




COMMITTEE EVALUATION AND REVIEW BOARD

MEMORANDUM

January 31, 2025

TO: Marc Elrich, Montgomery County Executive
Kate Stewart, President, Montgomery County Council

FROM: Sofya Orlosky, Chair 

SUBJECT: Committee Evaluation and Review Board Interim Report

As required by Montgomery County Code §2-146 (c) (2), the Committee Evaluation and Review Board (CERB) presents the attached **Interim Report**. The CERB will provide a final report in July 2025. Please let us know if you have any comments or questions on the contents of the report. Thank you.

INTERIM REPORT

Committee Evaluation and Review Board

Members

Sofya Orlosky, Chair

Anthony Buccitelli, Justin Carlson, Jake Didinsky,
Muriel Hairston-Cooper, Mary Ann Keeffe, Deeptaanshu Kumar,
Karl Pitt, Catherine Sindos, Jeffrey Slavin, Clint Sobratti

Staff

Ken Hartman-Espada, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer

Beth Gochrach, Administrative Specialist II

Eritrea Thomas, Office Services Coordinator

January 31, 2025

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1. Introduction

This Interim Report is submitted to the Montgomery County Executive and Council by the Committee Evaluation and Review Board (CERB), as required by Montgomery County Code Article XI, Sec. 2-146 (c) (2).

Purpose of the Committee Evaluation and Review Board

As stipulated in Sec. 2-146 of the Montgomery County Code, the Montgomery County Executive must appoint and convene the Committee Evaluation and Review Board. This body is a citizens review committee that reviews each of the Montgomery County Advisory Committees and Boards appointed under Sec. 2-146. In 2011, the Montgomery County Council expanded its responsibilities to not only review committees but also review the committee system as a whole.

Specifically, the task of the CERB is to “review the group system and each then-existing board, committee, commission, and task force and report to the Executive and Council its recommendations for changes in individual boards, committees, commissions, and task forces and the group system as a whole.” Additionally, the CERB “must review each advisory board that requests continuation under subsection (b)(2) and recommend to the Council whether the advisory board should continue.”

The CERB is mandated to evaluate 98 boards, committees, and commissions (BCCs), of which 50 are “advisory,” as defined in Montgomery County Code Sec. 2-146 Editor’s note Sec. 3. (b) (1).

The most recent CERB was formed in 2012 and delivered its findings and recommendations to the County Executive and Council in 2013. The current CERB was appointed on May 22, 2024, more than 10 years after the previous review effort. CERB members realize the particular urgency to their mandate given the extended timeframe since the previous review.

CERB Composition

The current CERB, consisting of 13 members, officially convened on the 11th of July. Since July 2024, the CERB has experienced two resignations that lowered the member count to the minimum requirement of 11. The members of the CERB as of January 1, 2025, are:

Anthony Buccitelli, Justin Carlson, Jake Didinsky, Muriel Hairston-Cooper, Mary Ann Keeffe, Deeptaanshu Kumar, Sofya Orlosky (Chair), Karl Pitt, Catherine Sindos, Jeffrey Slavin, and Clint Sobratti.

The CERB is supported by Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Ken Hartman-Espada, and Administrative Specialist, Beth Gochrach, as selected by the County Executive as per the statutory requirements.

2. Assumptions and Constraints

The CERB is established under Sec. 2-146 to: review the group system and each then-existing board, committee, commission, and task force and report to the Executive and Council its recommendations for changes in individual boards, committees, commissions, and task forces and the group system as a whole and submit an interim report to the Executive and Council within 6 months of appointment and submit a final report within 12 months of appointment.

The CERB has been unable to reach consensus on the interpretation of Sec. 2-146 (as amended by Bill 32-11 (1) and Bill 2-05 (2) and as executed in the 2013 CERB report) pertaining to the scope and coverage of the 2024 CERB review and CERB report.

The CERB asks that the Chief Administrative Officer (in accordance with Sec. 2-147 subsections (b) and (c)) work with Mr. Ken Hartman and the Office of the County Attorney to provide the CERB with interpretation and direction concerning the scope of CERB review and CERB report.

Given the lack of consensus on the scope of review of non-advisory BCCs, the CERB commenced its work by focusing on advisory BCCs.

3. Methodology

The CERB embarked on its dual mandate to evaluate the group system overall and each advisory board, committee, or commission individually by establishing a grounding framework.

The CERB review seeks to determine whether the advisory BCCs understand and dutifully implement their mandates, and whether they do so effectively and with the most efficient use of County resources.

The overarching policy premise for the establishment of various BCCs in Montgomery County is that “[p]ublic participation in boards, committees, and commissions contributes to the work of County government and provides a valuable service to the community by presenting the concerns and viewpoints of County residents on a variety of issues.”¹ Thus, the CERB worked with County Staff to develop evaluation questions that gauge the BCCs’ ability to effectively channel the varied experiences and needs of the diverse Montgomery County community into the work of the County government in an equitable way. By conducting the review through the *equitable engagement* lens, the CERB attempts to assess how effective BCCs are in informing communities about issues of focus, facilitating open dialogue with government agencies, soliciting and channeling feedback from diverse members of the public, and champion initiatives that empower county residents to actively shape their communities.

Within this framework, the CERB’s review and recommendations will be based on the analysis of data collected using the following instruments:

- A self-assessment questionnaire distributed to all BCCs (see template in Appendix A)
- Direct observation of the regularly scheduled BCC meetings (see assessment form in Appendix B)
- Interviews with the heads of relevant County departments
- Review of the recommendations from the 2013 CERB Final Report

4. Progress to Date

The CERB has been meeting monthly since its initial meeting. Following the establishment of the overall framework for the review, the CERB developed the self-assessment questionnaire, the direct observation form, and the schedule of visits to the advisory BCCs.

The CERB distributed self-assessment questionnaires to all advisory BCCs on August 30, 2024, and provided the required 60 days for the BCCs to return them to the CERB. As of the submission date

¹ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/boards/policy.html>

of this Interim Report, of the 50 BCCs, 48 answered the questionnaires. Two BCCs did not answer the questionnaires: the White Flint Downtown Advisory Committee is sunsetting, and the Workforce Development Board did not respond.

As of the submission date of this Interim Report, the CERB conducted 39 total visits to the advisory BCCs. Of the remaining 11 BCCs, two will not be visited: the Community Development Advisory Committee does not meet until November 2025 and the White Flint Downtown Advisory Committee is sunsetting.

5. Early Findings

The ambiguity of the law which establishes and governs the mandate of the CERB significantly complicates this Board's task. While the scope of "the first Committee Evaluation and Review Board appointed after November 8, 2011" is spelled out clearly, further clarifications are needed for the subsequent iterations of the CERB, in particular as it pertains to non-advisory BCCs.

Nevertheless, while prioritizing the review of advisory BCCs, each member of the CERB has had an opportunity to visit and observe the work of multiple advisory county boards, committees, and/or commissions. It is evident that Montgomery County provides a vast range of opportunities for community input and feedback on government services and critical issues through its system of advisory boards, committees, and commissions. Overall, members of BCCs are committed to the mandates of their groups, stay consistently engaged, and contribute diverse and relevant professional and lived experiences to their work.

At the same time, the CERB has noted that multiple BCCs have struggled to recruit members, in particular members representing the diverse communities of the entire County. Initial observations also suggest that BCCs have inconsistent experiences in and approaches to informing communities about their work, inviting county residents' input on issues meaningful to their communities, and collecting and channeling feedback on Montgomery County government's work. There are also opportunities to streamline the work of some BCCs to avoid duplication of effort or to improve focus.

6. Next Steps

The CERB recognizes that much work remains to be done in order to collect the necessary data, analyze it, distill findings, and develop its recommendations. The immediate priority is seeking guidance from the Office of the County Attorney on the scope of this CERB's mandate as it pertains to non-advisory BCCs. This guidance will determine the next steps in reviewing and evaluating those boards, committees, and commissions. The CERB will also address the remaining methodological questions as regards this Board's charge.

Additionally, in the next six months, the CERB will visit the remaining advisory BCCs, conduct interviews with relevant County department heads and staff, and then analyze the data collected through BCC self-assessment questionnaires, direct observation forms, and interviews. If necessary, and if time allows, the CERB may conduct follow-up visits or interviews with individual BCCs. This work will culminate in the development of recommendations for the Final Report.

7. Timeline

The CERB aims to provide its Final Report to the Montgomery County Executive and Council in July 2025.

Appendix A. Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Boards, Commissions, and Committees (BCC) Questionnaire

1. Briefly describe your board, committee, or commission (BCC) purpose and explain why it is valuable to the County. Based on conversations with members of the BCC,
 - Share reasons for why your BCC should or should not continue to serve, or be combined with another BCC.
 - Explain how your BCC collaborates with government services to meet the needs of the community.
 - Highlight specific expertise and lived experiences of your members have related to the advisory subject.
2. How many times has your BCC met in the past two years? In your answer, please detail the following,
 - How many of these meetings have been in-person, remote, or hybrid?
 - Do you ever hold "field" meetings in communities (ie. At Community Centers, Libraries, etc.)
3. Describe your relationship with department(s) or agency(ies) that you work with. Is this relationship beneficial? If so, why? If not, why? How does that department utilize the work of the BCC?
4. Share your BCC's top 2-3 impactful accomplishments within the past two years.
5. How does your BCC define success? Has this definition been effectively communicated with your members?
6. What do you believe are the greatest barriers, roadblocks, or challenges that may hinder success of your BCC over the last two years? What areas could you improve on?
7. Briefly summarize the Group's current priorities and anticipated workload for the next two years.
8. Name the specific communities that you serve (i.e. zip codes, cities, etc.). In your answer, please:
 - Detail how your BCC communicates/engages with, community leaders, groups and individuals.
 - Describe the methods your BCC implements for community involvement (e.g., surveys, forums, outreach programs).
9. List your key partner organizations, community groups, and other BCCs your BCC has worked with. How valuable are these partnerships to your mission?

10. How does your BCC include non-members in future planning and visioning activities.
11. List any communities that you have not yet engaged with your BCC and outline plans to include them in the next two years. In your reply,
 - Please describe any challenges that have prevented your BCC from engaging with some communities.
12. What types of incentives could your BCC utilize to improve recruitment strategies and community participation?
13. Has the BCC used services to ensure inclusivity, such as sign language interpreters and translation services?
14. Has your BCC used data to measure engagement success; ensure equitable participation; and determine which activities to champion/support? What data have you used, and how that data is used.
15. Does your BCC have access to government resources such as staff time allocation? If so, please:
 - Detail the specific tasks performed by staff to support the activities of your BCC.
 - Describe how your BCC maximizes the efficiency of available resources and the effectiveness of the staff.
 - What resources does your committee need to become more effective/impactful?

Appendix B. Direct Observation Form

CERB BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND COMMISSIONS (BCC) ASSESSMENT FORM

BCC Name: _____

Meeting Date: _____

Chair: _____ Co-Chair: _____

CERB Member: _____

	Meeting/Interview/Report	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Comments
1	BEFORE THE MEETING: It was easy to find information about the BCC before the meeting (links, past meetings, agendas etc.).						
2	Were you prepared to attend the meeting (be a prepared attendee)? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• notification (was timely and available)• agenda (was timely and available)• past minutes (complete and usable)• read-ahead materials (complete and usable)						
3	The meeting is easy to access (online or in-person). The online connection instructions were clear. The venue was clearly marked and easy to find.						
4	Meetings with written agendas and materials relating to significant decisions are given to the Board in advance of meetings						
5	DURING THE MEETING: Members are prepared to report on their follow-up items in accordance with the agenda. The Board has clear goals and actions resulting from relevant and realistic strategic planning.						

6	The Board possesses the background, knowledge, skills, and expertise to help accomplish its goals.						
7	Board meetings facilitate focus and progress on important organizational plans and community matters.						
8	The Board conducts meetings properly and applies relevant actions from the Robert Rules of Order, Open MeetingS Act, etc.						
9	(reserved)						
10	Board members exhibit the ability to work well together and appear to show respect for the ideas and views of fellow Board members and staff. Members seem to seek and identify ways to collaborate and build consensus as well as to resolve conflicts.						
11	Members exhibit commitment, diligence, and the willingness to take the necessary time and make the necessary effort to fulfill their responsibilities.						
12	Board members seem to have equal access to Board discourse; no member appears to dominate dialogue.						
13	Members seem to tackle “real community issues” vs. protocol (agenda, meeting minutes, membership issues) and are significant contributors to the process.						
14	The board clearly identified follow up items, assigned responsibilities, and set deadlines.						
15	The language of the discussion was accessible to an ordinary person. The topics were understandable and free of jargon.						
16	Overall Impressions – See GENERAL RUBRIC The meeting was effective.						
17	AFTER THE MEETING When minutes are issued for the meeting, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The minutes match the actual meeting agenda and content. The meeting and minutes are line with the goals and charter of the BCC. 						

18	As a MoCo resident, did I find this meeting useful or a waste of my time? Do I now understand better what this BCC does to the benefit of county residents and how I as a county resident can channel my input to the MoCo government through this BCC						
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***** **GENERAL RUBRIC** *****

Poor

- ✓ dictatorial chair or no chair,
- ✓ a few board members dominate the meeting,
- ✓ public either blocked out or runs rampant,
- ✓ does not follow process,
- ✓ does not follow agenda (all known new business should be on the agenda),
- ✓ does not review prior minutes (or old business)

Acceptable

- ✓ chair allows others to talk in turn
- ✓ uses majority rule (to close debate, etc)
- ✓ allows limited public engagement (if appropriate),
- ✓ follows agenda, past actions are reviewed (some level of minutes)

Excellent

- ✓ chair explains and guides process,
- ✓ Parliamentary processes are explained (in complex meeting a specific parliamentarian is useful)
- ✓ chair tactfully explains the rationale for meeting and decisions to any external attendees (public)
- ✓ Read-aheads were provided are used for any complex matters
- ✓ the agenda is a tool that can be amended by the group as a whole,
- ✓ minutes are used for action tracking and closure,
- ✓ there are meeting results:
- ✓ decisions are made,
- ✓ issues are clarified,
- ✓ out of scope matters are forwarded to appropriate other bodies