encounters to meet the needs of older adults.

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These program highlights demonstrate the resiliency of AAA staff during FY20 and FFY20:

- The Aging and Disability Services' Maryland Access Point answered 20,065 calls to assist seniors, persons with disabilities, and their families to provide access to information and short- and long-term care services offered both by the County and our non-profit partners.
- The Long-Term Care Ombudsman program conducted more than 1,050 onsite visits to long-term care facilities prior to March 2020. Due to COVID restrictions beginning March 2020, the program shifted to online visits. In addition, the AAA provided more than 1,500 information consultations with individuals, 253 consultations with providers, and investigated 210 formal complaints. The program has a dedicated volunteer corps who provided more than 2,070 volunteer hours in FFY20. It distributed over 4,000 activity books in July and October 2020. In July, over 180 Long Term Care Facilities received books entitled "Quarantine Activity Book" distributed by LTCO staff/volunteers. Because October is "Resident Rights Month" and the 2020 theme was "Connection Matters," the activity books were more robust. The books included sections for the residents to record their stories, and the guide encouraged caregivers, staff, and residents to "connect." A total of 3,000 books were distributed to long-term care residents.
- The Public Guardianship program served 75 persons in need of protective services (as determined by the courts), conducting more than 660 face-to-face contacts with clients before the pandemic ended these face-to-face visits. Additionally, the program conducted 14 education and training events for new staff, nursing home, and hospital case managers, and a Center for Continuous Learning training. The Public Guardianship program conducted preventative assessments and education which helped residents avoid 21 formal cases. The program lost 17 clients due to COVID-19; the end-of-life decisions were increasingly difficult and challenging as staff managed their own COVID related grief.
- The Senior Nutrition program served approximately 5,000 clients and provided more than 601,600 meals in FFY20, both at congregate sites and through home-delivery. As a result of COVID restrictions, all congregate meals were suspended in March 2020. The meal program offered at senior centers transitioned to a combination of home-delivered and grab-n-go meals. Seniors were served boxes of seven frozen meals per week delivered by the Department of Recreation and funded by the Senior Nutrition program. Congregate programs in housing sites shifted to meals being delivered directly to the residents' apartments. Several additional senior housing sites were offered the meals during the initial stay-at-home order. Congregate ethnic meal programs were permitted to continue providing meals to members via home delivery or grab-and-go. The Chinese and Vietnamese programs are providing restaurant meals in partnership with local restaurants. Existing home-delivered meal providers operated as usual, with an uptick. In November, all programs were required to discontinue serving seniors self-identified as low risk following a notice period. Those who wished to be reevaluated for continued service were instructed to contact the Food Access Call Center through 311.
- The AAA, via contracts with the Mobile Dentist, provided dental care and dentures to approximately 120 seniors who lacked insurance, a significant reduction from 2019 due to COVID restrictions.

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- The nurses team conducted 3,353 Adult Evaluation and Review Services evaluations, which are mandated to enable eligible persons to receive Medicaid-funded, community-based long-term services.
- The AAA provided nurse monitoring services (via its contract partners) to more than 2,650 Community First Choice program participants. The AAA Supports Planning Agency served 320 Community First Choice clients. All of these services are Medicaid funded.
- The Health and Wellness program was forced to reconfigure many of its outreach programs during FY20 due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. Prior to the health emergency, the program offered “Bone Builders” exercise classes at more than 30 locations throughout the County. The program transitioned in the third quarter to an online format. Although attendance has not returned to its previous levels, the online offering is growing in popularity. Alternative methods for “Matter of Balance,” “Stepping On,” and “Senior Fit” programs are being reviewed. Prior to COVID-19, community partners served more than 1,700 County residents.
- The Mobility and Transportation program focused on promoting volunteer driver programs and other transportation options in the County, including Ride-On Buses, Connect-a-Ride, and Escorted Transportation. Focus shifted to delivering groceries and other essential items, and later to coordinating trips to vaccine clinics.
- Since 2014, the Villages program has expanded to include over 30 villages. During the COVID emergency, the Village Coordinator successfully advocated for and staffed the County’s Food Access Call Center.
- The Caregiver Support program facilitated an Action Group for the County’s Dementia Friendly Initiative in partnership with the Alzheimer’s Association, and numerous other partners.
- The Senior Fellow for Age-Friendly Montgomery facilitated the submission of the “Age-Friendly Montgomery County 2020,” the County’s Age-Friendly Plan, five years after enrolling in the initiative.

Combatting Social Isolation and Boredom

Early in the pandemic, the AAA launched the “Engage @ Home” YouTube channel which features County staff and community partners highlighting health and wellness programs, cultural activities, and caregiver resources. “Engage@Home” has reached more than 115,000 viewers with over 411 hours viewed. To promote this resource and others, AAA staff created ["Thrive at Home"](#), an initiative that included a page on the County website listing such things as resources for residents looking for someone to talk to and activities for people with memory loss, and also a mailing of thousands of postcards with the “Thrive at Home” theme.



Commission on Aging Background

Older Adults in Montgomery County

The Commission's work is ever more significant as our older adult population continues to grow and to become more diverse. Seniors are the fastest growing age group in the County. By 2040 the Montgomery County older adult population (age 60+) is projected to increase from 233,592 to 315,666, an increase of 35 percent. Life expectancy is also increasing, with the population of older adults age 85+ expected to increase by approximately 77 percent between 2019 and 2030.

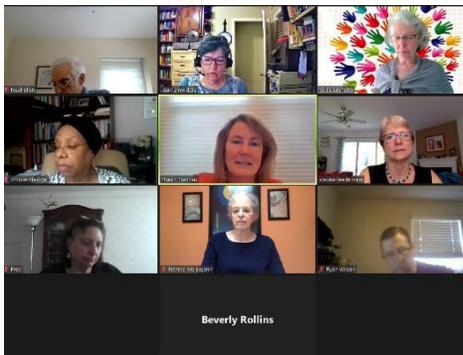
The older adult population of Montgomery County is also growing more diverse. Approximately 15 percent of residents age 60 and older are Asian; 14 percent are Black or African American; and 9 percent identify as Hispanic or Latino. Approximately 37 percent of County residents age 60+, the majority of whom are women, live alone.

The County is also home to significant numbers of low- and moderate-income older adults: 12 percent of households headed by an individual age 60+ have income less than 150 percent of poverty or \$18,210 per year for a single person. Housing costs are a serious issue, particularly for renters. For 24 percent of senior homeowners, housing costs exceed 30 percent of their income; 56 percent of senior renters spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent. Looking at the income that older adults need to live independently in Montgomery County, the monthly figure for a renter is \$33,840 a year (37 percent higher than the national average), \$44,268 a year for an individual with a mortgage (40 percent higher than the national average), and \$26,568 a year for an individual without a mortgage (31 percent higher than the national average).

In 2019, 21 percent of older adults living in the community reported having at least one physical disability. Many may require case management, transportation, in-home assistance, dental services, congregate and home-delivered meals, or other services. Respite care is often needed when the older adult lives with a caregiver.

CoA Organization and Core Activities

Commission activities include monthly meetings of the full Commission, the Executive Committee, and each of the three standing committees: Aging in Community, Health and Wellness, and Public Policy. In addition, task forces are convened to deal with specific issues.



Committees explore issues within their scope and identify challenges and gaps in services and supports. These issues may include such things as budget requests for programs for older adults or advocating at the County, State, or Federal level for laws, services, or programs. The committees often present their research to the full Commission for consideration for further action. The CoA also engages in studies of other age-relevant issues, which in recent years have included affordable housing, hearing loss issues, and the need for

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financial assistance to help cover the high cost of assisted living. Focus or Task Groups are created as needed to examine discrete issues such as ageism, employment discrimination, and caregiving. CoA also co-produces the monthly County Cable Montgomery program, *Seniors Today*, which informs the community about issues, programs, and activities for older adults. In 2020, alumni Commission member, Amy Harbison, hosted the program, which is broadcast several times each month and available for on-line viewing.

All CoA meetings are open to the public. In addition, to help inform the Commission's priorities and advocacy, full Commission and committee meetings frequently include invited guests who share their expertise on important topics. Meetings are also attended by representatives from other Montgomery County commissions, boards, committees, departments, and agencies, and interested stakeholders. Several Commissioners serve as liaisons to other relevant organizations and groups.

Commissioners are in frequent contact with the County Executive, County Council members, department directors and staff, State and Federal legislators, members of the public, and others to advance programs, services, and policies on behalf of County seniors. At the County level, the CoA provides oral and written testimony on legislative, budget, and program issues and priorities pending before the County Council. In addition, CoA

members meet with the County Executive, members of the Council, and executive branch directors; have ongoing communication with department staff; and collaborate with other County boards, committees, commissions, and stakeholders on issues of mutual interest. CoA members also engage with non-profit partners, private sector groups, and other stakeholders to identify challenges and develop solutions.



At the State level, the CoA responds to proposed legislation in the General Assembly and communicates with relevant State agencies and members of the Montgomery County delegation on issues of concern to older adults in the County. Members also testify at County and State hearings.

At the Federal level, the CoA writes letters on priority issues to appropriate Congressional representatives. Members also support Congressional and Executive Branch outreach conducted by national organizations that represent the older adult population on issues affecting Montgomery County residents.

The CoA usually convenes two significant annual events:

A **Public Forum** for older adults in the community to learn about issues that may affect them, and for the CoA to hear from older residents, caregivers, and service providers about their issues of concern.

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A **Legislative Breakfast** to allow the CoA the opportunity to meet with members of the Montgomery County delegation to the Maryland General Assembly and inform them about the Commission's work and priorities. It is also a chance for the CoA to learn about the legislators' plans for the upcoming legislative session and for all participants to identify areas for working together to benefit the older adults in the County.

These two events enhance CoA members' knowledge of the issues and concerns of older adults in Montgomery County and help to inform the development of CoA advocacy priorities. Unfortunately, the Public Forum in 2020, scheduled for March, was cancelled because of the COVID pandemic. The Legislative Breakfast was held virtually by Zoom call.



Key CoA Advocacy Activities in Recent Years

The CoA believes that Montgomery County continues to make progress toward becoming a Community for a Lifetime as envisioned by the *Senior Agenda*, a document that was developed by the CoA, and endorsed by the County Executive and the County Council in 2012. In keeping with the vision and goals of the *Senior Agenda*, the CoA continues to focus on quality of life for all older adults in the County.

County Level. CoA budget advocacy has resulted in additional funding for essential County supports and services for vulnerable older adults, including services that are mandated under Federal and State law but that require supplemental County funding to meet the need. These programs and services include the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program, Adult Protective Services, Public Guardianship, Adult Foster Care, Respite Care, senior centers, and a number of transportation programs.

State Level. The CoA has supported several successful State legislative initiatives in recent years, including: mandating banks, credit unions and, most recently, financial advisors to report suspected elder abuse; requiring hospitals to provide a patient (or his or her legal guardian) with the opportunity to name a caregiver to receive notice of the patient's discharge and provide information about the patient's aftercare needs; reducing property tax burdens on older homeowners; eliminating filing fees on certain estates where the only asset is real property and the person seeking appointment as an administrator is low income and is the sole heir to that property; allowing the Maryland Attorney General to file a civil action for damages on behalf of elder financial abuse victims; establishing a telephone reassurance program for older adults; and examining the quality of care in nursing homes.

In 2016, the CoA worked with the Maryland Dental Action Coalition to support the *Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults Act* (SB169/HB1158), that provided for a study of the impact of dental emergencies on emergency room costs. It also authorized the Governor to establish an adult dental benefit in the Maryland Medical Assistance program. The

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CoA's Health and Wellness Committee provided talking points for testimony and letters of support for the successful bills. A pilot program to offer such a benefit was started in 2019.

Advocacy for Innovative Programming. In recent years, the CoA has successfully advocated for the creation of several innovative County programs and services for older adults and new positions to support them, including a Transportation and Mobility Manager, a Village Coordinator, a Caregiver Support Coordinator, and a Senior Fellow to manage the Age-Friendly Montgomery County Initiative. Other pioneering programs that Montgomery County instituted with CoA support include a Senior Center Plus-like program for older adults with cognitive impairments, and a partnership between Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services and the Department of Health and Human Services to provide home health and other services to frequent callers to 911. In FY20, the CoA advocated successfully for reinstatement of the "Senior Budget" in the County Executive's budget.

Advocacy for an Age-Friendly Montgomery County. As a result of the Commission on Aging's research and advocacy, in 2015, under the leadership of County Executive Isiah Leggett, Montgomery County enrolled in the World Health Organization/AARP global network of certified Age-Friendly Communities. The County now enjoys the status of a designated Age-Friendly Community, in an initiative known as Age-Friendly Montgomery County. Project leaders created 10 areas of focus, or domains, essential to our Age-Friendly community: Civic and Social Involvement; Communications; Elder Abuse Prevention; Employment; Health and Wellness; Home- and Community-Based Services; Housing; Planning; Open Spaces, Parks, and Community Buildings; Senior Public Safety; and Transportation and Mobility. The County Executive established an Age-Friendly Montgomery County Advisory Group that is comprised of department directors and community leaders who oversee the efforts of the work groups for the 10 domains. Together, these public and private sector partners plan for and guide work to address issues, meet challenges, and build on opportunities for each of the domains. The CoA actively supports and works in collaboration with the Age-Friendly Montgomery County effort. The Commission chair serves on the advisory group, and CoA members serve on the domain work groups. In October 2020 AARP recertified the initiative. Additional information about the Age-Friendly initiative is available at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior/age-friendly.html>.



Commission on Aging Briefing Book for Elected Officials and Other Stakeholders

The CoA developed a "Commission on Aging Briefing Book" to help acquaint the

County Executive and County Council members with the Commission's important work. The book provides information on nine key issues facing older adults in Montgomery County including: affordable housing; assisted living affordability; caregiver support; elder abuse, neglect and exploitation; health and social services; quality of care in long-term care facilities; social isolation; and transportation (including driver and pedestrian safety). It also addresses the cross-cutting topics of diversity, communications, and ageism.

It is available on the COA website at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/coa.

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2020 Commission on Aging Advocacy

The Commission's 2020 priorities and activities were informed by the goals and recommendations from the County's *Senior Agenda*, the County Executive's 2015 Summit on Aging, the Age-Friendly Montgomery County strategic goals, and the recommendations of the 2018 and 2019 CoA public forums. The CoA also drew upon information gathered from a number of summer studies that it completed in recent years, from previous stakeholder meetings and public forums, and from input from speakers and agency representatives.

County

The Commission recognizes and appreciates the efforts of the County Executive and the County Council to respond to the needs of all older adults in the County, including those who are low-income and otherwise vulnerable, and those who are healthier and more vital. Our advocacy includes written and oral testimony at County Council meetings and hearings, meetings with department directors and representatives, and meetings with individual Council members. The County Executive, Council members, and other officials are invited to CoA meetings, and the Commission welcomes any communications to discuss issues affecting older adults in the County.

The CoA's priorities for the FY21 County budget included recommendations for health and social services programs, affordable housing expansion and preservation, and new positions and programs that would provide needed support for the County's vulnerable and vital older adults and their families. The Commission's specific budget priorities were provided to the County Executive, the Office of Management and Budget, and the County Council and included:

- *HHS*: (1) Expand the home-delivered Senior Nutrition program 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 funding lost in the FY20 budget 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.

In April 2020, following release of the County Executive's proposed FY21 budget, Commission members met with County Council members by Zoom call to discuss that proposal and to advocate for additional CoA budget priorities. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic had a distressing impact on the County's budget and the Council was not able to fund most of the CoA's priorities. It did, however, approve bus transportation to six senior centers, five days a week.

To develop its FY22 budget priorities, the CoA convened a meeting in June with Sidney Katz, President of the County Council, and Rich Madaleno, director of the County Office of Management and Budget, to discuss the County's budget situation in light of the COVID pandemic. Then in July, the CoA held a special meeting where, building on previous goals and

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recommendations, it developed a list of budget priorities for FY22. CoA chair, Jean Dinwiddie, presented those priorities in testimony before the County Council's HHS Committee on November 18, 2020.

Those priorities included:

- **Public Guardianship/Adult Protection Services:** Establish two new social worker positions
- **Affordable Housing:** (1) maintain funding for the Housing Initiative Fund and (2) provide funding for legal assistance with evictions
- **Recreation Budget:** (1) maintain the early-stage memory loss/Senior Center Plus program and (2) provide funding for senior adult programs
- **Health and Wellness:** (1) expand the senior nutrition programs, (2) increase payment rates for the Adult Foster Care program, and (3) provide funding for consumer education on hearing loss and hearing tests
- **Senior Fellows:** (1) establish a Senior Fellow position for diversity and (2) restore the two Senior Fellow positions eliminated in the FY20 budget
- **Other:** (1) provide funding for the employment/training/ retraining of older adults and research and address older adult unemployment issues, (2) institute a campaign to advertise County services available for older adults, and (3) form a County task force/work group to assess community alternatives for congregate and institutional living arrangements

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 support even though they did not rise to the highest level of priority in



2020. 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. The CoA will continue to advocate for these items as appropriate. Some additional issues – e.g., hearing loss and social

isolation, and older adult employment – will be studied further by CoA committees.

Other County Advocacy Activities

During 2020, the CoA engaged in several advocacy efforts on behalf of older adults in the County. These efforts included:

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Transportation

During 2020, the CoA established a task force to address transportation issues for older adults in Montgomery County, specifically to provide suggestions, comments, and concerns regarding initiatives that the County is undertaking to improve roadway safety. Task force members reviewed the County’s *Vision Zero Initiative Action Plan* and the *Draft Complete Streets Design Guide* and offered recommendations to County Executive Marc Elrich that would be of benefit to older adults. The task force also laid out the Commission’s top five priorities for improving roadway safety. In addition, task force members drafted comments for the CoA to submit to County Council President Sidney Katz regarding public parking spaces for e-scooters. The CoA approved all of the task force’s comments and recommendations.

CoA members also worked closely with the Commission on People with Disabilities to support appropriate use by the County of the Transportation Services Initiative Fund. This fund, generated from assessments on UBER and Lyft rides, was created to improve the delivery of “accessible transportation services, transportation for eligible senior citizens, and transportation for persons of limited income.”

Affordable Housing

In addition to ongoing advocacy to increase the Housing Initiative Fund and recognizing the potential for accessory dwelling units to help meet this need, the CoA wrote to the mayor of Gaithersburg in support of affordable housing in that community. The Commission also asked the County Council to continue to fund existing affordable housing initiatives. For FY22, the CoA advocated for the Council to create a stable program to provide legal assistance to renters in eviction proceedings, one that considers the needs of older adults.

Additional Resources for Adult Protective Services and the Public Guardianship Program

At its special July meeting to discuss budget priorities, the CoA voted to make advocating for additional resources for Adult Protective Services and the Public Guardianship program one of its highest priorities. The CoA wants to ensure that the County has sufficient staff to investigate and address issues of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults, and to protect and assist those who lack the capacity to care for themselves. In her November 18 testimony before the HHS Committee of the Montgomery County Council, chair Jean Dinwiddie noted that the CoA supports the hiring of two additional social worker positions in HHS – one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public Guardianship program.



Racial Equity and Social Justice

The theme of the CoA’s annual public forum for 2020 was to be “What Can Racial Equity Look Like in an Age-Friendly Community?” Unfortunately, the forum was cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis. The CoA, however, is continuing its efforts to educate its members and to

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advocate for racial equity and equality. In August, the Dementia, Policing and Racial Equity Task Force was formed. In addition, at its September meeting CoA members heard from Ms. Tiffany Ward regarding Montgomery County's recent racial equity initiatives, including why the County has decided to develop and use a racial equity framework. CoA members hope to participate in the racial equity training that the County is developing as soon as it is available.

Other Efforts

- During the early months of the pandemic the CoA sent a letter to the Maryland State Secretary of Health urging that assisted living facilities be required to adhere to the same testing protocols for COVID-19 as nursing homes.
- The CoA co-signed a letter that the Suicide Prevention Subcommittee of the Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee prepared in an effort to build a better understanding of suicide risks, and ways to address them, among aging adults in Montgomery County.
- The CoA sent a letter to Gwen Wright, director of the Montgomery County Planning Department, urging that older adult issues such as affordable housing with accessible health care and senior programs be explicitly considered in the County's "Thrive Montgomery 2050" planning initiative.
- The CoA sent a letter to the Rockville mayor and City Council in support of a donation of 25 acres on which to develop a Veterans Administration nursing home.
- Chair Jean Dinwiddie participated in one of the County's COVID recovery workgroups where she discussed evictions, food security, social isolation, and other issues that the County's older adults are facing because of the pandemic.
- Commissioner Edgar Rivas represented the CoA on the Racial Equity and Climate Change workgroup.
- Aging in Community Committee co-chair, Monica Schaeffer, worked with the executive director of the Alliance for Workplace Excellence to establish a "Best Practices Supporting Workers 50+" award, a recognition for organizations that establish a workplace culture that is continuously and comprehensively supportive of a diverse and inclusive workforce.

State Advocacy

The Public Policy Committee reviewed dozens of bills filed in the Maryland General Assembly during the 2020 session with a focus on those of interest to older adults in Montgomery County and within our general priorities. The committee researched relevant topics, including protection of vulnerable adults, nursing home resident rights, Medicaid waivers, and affordable housing and protection of renters, and led the drafting of position letters on several bills. Our positions were communicated to members of the Montgomery County Delegation.

The following bills that the CoA supported in the 2020 General Assembly session were enacted into law:

HB 33 – Criminal Law, Abuse of Neglect of a Vulnerable Adult Causing Severe Emotional Distress. To expand the criminal definition of abuse and neglect of a vulnerable adult to include emotional abuse and some additional elements.

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HB 304 – Consumer Protection, Unfair, Abusive or Deceptive Trade Practices, Exploitation of Vulnerable Adults. To make criminal exploitation of vulnerable adults an unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice in violation of the *Maryland Consumer Protection Act* and subject to enforcement by the Office of the Attorney General.

HB 1326 – Sales and Use Tax, Exemption for Artificial Hearing Device Ear Molds, Equipment and Devices. To exempt hearing aids and some other devices from State sales tax. The following bill supported by the CoA was passed by the General Assembly but vetoed by the Governor, with cost as the reason:

SB 407 – Office of the Attorney General, Senior and Vulnerable Adult Asset Recovery Unit. To establish and fund a unit in the Office of the Attorney General to bring civil actions for damages against perpetrators of financial crimes against seniors and vulnerable adults.

The following bill supported by the CoA did not pass but was amended in the budget bill:

HB 1163/SB 642 – Home and Community Based Waiver Services. Would have required Maryland to expand the Home- and Community-Based Waiver program pursuant to the United States Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead v. LC*. The budget bill was amended to require the Maryland Department of Health to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of expanding access to long-term care services through home- and community-based waivers, and to establish a task force to study and make recommendations on the issue by December 1, 2020.

The following bills supported by the CoA did not pass the General Assembly:

HB 821 – Montgomery County Stable Homes Act. Would have enabled Montgomery County to enact a law prohibiting residential landlords from evicting tenants absent specific “good cause” reasons.

HB 1010 – LGBTQ Senior Bill of Rights. Would have prohibited discrimination against LGBTQ individuals by long-term care facilities, and other requirements.

HB 1567 – Affordable Housing Development Credit Program. Would have created a State low-income housing tax credit program.

Federal

The Public Policy Committee prepared a letter to members of the U.S. Congress and Senate indicating agreement with the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging’s position on the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* (P.L. 116-127) and the *CARES Act* (P.L. 116-136). The Executive Committee approved the letter in May.

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2020 Commission on Aging Activities

Public Forum Cancelled

The theme of the CoA's 2020 event was to be "What Can Racial Equity Look Like in an Age-Friendly Community?" Unfortunately, the forum was cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Featured Speakers at Full CoA Meetings in 2020

During 2020, the CoA heard from a number of presenters at its full Commission meetings. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, meetings in March and April were cancelled and subsequent meetings were held by virtually by Zoom call. Guests at the 2020 full CoA meetings included:

- January:** Robin Riley, Recreation Department Director
Phil Smakula Recreation Department Staff
- February:** Gabe Albornoz, Montgomery County Council Member
Chuck Short, Special Assistant to the County Executive
Khalid Afzal, Special Projects Manager for the Maryland-National Capitol Park and Planning Commission
Daniel Jones, Partnership Specialist for the Bureau of Census
Walton Harris, Policy Analyst for Taxicab Regulation and Special Transit Services.
- May:** Lylie Fisher, Facilitator, Montgomery County's Caregiver Support program and lead for the County's Dementia Friendly initiative and member of the Maryland Commission on Caregiving
- June:** Sidney Katz, President of the Montgomery County Council
Rich Madaleno, Director of Montgomery County's Office of Management and Budget
- July:** No guest speakers: special CoA meeting to determine budget priorities
- September:** Tiffany Ward, Montgomery County's Chief Equity Officer
Betty Lam, Chief of Montgomery County's Office of Community Affairs.
- October:** Sean O'Donnell, Administrator of the County's Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response program
- November:** Jack VanDerhei, Research Director for the Employee Benefit Research Institute
Helane DiGravio, Social Security Administration
- December:** Will Jawando, Montgomery County Council Member

CoA Meetings with Department Directors and Other Officials

In addition to meeting with officials at full CoA meetings, Commission members met individually or in small groups with other experts to inform them of the CoA's work and concerns, and to learn of their organization's priorities and goals. Among those who Commission members met with include:

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- Pazit Aviv, Village Coordinator for Montgomery County
- Eileen Bennett, Montgomery County Ombudsman program
- E.A. Casey, Program Manager for the AARP Foundation
- Sarah Constant, Senior Vice President of Real Estate Development for the Mission First Housing Development Corp
- Mark Dunham, Principal for Novum Strategies
- Lisa Govoni, Housing Research Planner for the Montgomery County Planning Department
- Lise Hamlin, Director of Public Policy for the Hearing Loss Association of America
- Tom Hucker, Member of the Montgomery County Council
- Barry Hudson, Public Information Officer for Montgomery County
- Sidney Katz, Council chair of the Montgomery County Council
- Rona Kramer, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging
- Erica Lee, Marketing Associate for Habitat America
- Khoi Lee, Aging and Cognitive Health Evaluation in Elders (ACHIEVE) study team at Johns Hopkins University
- Dr. Gail Lynne, Audiologist at Potomac Audiology
- Gail Nachman, former Montgomery County Senior Fellow
- Carrie L. Nieman, MD, PHD, Co-founder of Access HEARS at Johns Hopkins University
- Tina Purser-Langley, Senior Health and Wellness Coordinator for Montgomery County
- Stephanie Roodman, Senior Project Manager and Legal Counsel for Montgomery Housing Partnership
- Chuck Short, Special Assistant to the Montgomery County Executive
- State Legislators who attended the Legislative Breakfast

The CoA members also met virtually with each of the Montgomery County Council members and the County Executive to discuss the Commission's FY21 budget priorities and concerns.

Legislative Breakfast

For many years, the Commission has hosted an annual Legislative Breakfast to meet with members of the County's delegation to the State legislature. County staff are also invited. The Breakfast provides the Commission, delegation members, and County staff the opportunity to share accomplishments of the past year and to identify issues and priorities for the upcoming legislative session.



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At its December 2020 Breakfast, which was held virtually by Zoom call, Commission members

briefed the legislators on the CoA's 2020 accomplishments; and the resource challenges faced by the County's Adult Protective Services and Public Guardianship programs. Legislators who attended or who were represented included:

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U.S. Congress

- Jamie Raskin
- John Sarbanes (Vikki Garcia, staff)

Maryland Senators

- Cheryl Kagan Sen Nancy King
- Benjamin Kramer
- Susan Lee
- Craig Zucker

Maryland Delegates

- Al Carr
- Julie Palakovich Carr
- Lorig Charkoudian
- Kathleen Dumais
- David Fraser-Hidalgo
- Jim Gilchrist
- Anne Kaiser
- Ariana Kelly
- Marc Korman
- Lesley Lopez
- David Moon
- Lily Qi
- Pam Queen
- Emily Shetty
- Jared Solomon
- Vaughn Stewart
- Jheanelle Wilkins

CoA Testimony

- Chair Jean Dinwiddie testified before the Montgomery County Council on April 14 and November 18 regarding the CoA's FY21 and FY22 budget priorities and goals.
- Commissioner Katie Smith testified at the Joint Priorities Hearing of the Montgomery County delegation to the Maryland General Assembly on November 12, 2020 and presented the CoA's list of priorities.
- Chair Jean Dinwiddie testified before the Gaithersburg City Council regarding the need for affordable housing.

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Standing Committee Activities

A substantial amount of Commission activity occurs in its standing committees, which provide the opportunity for members and guests to focus in greater depth on specific issues, develop projects, and identify potential priorities. Those committees include Aging in Community, Health and Wellness, and Public Policy.



Aging in Community

Members of the Aging in Community Committee initially decided to focus on two areas in 2020: housing affordability and older adult employment. They examined the challenges and successes in developing various models of older adult and intentional intergenerational housing, including compliance with the *Fair Housing Act* and other HUD requirements. They also devoted time to learning more about the Senior Fellows program, a program implemented in 2007/2008 to take advantage of the talent pool of the age 50+ segment of the County's population.

When the pandemic struck, however, the committee decided to study the impact COVID-19 has had on the older adult community. Members chose to focus on social isolation and what role the CoA can play in reaching isolated older adults. The committee researched ways to communicate with older adults and what types of County resources are available to them. After hearing that traditional forms of communication are no longer working well during the crisis, they recommended using the mail – postcards – to connect with socially isolated people. To that end, the County mailed thousands of “Thrive at Home” postcards.

The committee is continuing to study aspects of social isolation on older adults and decided to join with members of the Health and Wellness Committee to discuss the issue. A task force was formed that includes interested members of both committees.

Health and Wellness

In 2020, the Health and Wellness Committee researched hearing loss and its implications on health, dementia, and social isolation. The experts who committee members met with included representatives from the Hearing Loss Association of America and the Johns Hopkins Aging and Cognitive Health Evaluation in Elders (ACHIEVE) study. Based on their research they developed a Hearing Loss Fact Sheet that has been distributed throughout Montgomery County.

With the advent of the COVID-19 crisis, committee members decided to study COVID responses at the County's different aging facilities. Their research led them to meet with experts to discuss the success of those responses including a session with a program manager in the County's Ombudsman program.

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Currently, committee members are considering the problem of social isolation in a joint project with the Aging in Community Committee. Other issues they are looking at include nursing home regulations, COVID-19 testing, suicide prevention and other mental health issues, and home-based healthcare.

Public Policy

The Public Policy Committee takes the lead on much of the Commission's advocacy on priority issues at the County, State, and Federal levels. During 2020, the committee reviewed proposed legislation at these three levels of government; researched relevant topics as needed; and drafted testimony, letters of support, and other written documents for the CoA. The committee also took the lead in convening the annual Legislative Breakfast.

Specifically, the committee:

- Monitored proposed Federal, State, and local legislation affecting older adults and led the drafting of CoA position letters that were communicated to members of the Montgomery County delegation in Annapolis.
- Followed the *Transportation Services Improvement Fund* and consulted with Council member Tom Hucker about establishing an accounting system to monitor how the funds are used.
- Researched how and whether AARP's Age-Friendly status will be possible for the State of Maryland.
- Drafted and sent a letter to the Rockville Mayor and City Council in support of a donation of 25 acres on which to develop a Veterans Administration nursing home.
- Prepared a cover letter that expressed the CoA's approval of a National Association of Area Agencies on Aging statement to U.S. legislators in favor of COVID-19 legislation.
- Drafted a letter to Montgomery County's Office of Planning providing comments on the "Thrive Montgomery" initiative; and
- Reviewed and provided input for letters prepared by other CoA committees.

In addition, the Public Policy Committee researched the issue of voting in nursing homes noting that, in light of COVID-19 isolation rules, voters would need more assistance with their ballots. Subsequently, committee members learned that the County's Board of Elections had taken efforts to deal with that problem. The members also looked into the issue of employee leave for eldercare and advised the Executive Committee that the CoA may want to approach the County Council to suggest amending the County law to add eldercare provisions.

Seniors Today. During 2020, a CoA member hosted 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. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, production was suspended from March through August but restarted on September 28 through Zoom. 2020 guests included:

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- Allison Adams, Senior Planet Montgomery County
- Khalid Afzal, Project Manager for Thrive Montgomery 2050
- Sylvia Balderas, Professional Organizer
- Eileen Bennett, Montgomery County Long Term Care Ombudsman program
- Adriane Clutter, Montgomery County Recreation Department
- Frank Demarais, Deputy Director for Affordable Housing at Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs
- Jean Dinwiddie, chair of the Montgomery County Commission on Aging
- Micki Gordon, Assistant CEO/Senior Director of Development, The Jewish Council for the Aging
- Shivali Haribhaktiwith, Senior Planet Montgomery County
- Mitsuko Herrera, Senior Planet Montgomery County
- Austin Heyman, former chair of the Montgomery County Commission on Aging
- Suzan Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer of the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County
- Larissa Johnson, Residential Energy Program Manager for the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection
- Daniel Jones, Partnership Specialist for the U.S. Bureau of Census
- Ben Kramer, Member of the Maryland State Senate
- Rona Kramer, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging
- Arthur Lappen, Montgomery County Long Term Care Ombudsman program
- Jane Markley, Advanced Care Planning Expert
- Seth Morgan, chair of the Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities
- James Stowe, Director of the Montgomery County Office of Human Rights
- Stephanie Svec, Montgomery County Seniors' Services Affiliated Santé Group
- Dolores Ustrell, Acting Director of the Wheaton Senior Center
- Anita Vassallo, Director of Montgomery County Libraries
- Susan Yaffe-Ozeil, Director of Audiology at the Treatment and Learning Centers



Commission on Aging Plans for 2021

The Commission on Aging will undertake the following activities in 2021:

- Meet regularly in standing committees and as a full Commission to implement Commission goals and priorities.
- Continue engaging with elected officials and department heads on important older adult issues in the County.
- Identify and examine one or more focus areas of importance to older adults in the County.
- Convene a public forum in 2021.

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- Meet with County Council members on CoA budget priorities in April 2021.
- Advocate on priority issues, including budget issues, at the County, State and Federal levels.
- Identify CoA priorities included in the FY22 budget and establish FY23 County budget priorities.
- Host a Legislative Breakfast in November 2021.
- Continue to participate in the Age-Friendly Montgomery County Advisory Group and workgroups, and monitor implementation of the Age-Friendly strategic plan as appropriate.
- Learn more about Greenhouse nursing homes and the Homesharing Project.
- Attend Department of Health and Human Services' quarterly board, committee, and commission meetings and prepare quarterly reports.
- Collaborate with other boards, committees, commissions, and other groups as appropriate.
- Other activities as identified.

2020 Commission on Aging



Seated left to right: Dr. Odile Brunetto, Acting Chief, Aging and Disability Services and Director, Area Agency on Aging; Morris Klein; Jean Dinwiddie, Chair; Miriam Kelty; Barbara Selter; Janice Zalen; Ruby Moone; Tho Tran. **Standing left to right:** Stephanie Edelstein; Karon Phillips; Mary Sweeney; Arunima Ghosh; Arthur Williams; Karen Maricheau; Hilery Tsumba; Ryan Wilson, Vice Chair; Edgar Rivas; Neal Brown; Richard Jourdenais and Beverly Rollins, Secretary. **Not pictured:** Aмоke Alakoye; Barbara Brubeck; Morton Faller; Amy Harbison; Nanine Meiklejohn; Deborah Royster; Monica Schaeffer; Odessa Shannon; Marsha Weber. (Photo taken in February 2020, pre-pandemic.)

Montgomery County Commission on Aging 2020 Annual Report

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Montgomery County Council
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Seated: Will Jawando, Sidney Katz, Nancy Navarro, Evan Glass
Standing: Hans Riemer, Gabriel Albornoz, Craig Rice, Andrew Friedson, Council President Tom Hucker

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Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Dr. Odile Brunetto, Chief, Aging and Disability Services
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