**Montgomery County Executive’s Latin American Advisory Group (LAAG)**

**Minutes for March 11, 2014**

Place: CAO Conference Room, Executive Office Building, Rockville, MD

Attendees: LAAG Chair Teresa Chapa; LAAG Co-Chair Ursula Iannone; Mayra Bayonet; Mayra Breton; Oscar Buitrago; Cesar Lopez; Milagros McGuire; Henry Montes; Cecilia Otero; Maria Peña-Faustino; Tomas Silvani; and Carmen Delgado-Votaw.

Guests: Joe Adler, Director of Human Resources; Joe Heiney-Gonzalez, Office of Human Resources; Rick Nelson, Director of Housing and Community Affairs; and Karla Silvestre, Director of Community Engagement, Montgomery College;

Staff: Bruce Adams, Office of Community Partnerships

The meeting began at 6:30 p.m. with a welcome by co-chair Teresa Chapa.

Conversation with Joe Adler, Director of Human Resources

Director of Human Resources Joe Adler began by handing out a memorandum (attached) prepared in response to questions submitted on behalf of the committee by Henry Montes. Henry Montes explained that the county workforce is an issue so important to the LAAG that it will always be on the group’s agenda. Adler began by saying that in terms of numbers of Latino employees, the County needs to do more. He noted that the county is recognized by Brookings and others for our efforts at inclusion and pointed out that County Executive Leggett will soon receive a prestigious national award for his work to promote social equity.

Adler pointed out that in response to the international economic recession, the total number of employees is down since 2008. Despite that, full-time, merit Latino employees increased both in actual numbers (547 to 697) and percentage (7.19% to 9.02%) between 2006 and 2013. Adler noted that these numbers are ahead of Fairfax County (6.73%). The percentage of Latino county MLS (Management Leadership Service) employees (4.19%) is higher than Latino federal SES employees (4.10%).

Tomas Silvani said these numbers are better than MCPS. Karla Silvestre said the numbers are better than Montgomery College. Silvani asked beyond the Job Club emails, what can be done to increase applicants? Joe Adler said more aggressive grassroots recruitment is needed. Henry Montes said each department needs to improve recruitment. Teresa Chapa pointed out that the Latino community is a big user of Social Media. Joe Adler said he hopes to revive a special program to prepare employees for MLS positions. In response to a question from Karla Silvestre about what he would do if he had additional resources, Adler said he would hire more recruiters and invest in social media. Tomas Silvani asked if recruiting is done at health clinics and in libraries. Henry Montes said more than information sharing is required – results need to be part of performance measures of directors.

Joe Adler said there are 670 Spanish speaking certified county employees. Some departments require or prefer Spanish competency for front desk positions.

Adler explained that much of the limited hiring during the recession was done through promotions from within. As the economy gets better, more hiring will be done from outside the government. Henry Montes said selection is the key. How do you hold directors’ feet to the fire on selection? Performance is the issue. Adler said interview panels must be diverse. He explained that the County Attorney says that we can work to ensure diversity but that we can not target specific ethnicities. The County Attorney says that departmental data can not be made public. The County Executive and the CAO do have this data for purposes of performance evaluations. Ursula Iannone asked if this is part of performance evaluation for all managers or just for directors. Adler said it is part of performance evaluation for all MSL employees.

Tomas Silvani said having only 9% of workforce is shocking. Adler responded by saying that the county has been constrained by the bad economy. He said the county is not where we want to be but that we are better than many jurisdictions, we are improving, and we want to do better still. Retirements will give the county an opportunity to improve the diversity of the workforce in future years.

Mayra Bayonet said she knows lots of well qualified people who are determined by OHR to not meet minimum qualifications. She asked what is happening in that part of the process. Joe Adler suggested the first round of screening could be done by computer. A few members questioned whether computerizing the first cut would make it even less sensitive to good candidates who fail to use the “magic words” in their applications.

Maria Peña-Faustino asked why Spanish wasn’t a requirement in hiring the Latino liaison. Bruce Adams said that was his error, that Henry Montes pointed it out, and that it was corrected so that Spanish was a requirement. In fact, at Karla Silvestre’s suggestion, one of the six questions (and answers) was in Spanish. Adams explained that at least eight of the 125 applicants for the Latino liaison job would clearly make excellent county employees. He said he will provide their resumes to Joe Adler and request that Adler meet with them to facilitate their ability to get county jobs. Karla Silvestre said this can be the start of a Latino Talent Bank. Joe Adler agreed to meet with these applicants to help them understand the process and have them tell him what skills they have and which jobs interest them. Several members said the Latino Talent Bank is an excellent idea.

Conversation with Rick Nelson, Director of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA)

Director of Housing and Community Affairs Rick Nelson thanked the advisory group for sending questions prior to the meeting. Nelson explained that housing is a very complicated subject here as there are at least a dozen programs run by multiple agencies. The cost of housing is going up faster that the income of the people needing housing. Most significant housing projects in Montgomery County now combine five or six sources of funding. Montgomery County uses a range of resources from federal dollars to closing cost assistance to vouchers. Housing Opportunity Commission (HOC) is the biggest provider. HHS helps prevent evictions by paying for utilities. HOC and HHS serve the poorest of the poor. DHCA does not own properties. Montgomery County is proud of the fact that affordable housing is spread across all parts of the county. The county’s MPDU (Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit) law has produced 13,000 units by requiring 12.5% of a development be priced for modest income families (*e.g*., $60,000 for a family of four). The 1988 Housing Initiative Fund has produced 9,000 units under County Executive Ike Leggett despite the bad economy. HOME is a deep subsidy federal program usually used by nonprofit groups for special needs populations.

Ursula Iannone asked if DHCA has housing data by ethnicity. She wondered whether Latinos are getting a proportionate share of county affordable housing resources. Rick Nelson explained that the county does not require people to identify their ethnicity. Affordable housing programs serve all ethnicities. No one group has a leg up. DHCA has found that having bilingual staff is essential. Myriam Torrico is DHCA’s point person for outreach to the Latino community. Our tenant rights program brochures are in Spanish as well as English. There has been a significant increase in rentals of single family houses, and the owners often don’t understand what is required of a landlord. We reach out to private contractors and nonprofits like Habitat for Humanity and Rebuilding Together to provide services.

Teresa Chapa asked what percent of senior housing is Latino. Nelson guessed about ten percent. Latino renters are about 16% of renters in the county. We do not see significant discrimination against Latinos, said Nelson.

There are in all ethnicities families that just can not afford the space they need for the size of their family, Nelson explained. There is lots of overcrowding. It is a difficult balancing act. We do not focus all of our dollars on families with the lowest incomes. We need to help families with slightly higher incomes as well. Maria Peña-Faustino asked if inspections were just done during the day. Nelson said DHCA is able to find what it needs to find during daytime inspections. Tomas Silvani asked what needs to be done about overcrowding. Nelson explained that HHS is responsible for homelessness. There is no perfect answer as we can not promise to house everyone. Providers meet on a regular basis. We really work hard together to try to provide for everyone.

Maria Peña-Faustino asked about those without documentation. Nelson said the county does not ask, but HOC has to ask because of federal dollars.

Cesar Lopez asked what recourse tenants have. Nelson said DHCA has a landlord tenant office with Spanish speaking staff. Tomas Silvani asked if there is a welcome packet for new renters and homeowners. Nelson said we have lots of written materials but that we need to figure out how to use Social Media. Silvani said highest use of Social Media in Latino community is the low income population. Karla Silvestre said Pew’s data is different. Nelson asked the advisory group members to help DHCA improve its use of Social Media. Ursula Iannone said many Latinos don’t have email and rely on their phone.

Ursula Iannone asked if the county should own housing. Nelson said that HOC and nonprofits are our partners and they own homes. He said the County's Housing Initiative Fund has been funded over the past six years at levels from $31 million to $58 million per year. About one half of these funds are invested in private and nonprofit development projects and in return the developers include a certain amount of affordable housing in their buildings. Iannone asked how and if this had been determined to be the most effective approach.

Karla Silvestre pointed out that there are lots of apartments along the route of the Purple Line and asked what will happen to them. Nelson said the County Council intentionally did not upzone in these areas because of concern about the loss of affordable housing. The county will keep the pressure on to provide units for those displaced. In all cases, the number of units along the Purple Line will increase.

Mayra Bayonet asked if DHCA is involved in planning. Nelson said DHCA is increasing its involvement in master plans having recognized that it was not adequately engaged in the planning of White Flint.

Maria Peña-Faustino asked about the waiting lists for affordable housing. She said newer residents don’t know about MPDUs and suggested the county should promote the sale and resale of MPDUs. Nelson handed out a flyer promoting the 14th annual Montgomery County Housing Fair and Financial Fitness Day to take place from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday May 3 at Bohrer Park in Gaithersburg. He also handed out flyers about a Seminar on Tenant Rights to be held from 7 to 9 p.m. on Wednesday April 30 at the Silver Spring Civic Building as well as a flyer listing foreclosure prevention services (attached).

Minutes of January 22, 2014

By motion of Tomas Silvani, the members approved the minutes of the January 22, 2014 submitted by Bruce Adams with the revisions suggested to the first draft submitted previously by email.

Next Steps for LAAG

Advisory Board members discussed upcoming meetings and agreed to ask OMB Director Jennifer Hughes to come to the July 15 LAAG retreat after the budget has been finalized. Director of Economic Development Steve Silverman has confirmed for the May 13 meeting and a representative of Holy Cross Hospital will be invited to present at the May 13 meeting. There was discussion of having the Purple Line as a topic at an upcoming meeting. Questions need to be prepared for the May 13 session with Economic Development.

Henry Montes said that the follow-up to the Diversity Summit is where the action is. OHR provides cover for the department directors. The challenge is to place pressure on hiring officials. We have to be super diligent on a department-by-department basis. Montes said he will draft a follow-up letter to Joe Adler. Teresa Chapa noted that she liked the Talent Bank, but did not like the idea of turning the minimum qualifications assessment over to a computer. Tomas Silvani suggested recruiting a pool of talented Latino reviewers. The advisory group discussed the pending Children and Youth vacancy at HHS.

Henry Montes noted that Rick Nelson had asked for help in the use of Social Media. Montes proposed creation of a subcommittee on Social Media with Oscar Buitrago, Lorna Virgili, Tomas Silvani, Karla Silvestre, and others to report at the July 15 retreat.

Karla Silvestre suggested the new Latino liaison do a community forum on how to apply for jobs with the county government. Teresa Chaps suggested we could do a webinar.

Karla Silvestre pointed out that coupon companies know when people move into new houses. She suggested that the county get that list and send a welcome package.

The next meeting of the advisory group will be Tuesday May 13 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in the second floor conference room of the Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Rockville. Guests will be Steve Silverman, Director of Economic Development, and a representative of Holy Cross Hospital.

The meeting adjourned at 9 p.m.

Minutes prepared by:

Bruce Adams, Office of Community Partnerships

Minutes will be submitted for final approval by the LAAG at its May 13, 2014 meeting.