



**Commission on People with Disabilities  
Meeting Summary Minutes  
May 8, 2024**

**\*\* MEETING WAS HELD VIA ZOOM \*\***

**Welcome and Approval of April 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Karen Morgret, Acting Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the April 2024 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the April 2024 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd).

**Accessibility of Government Websites and Documents**

On April 8, 2024, Attorney General Merrick B. Garland signed a [final rule](#) under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to ensure the accessibility of web content and mobile applications (apps) for people with disabilities. This final rule clarifies the obligations of state and local governments to make their websites and mobile applications accessible. The County has been working to comply voluntarily prior to the final ruling. Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported she has been assisting several departments this week in advising them how to make their flyers accessible for screen reader software. She suggested that Matt Barkley, ADA Compliance Team, Department of General Services (DGS), and Chris Daniel, Manager III, Web Solutions Team Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions (TEBS), lead a discussion at next month's meeting on accessible websites and documents.

**Discussion of Commissioner Identified Topics with The Honorable Andrew Friedson, President, Montgomery County Council**

Council President Friedson expressed his appreciation for the work of this Commission and its representation of people with disabilities, parents and caregivers of people with disabilities, organizations, agencies and government. He worked with the disability community when he helped launch the [Maryland ABLE program](#). Maryland ABLE accounts provide a way to help individuals with disabilities save money and pay for qualified disability-related expenses without jeopardizing state or federal means-tested benefits such as SSI or Medicaid. He said requiring a person to be impoverished to qualify for government services is an outdated and cruel way to view an inclusive community.

Council President Friedson addressed the following topics that were identified prior to the meeting:

- **Accessible housing and Design for Life Property Tax Incentive Program:** The program is not making the impact that is needed. There is a disconnect between the actual need and the way the program is set up. The application process needs to be streamlined and there needs to be more education and outreach to the public. Department of Permitting Services currently manages the program, but it has been discussed that perhaps the Department of Housing and Community Affairs or the Department of Health and Human Services should manage it as they are a more public facing program. The County is reviewing similar programs that are offered in Prince George's and Howard Counties as well as in Northern Virginia. The adult aging population is growing every year and the County wants to have services and programs in place that serve the residents that we represent.
- **Enforcement of accessible parking spaces by Department of Permitting Services and Montgomery County Police Department:** This is an area of concern both from an enforcement standpoint and a permitting standpoint. Council President Friedson recently introduced a bill to address parking minimums and language that addressed the issue of accessible parking was included to deter harm. Several years ago, the County launched the Respect the Space Campaign that addressed enforcement of accessible parking. The County's Department of Permitting Services does play a role in enforcement as does the Office of Human Rights.

- **Plans to ensure safe sidewalks are available so children and adults do not have to walk on congested main artery neighborhood streets that lead to schools and community activities:** Council President Friedson understands the issues of pedestrian safety and being able to roll and walk in communities. He has spent a lot of time on this issue. On his second day in office, he convened a walk in downtown Bethesda with residents and community leaders to identify a number of issues including a utility box located at the end of a curb ramp on Old Georgia Road that impeded a safe path of travel of persons who use wheelchairs. The issue was raised with the State Highway Administration and the ramp was redone. Council President Friedson introduced [Bill 38-19: Streets and Roads – Permit to Obstruct Public Rights-of-Way – Amendments](#) which required the County Executive to adopt certain regulations regarding permits to close curb lanes, sidewalks, or shared use paths in the public rights-of-way; limit the circumstances in which the Department of Permitting Services may grant a permit to close a curb lane, sidewalk, or shared use path in a public right-of-way; require the Director of Permitting Services to publish certain information regarding permits to close public rights-of-way; and generally amend the law regarding permits to obstruct public rights-of-way. The bill was unanimously approved and went into law June 2020. These changes improved how residents can get around safely in their community. The Complete Streets Design Guide and Safe Streets Act were also both recently passed and focus on safety and accessibility of our roadways.

Additional comments:

- A number of ADA-related and accessibility-related items have recently been included in the Capital Improvements Program, particularly in the transportation budget, including: a number of intersection improvements and relocation of barriers that create accessibility challenges such as signs, poles and fences. Council President Friedson reported that a number of deaths have been caused due to utility poles and signage installed along sidewalks along major thoroughfares.
- Council President Friedson is Chair of the Planning, Housing & Parks Committee. He has passed a number of zoning text amendments to make it easier for residents and those who have disabilities to age in place. Previous standards and requirements made it very difficult to create housing for those who need it. Relaxed standards allow for greater diversity of housing types and design standards. It was reported that Accessory Dwelling Units are a possible housing option for persons with disabilities. The fees for these units have been waived for persons with disabilities.
- Universal Design standards need to ensure our housing units serve the greatest number of people in our community. Accessible design is not particularly expensive when building, but it is exorbitantly expensive when retrofitting a property. The County needs to look at affordable housing programs and properties being built through the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC).

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

- **No sidewalks located in the neighborhood off Western Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue. Residents including children are forced to walk in the road on these side streets where many cars travel in the morning to avoid major thoroughfares. Requests have been made to have a sidewalk installed on one side of the route, but Chevy Chase residents can refuse the request according to current regulations. This is a major pedestrian safety issue.** Council President Friedson agreed it was a safety issue and understands the gravity of the situation. The sidewalk installation request process is cumbersome and there are examples of sidewalks installed in neighborhoods where there was community opposition, such as Kenwood Park for example. There is limited funding for sidewalk installation. Council President Friedson added that the cut through traffic needs to be addressed as well. Engineering changes to roadways have impacts elsewhere. The Pedestrian Master Plan and Complete Streets Guidelines will help guide us in that direction.
- **Accessible housing can make a huge difference in how someone maneuvers throughout their life. Suggestion to create a committee or task force look into creating more accessible housing.**
- **Suggestion to set aside a certain number of wheelchair accessible Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDU). It is very expensive to modify an existing home and many persons with disabilities have a limited income.** Council President Friedson would have to look into the

requirements for setting aside a certain number of MPDUs for those with disabilities. He noted that non-profits can buy MPDU's. For example, the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless has purchased MPDU's and repurposed them to rent them for subsidized rates or for free. The way to solve the housing crisis is to meet supply and demand. There is not nearly enough housing for the entire population. In 2021, the County Council approved an [annual appropriation to finance \\$100 million in bonds](#). It was recognized as a model nationally on how to work on the affordable housing crisis. These funds will allow the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) to produce 6,000 new housing units. HOC uses funds to finance construction of mixed-income, mixed-use new developments in Montgomery County with at least 30% of units income-restricted (20% of units affordable at or below 50% Area Median Income (AMI) and 10% at or below Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) income limits (65% - 70% AMI). The County is also moving forward and funding \$50 million by the end of the year to preserve half of at-risk naturally occurring affordable housing.

- **What zoning text amendments were approved that aid in helping a person age in place?** [Zoning Text Amendment 20-08: Residential Care Facility – Continuing Care Retirement Community](#) was adopted in 2020. It allows a wider variety of building types by allowing the construction of campus-like communities with a varying level of associated medical services. [Zoning Text Amendment 21-02: Independent Living Facility for Seniors or Persons with Disabilities - Residential Zone Standards](#) allows more diverse housing options and less intensive building types, such as townhomes, duplexes, and detached houses. ZTA 21-02 also reduces the amount of green space required and amend other setbacks to allow for the construction of these communities while remaining a conditional use.
- **It has been harder to find accessible parking spaces especially at medical buildings. More enforcement is needed as well for those that are parking illegally. Design of accessible parking aisles could be improved upon to deter people from parking in those aisles.** Design of accessible parking and access aisles is determined by the Maryland Accessibility Code which adopted ADA standards in 1994. Maryland chose to include that extra accessible spaces be required. Enforcement will always be an issue and will always be complaint based. Educating the public is important.
- **What is the Respect the Space Campaign?** The Campaign came out of this Commission and several Commissioners cited parking that was not marked property. Due to lack of enforcement, the program was put on hold.
- **Suggestion to increase accessibility parking spots in the upper levels of garages as a person with a disability can use an elevator.** Council President Friedson acknowledged that many public parking garages are underutilized and is something to consider. He also noted that there are challenges if an elevator is out of service and repairs can take a very long time.

Council President Friedson thanked the Commission for their time and encouraged Commissioners to reach out to him or his staff Matt Higgins if they have further comments or questions.

### **Chair Update**

The Commission has completed interviews of applicants and recommendations have been sent to County Executive Marc Elrich who will make the final decision. His recommendations will be sent to County Council for confirmation and appointment. It is expected new Commissioners will be appointed within the next two months.

Steering Committee will meet next Wednesday May 15 from 5pm to 6pm. Betsy will send out a Zoom invite.

### **Update – Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission (IDDC) – John Whittle, Commissioner and Liaison to IDDC**

John was unable to attend tonight's meeting. It was reported that IDDC will be having an election for a new Chair and Vice-Chair in June. IDDC will also be advertising soon for vacant positions. Betsy noted that this Commission will continue to work on the same issues as IDDC.

### **Ex-Officio Member Updates**

Denise Isreal, Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), reported the County is seeking to expand the Ride On Flex on-demand bus service to Germantown, Poolesville, Aspen Hill, and other areas. Residents were surveyed to provide feedback on the Ride On Flex service and expansion. It was noted that

the Ride On Flex service allows users to request a vehicle to pick them up and drop them off within a specified zone. Expected wait times range between 10 to 20 minutes. Riders with disabilities are picked up at their homes and others at the nearest intersection. MCDOT adjusted seven Ride On bus route schedules starting Sunday, May 5, to improve efficiency and on-time performance. Although service levels are staying relatively the same, the changes reflect a shift of resources to allow for more reliable service where there is higher demand. The new schedules will be available at [rideonbus.com](http://rideonbus.com) and in print. MCDOT will be participating in several upcoming outreach events including a health and wellness event on June 6 at Leisure World in Silver Spring, Annual Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 11, and Older Americans Month Celebration on June 24 at Long Branch Senior Center. From June 1 through September 30, Metro Red Line Stations in Glenmont, Wheaton, Forest Glen and Silver Spring will be closed due to station and track maintenance. Free shuttle buses will replace trains at Glenmont and Takoma.

Patricia Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), reported MCPS Special Education Services will be hosting a Special Education Family Resource Fair on May 11 at Blair High School. A Transitioning Youth (TY) Fair will be held May 9 at Gaithersburg High School specifically for TY25 families.

Matt Barkley, ADA Compliance Team, DGS, reiterated the importance of digital accessibility. Chris Daniels, TEBS, has been working to train staff on how to make documents accessible. The County must ensure that materials are readable by software. Myra Coffield, Commissioner, offered to provide guidance and assistance with making documents accessible as she is certified in this area. Betsy will be convening a meeting with Chris and Matt to discuss accessibility issues and how to implement a remediation plan of existing documents as well as ensuring accessibility of new documents. It was noted that the Federal government will be increasing its scrutiny of anyone receiving federal funding. Matt also reported the ADA Compliance Team will be advertising a vacancy soon.

Angela Luskey, Department of Recreation, reported additional staff are being added to Therapeutic Recreation to assist with inclusion services.

### **Commissioner Updates**

Tonya reported Montgomery Parks is offering adaptive paddling classes again this summer. Information and registration is listed in the summer program guide: <https://montgomeryparks.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Program-Guide-Summer-2024-PRESS.pdf>.

### **Public Comments**

No member of the public signed up to speak.

Meeting Adjourned – 7:20pm

### **Attendees**

**Commissioners Present:** Myra Coffield; Kaylee Davis; Tonya Gilchrist; Karen Goss; Samuel Korper; Ricardo Lopez; Karen Morgret, Acting Chair; Avner Shapiro; Richard Shermanski; Jeneva Stone; Teresa Villani;

**Commissioners Absent:** Sammi Hampton; Cindy LaBon; John Whittle; Melissa Wyman

**Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Present:** Matthew Barkley, ADA Compliance Team; Patricia Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools; Rebecca Grayson, Housing Opportunities Commission; Denise Isreal, Department of Transportation; Angela Luskey, Department of Recreation

**Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Absent:** Jennene Blakely, Montgomery Parks; Candace Groudine, Human Rights Commission; Angelisa Hawes, Montgomery County Public Libraries; Karen Hochberg, Office of Human Resources

**County Council Present:** County Council President Andrew Friedson; Matthew Higgins, Legislative Aide to Council President Friedson

**Commission Staff Present:** Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

**Public:** Laurie Ross; Seth Morgan; Jennifer Berzok; Jackie Simon; Ryan Helgerman; Deborah Rozell; Jac Terrio (Sign Language Interpreter); Tommy Burgess (Sign Language Interpreter); Matt Higgins; Dave Engel (Commission on Aging); Rebecca Murphy; Jamila Michael-Sobratti; Pat Sheehan

**Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities  
June 2024 Meeting and Events Calendar**

Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday June 12  
6pm to 7:30pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday June 19  
5:30pm to 6:30pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Program Specialist II  
Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager