



COMMISSION ON AGING

April 13, 2022

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Councilmembers,

The Commission on Aging congratulates the County Council and County Executive on the planned conversion of a Sandy Spring office complex into Sandy Spring Village to be located at 17810 Meetinghouse Road. This conversion is taking place via the contract provided to property developers KCG. The red brick office buildings that will be converted are charming and, with the grounds that also will be renovated, should make very pleasant residences.

We request that you ensure that this renovated building is functionally suitable for older adults. Beyond affordability, developers in Montgomery County must add the features that older adults need to age in place safely. These features are commonly referred to as "Universal Design," and are suitable for those who have a disability, as well as older adults still in good health. Specifically, Universal Design includes:

- Eliminating stairs (or making sure elevators or ramps are always available as alternatives to stairs)
- Widening doorways and entrances to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers
- Ensuring that bathrooms are older adult-friendly with walk-in, no-step showers and/or step-in baths, grab bars, and toilets that are a comfortable height
- Providing electric outlets on the wall in bedrooms, kitchens and living rooms at a higher level so older adults do not need to stoop to plug in a TV or appliance
- Ensure that the building is cable and internet ready, as many older adults rely on internet to stay in touch virtually with their physicians, church groups, family and friends

While these features may add a slight cost to construction, they should not be optional for older adult living. County Design for Life (DFL) funds would not support later renovations to these apartments as they do not cover condominiums or apartment renovations. This could mean that older adults who have moved in may ultimately have to move out again as they age and become more frail. We hope the renovation plans do not simply turn this building into town homes with stairs and bedrooms on upper floors, unless elevators are added.

Department of Health and Human Services

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Ideally, these older-adult friendly, Universal Design features would be a part of any building that is promoted as housing for the elderly, whether new or renovated. Universal Design actually is beneficial also to the non-elderly, so there really is no downside to including these features in all construction and renovation. Unfortunately, this is not presently occurring. For example, the Gateway building in Wheaton will have older adult affordable housing but, to our knowledge, no accommodations are being made to meet the needs of elderly residents. It would be beneficial to all for the County Council to require that all developers promoting older adult housing include Universal Design. If indeed we are to be “age-friendly Montgomery,” we must ensure appropriate and functionally suitable housing.

The Commission members would be happy to discuss these issues with you and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Barbara Selter

Barbara Selter, Chair

Montgomery County Commission on Aging