



Montgomery County Commission on Aging
Meeting Minutes
March 27, 2025
9:15 am to 12:00 pm

Virtual via Zoom Link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82378694890?pwd=YU5RaHJQTjNTSzYvZ2lObHNqY204Zz09>

Phone Call-In: 301-715-8592 Meeting ID: 823 7869 4890 and Passcode: 297852

***NOTE:** If you need access to Sign Language Services, please contact Tremayne Jones
one week prior to the meeting at (240) 777-1262 or at Tremayne.jones@montgomerycountymd.gov

Attendance:

Commissioners: Wayne Berman, Linda Bergofsky, Yvette Monroe, David Engel, Laurie Pross, Dixie Butler, Virginia Cain, Betsy Carrier, Vernell DeWitty, Joyce Dubow, Norman Goldstein, Morris Klein, Kendell Matthews, Kathleen McGuinness, Sibö Ncube, Eleanor Tanno, Marie Sloan, Kate Stein, Janice Zalen; Commissioner alumni: Marcia Pruzan, and Marsha Weber;

County Staff: Peter Illig, Dr. Patrice McGhee, Dr. Kimberly Y. Johnson, Tremayne Jones, Tara Clemons-Johnson, Denise Isreal, Sara Swarr, Stacy Siglar, Tremayne Jones; Guests: Becky Donahue, Delores Clearfield, Rebecca Sosa, Jewish Council for the Aging: Shane Rock, Dana Hirsh, Gerard Etienne, Latino Health Initiative: Ingrid Lizama; Worksource Montgomery: Cynthia Grissom

Guest Speaker: County Executive Marc Elrich

Meeting Introduction and Agenda Overview

- Linda Bergofsky introduced herself as one of the co-chairs of the Commission on Aging and welcomed attendees, including commissioners, alumni, liaisons, and partners.
- The agenda is shared, with a single speaker, County Executive Elrich, expected to join at 9:30.
- The agenda included updates from Dr. Johnson and Dr. McGee on the FY 26 budget, JCA, and the senior nutrition program.
- Linda requested written narratives from liaisons and committee co-chairs to assist David with note-taking.

County Executive's Budget Overview

- County Executive Elrich discussed the challenges of the current fiscal year, including a \$3 billion state budget gap and potential cuts.
- He mentioned the success of the disabled community in restoring some lost funding and the impact of reductions on childcare and other programs.
- The county executive's budget proposal included a 3.5% property tax increase, with credits to mitigate the impact on homeowners.
- He compared Montgomery County's tax structure to Virginia's, highlighting the higher tax rates on commercial properties in Virginia.
- The county executive emphasized the need for a more progressive tax structure and the challenges of federal grant funding due to political changes.

Discussion on Employment and Transportation

- Linda asked about the county executive's approach to services for seniors and the impact of budget cuts.
- The county executive explains efforts to maintain funding for social services, including a 3% annual adjustment for nonprofits.
- Wayne raised concerns about attracting employment and new businesses to the county.
- The county executive discussed the success of the Institute for Health Computing and the opening of an AI incubator.
- He highlighted the importance of transportation infrastructure, including bus rapid transit (BRT), and the challenges of securing funding for such projects.

Commission on Aging Priorities and Grants Management

- David asked about the Commission on Aging's priorities and the Office of Grants Management.
- The county executive acknowledges the need for improvements in the grants management process and mentions efforts to automate parts of it.
- He discussed the importance of targeted grants that align with departmental needs and the challenges of evaluating grant submissions.
- The county executive expressed openness to resurrecting the senior fellows program and emphasizes the need for targeted grants.

Advocacy and Legislative Efforts

- Linda asked for suggestions on issues the Commission on Aging should tackle.
- The county executive urges the commission to advocate for maintaining quality of life and services, including transit improvements.
- He highlighted the importance of supporting the Drug Accountability Board to control drug prices and the potential for importing Canadian drugs.
- The county executive emphasized the need for vocal support for transit projects and the importance of the state legislature's role in funding infrastructure.
- He mentioned an upcoming trip to Annapolis to discuss electric buses and potential partnerships with companies like BYD, the electric bus manufacturer.

Housing and Development Challenges

- The county executive criticized the "More Housing Now" proposal, arguing it lacks clear timelines and affordable housing requirements.
- He discussed the challenges of rezoning without community input and the impact on single-family neighborhoods.
- The county executive highlighted the lack of market demand for high-rise developments and the need for more affordable housing.
- He criticized the planning board's approach to housing and the lack of consultation with local communities.
- The county executive suggested focusing on existing master plans and building community-supported housing types before rezoning.

Dr. Johnson and Dr. McGhee discuss Federal State and the Local Budget

- Dr. Johnson provided updates on the federal and state budgets, including the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act and the Social Services Block Grant.
- She mentioned the potential impact of federal budget cuts on adult protective services and the importance of advocacy efforts.
- Dr. Johnson discussed the state's efforts to address budget deficits and the restoration of funds for the Developmental Disabilities Administration.
- She highlighted the importance of maintaining funding for adult medical day services and the challenges of securing federal grants.
- Dr. Johnson emphasized the need for continued advocacy and monitoring of proposed budget reductions at the federal and state levels.
- Dr. McGhee discussed the tight budget cycle and the significant increase in the budget for aging and disability services, specifically a 5.5 million increase.
- The county executive had deep conversations about potential reductions that would minimally impact seniors.
- Highlights of the recommended adjustments include increased funding for the Aging and Disability Resources unit, Senior Nutrition Program, and home care.
- The county executive proposed a 3% increase for the two supplements managed by Aging and Disability Services: one for adult medical daycare providers and one for developmental disability administration providers.
- Dr. McGhee emphasized the importance of paying good wages to direct service professionals (DSPs) to ensure recruitment and retention in the direct service professionals' space.
- Proposed reductions include eliminating underutilized contracts in the community support network, which provides disability services.
- The budget includes a respite fund increase.
 - Respite services are highlighted as essential, with multiple programs within aging and disability utilizing respite services.
 - Advocacy efforts have been beneficial.

Senior Care Program and Advocacy Efforts

- Dr. Johnson provides updates on the senior care program, including efforts to reject a proposed \$2.5 million cut.
- Coordinated efforts are being made by Montgomery County to ensure continuity of services for enrolled clients.
- HR hiring process for the ombudsman manager is ongoing,
- A nursing home resident experience of care survey is being conducted – timing unknown.
- Dr. McGee mentioned the 60th anniversary of the Old American and an upcoming celebration on May 30, 2025.

Federal HHS Changes and ACL Consolidation

- Shawn Brennan provided unsettling news about the Federal HHS absorbing the Administration on Community Living (ACL) into other HHS agencies.
- The impact of the consolidation on the Older Americans Act and its programs, such as the Senior Nutrition Program and long-term care, was discussed.

Proposed Reductions in Underutilized Programs

- Clarification was provided for the proposed reductions in underutilized programs, and the lists of three contracts: the My Turn Program, the Child Care Program, and the Community Companions Contract.
- The My Turn Program, which provides financial assistance for children's activities, has seen underutilization due to pandemic hesitation.
- The Child Care Program, a subsidy program for child care, has also seen underutilization since the pandemic.

- The Community Companions Contract, which provides companionship services, has a proposed reduction based on year-over-year under spending. Challenges in Funding and Spending for Senior Care Programs

- CoA members discussed concerns about the proposed cuts for FY 25 and the impact on senior care programs.
- Dr. Johnson explained the challenges in utilizing wait list funds and the strict requirements for spending.
- The goal of the consolidation of senior care, sales, and congregate housing programs is to provide flexibility and reduce administrative burden.
- The hope is to restore the proposed cut for FY 25 and FY 26 and eliminate surpluses in senior care programs.

Liaison update

- Shane Rock, Jewish Council for the Aging (JCA) provides updates on the Senior Community Employment Program and concerns about federal funding.
- Upcoming events related to the impact of federal changes are mentioned, including a conversation with Howard Gleckman and a resiliency workshop for federal employees.
- Shane Rock discusses the need for identifying employers to participate in job expos and the coordination with WorkSource Montgomery and the county government.

- The importance of supporting federal employees displaced by layoffs is emphasized, and the need for employers to participate in job expos is highlighted.

Old Business and Action Items

- February monthly minutes are approved unanimously.
- Linda reviewed the action items from the last meeting, including the process for reviewing correspondence and the executive committee's decisions.
- The importance of weighing in on the budget and advocating for senior services is emphasized.
- The need for a dedicated person to oversee communications and marketing for senior programs is highlighted.
- The Senior Fellow Program is discussed as a potential solution for addressing the need for staff with marketing and outreach expertise.

Committee Reports and Upcoming Events

- Communications Committee reported on the ambassador program, including upcoming events and the need for a dedicated person to manage the program.
- Betsy Carrier provided updates on the Aging and Community meetings, including presentations from Shawn Brennan and Dr. Johnson on new data on older adults
- Wayne Berman discusses the public forum on caregiving, including the keynote speaker, Howard Gleckman, and the planning for the event.
- Linda updated on upcoming events, including the Active Aging Expo, the Gaithersburg book festival, and World Elder Abuse Day.
- Morris Klein provided updates on public policy, including the nursing home survey bill and other housing and health legislation.
- The importance of tracking and weighing in on legislation was emphasized.
- The creation of a document authorizing the commission to take positions on legislation is discussed.
- The upcoming CoA April meeting with the mayors of Gaithersburg, Rockville, and Takoma Park was highlighted.

Closing Remarks and Next Steps

- Linda thanked everyone for their cooperation and collaboration and provides a summary of the meeting's key points.
- The importance of advocating for senior services and supporting federal employees displaced by layoffs was reiterated.
- The need for continued efforts in communications and marketing for senior programs was emphasized.
- The next meeting is scheduled for April 24, with speakers from the mayors of Gaithersburg, Rockville, and Takoma Park.

Adjourn 12 pm

Director, Area Agency on Aging (AAA)
COA Report_ March 2025

Key Vacancies Remaining

- Ombudsman Program Manager II
- Actively in the HR hiring process for an Ombudsman Manager and will continue to provide updates until a manager is onboarded.

Nursing Home Resident Experience of Care Survey

- Process is currently under review for an Offeror to conduct a nursing home resident experience of care survey within the County's nursing homes.

Development and Implementation of a Branding Plan for Aging & Disability Services

- Continuously working with PIO to launch commercials, bus, and radio ads on Aging and Disability Services Program.

Older American Month Celebration

- A&D and Rec will hold a celebration on May 30, 2025, from 9:00-1:00pm at White Oak Senior Center.
- Save the Date Flyer has been developed

Area Agency on Aging Budget updates

- **Senior Care Program**
 - Advocacy efforts have been made to reject the proposed cut
 - Waiting on final budget decisions
 - Montgomery County is making coordinated efforts to ensure continuity of gap-filling services for enrolled clients.
- **New Identity Verification Policy by Social Security Administration to Begin 3/31/25**
 - Effective March 31st, Marylanders seeking Social Security benefits or other services that require identity verification will no longer be able to do so over the phone. This policy change, announced by the Social Security Administration on March 18th, is expected to significantly increase calls for assistance, placing further strain on support teams. To mitigate these disruptions, frontline teams, including MAP and SHIP counselors, must be ready to assist. Key support measures include:
 - Providing **addresses, hours, and phone numbers of local Social Security offices** to accommodate increased in-person visits.
 - Outlining **transportation options** for residents with mobility limitations or those unable to drive.
 - Offering simple, **step-by-step guidance on using the online verification system** for individuals with limited internet literacy.

- Preparing a **checklist of required documentation** for in-person office visits or online verification.

DOT March CoA Update

Submitted by Denise Isreal

Ride On Reimagined Final Report

Ride On Reimagined is Montgomery County's visionary plan to transform and expand public transit, making it more accessible, equitable and sustainable.

Use [the final report](#) to:

- Explore route maps and schedules to see how travel options will improve.
- Review timelines to prepare for upcoming changes and expansions.
- Learn about equity-focused initiatives designed to make transit more accessible.

The report emphasizes enhanced service quality, including shorter travel times, improved weekend options, and expanded coverage in lower-density areas.

Visit the [Ride On Reimagined webpage](#) to read the report.

Ride On Bus 'What Drives You' Contest Will Choose Weekly Winners in March to Celebrate March Madness

March Madness has hit MCDOT's Ride On "What Drives You" contest. To celebrate the excitement of the coming season, Ride On bus services is asking riders to submit stories highlighting positive experiences with Ride On bus service. Submissions will be entered into a weekly draw for a prize pack, which includes a gift card and Ride On giveaways, throughout March.

Riders are asked to share their story in one of the three ways:

1. Share your story on the [website submission page](#).
2. Post your story on [Instagram](#), [X](#), or [Facebook](#) and tag the @RideOnMCT account.
3. Email your experience to rideon.customerservice@montgomerycountymd.gov for a chance to win.

Eligible entries may be used to further publicize the contest. The contest will run indefinitely, with a winner typically chosen each month. Winners are announced via email, [Instagram](#), [X](#), [Facebook](#) and [Bluesky](#) within the last week of each month.

March is Disability Awareness Month – How Ride On Delivers Accessibility to All Riders

March is Disability Awareness Month and at Ride On we're committed to making sure that public transit remains accessible, inclusive, and reliable for all riders, including those with disabilities. Ride On provides equitable transportation options that allow individuals with disabilities to travel independently and confidently. Our fleet and services are designed with accessibility in mind, ensuring riders have the necessary resources to navigate Montgomery County with ease. Ride On buses feature several accessibility features. Designated priority seating near the front of the bus is available for riders with disabilities, seniors, and those who need extra assistance. All Ride On buses lower to the curb making it easier to get on and off the bus. Ride On buses are also equipped with wheelchair ramps making them wheelchair accessible. They also contain an optional wheelchair securement apparatus to keep wheelchairs secure in travel. Visual and audio stop announcements help riders with visual or hearing impairments stay informed about their route.

Montgomery County Senior Centers News:

Budget - nothing added or removed for Recreation / Senior FY 26 Budget

Damascus Senior Center - now operating out of the Damascus Community Recreation Center, 25520 Oak Drive, Damascus

Job vacancy - Recreation Specialist, Damascus Senior Center director, has been advertised and closed 3/20. Interviews will take place in April.

Maryland Senior Olympics - registration is open for the 2025 season Cardboard Boat Regatta held March 12 was a huge success (and Poolesville Seniors won!!)