COMMISSION ON AGING MEETING
Minutes
March 22, 2021

PRESIDING: Reginald Avery, Chair

Members Attending
Jennifer Asher
Angie Boyter
Peter Brunner
Wei Guo
Susan Hailman
Victoria Hathaway
Geetha Jayaram
Elizabeth Edsall Kromm
Eletta Morse
Sue Song
Mark Stinson
Michael Willis

Excused/Absent
Julia Mattis
Michael McPherson

Office on Aging and Independence
Jenna Crawley
Donna Tugwell

Guests
Carl DeLorenzo from the County Executive’s office

Call to order
The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm

Approve Agenda
Angie Boyter motioned to approve the agenda. Michael Willis seconded the motion. Motion was approved. All in favor. Agenda accepted.

Approve Minutes
After an edit was done to the February 2021 minutes, Jennifer Asher motioned to approve the minutes. Michael Willis seconded the motion. Motion was approved. All in favor. Minutes accepted.
Welcome of Guest and New Commission members

- Reginald Avery welcomed the newest member of the Commission on Aging, Geetha Jayaram.
- Geetha Jayaram is a semi-retired professor of psychiatry, public health and nursing from Johns Hopkins. She has spent a long time working with mostly the inner-city poor of Baltimore. She had a private practice which she closed several years ago. Geetha has worked with the Howard County Disabled Review Board for the past eighteen years. She also has worked with numerous service agencies that work with the poor and the disabled, among them The Domestic Violence Center and Grassroots. She has a long history of volunteer service. Currently she is the incoming District Manager for 62 rotary clubs in D.C. and Maryland. The theme this year is “Serve to Change Lives”.

Update on Age Friendly program – Susan Hailman

- Susan Hailman is working on the Community Health and Services Age-Friendly work group. Susan Hailman and Pete Brunner are members of The Village in Howard. The interest of The Village in Howard and the Commission on Aging overlap. The Village in Howard is about six years old and provides educational, social, cultural and neighbor services. During the pandemic they are seeking to provide services so everyone can stay as independent as possible within the community. An example of this is help with transportation. Another example is a circle of care when a person is going thru a traumatic event, medical event or hospitalization. These services tie in with the Age Friendly concept and helps people from becoming isolated. They also fit in with working towards the AARP certification.

Discussion of Tax Credit and Commission’s interest in the Aging in Place bill with – Carl DeLorenzo (County Executive’s Office)

- Reginald Avery stated that Maryland is one of the worst places for seniors to retire in. Carl DeLorenzo works in the County Executive’s office. Aging policies is one of his areas of work. In the past few years, he has worked with Jenna Crawley on the Age Friendly initiative. Recently they have been working on the tax credits. Besides the current tax credit legislation, they had a broader discussion on what tax credits are available to seniors, and how they can be of service to older adults. Carl stated that research has shown that home ownership demands are going to be felt most in minority communities and older adult communities. The County looked at what they are doing to help seniors maintain their homes and afford ownership of their homes. Tax credits is one way.
- Reginald Avery stated that one of the problems is you must be in the same home for an extended number of years. Many people move several times while living in the county due to life style changes.
- Pete Brunner will email Carl DeLorenzo a slide show that was presented at the 2019 Legislative Breakfast. The slide show included a lot of points about tax credits. One of the topics of the slide show was that seniors are a benefit financially to the County. Seniors pay more in taxes than they receive in services. The tax structure needs to be optimized so you balance the number of people leaving the community and the amount of taxes they are paying. One of the reason people leave is taxes. How do you structure taxes so that you keep a larger number of those people here?
- Angie Boyter mentioned that one of the problems is publicizing the available tax credits, for example the Livable Homes Tax Credit. Many people do not know what is available. Another problem is dealing with the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy prevents a lot of people from using the tax credits. Things need to be made more user-friendly.
- Geetha Jayaram said that there should be a cap on the real estate property tax. These taxes keep going up and it does not look like there is a cap. Seniors’ income level goes down, but the taxes go up. Carl DeLorenzo said that he believes that the State does have a limit and establishes a ceiling as to how high local property tax rates can go. A lot of these things require State action.
- Carl DeLorenzo commented on the points made and agreed with some of them. He is interested in seeing the power point presentation that Pete will send him. He felt that a systemic change to how taxes are calculated on a demographic basis was an interesting topic and that in Annapolis some of this may already be being look at.
Pete Brunner made the point that if you are living in your home on a fixed income and things keep going up such as food and taxes, often home maintenance is deferred and not affordable. As a result, the property can deteriorate. He also talked about the bill that is currently up before the County Council and that portability as it relates to the tax credit should be addressed. Pete Brunner also talked about Title 9 Section 258 and property taxes. Pete will send Carl his notes on a past meeting with Janet Irwin.

Reginald will connect Carl DeLorenzo, Pete Brunner, and Angie Boyter for a meeting to discuss tax credits. Reginald and Jenna will also be included at the meeting.

Sue Song stated that when any changes occur the message needs to go out to the community.

Update of Draft Commission letter to County Executive

The letter that Pete Brunner drafted to send to the County Executive was discussed. Jennifer Asher suggested some things to add: 1) a short intro at the top and 2) an insert after the 3rd paragraph. Reginald will send out a revised letter for everyone to review. Carl DeLorenzo said the County Council should be voting on the bill in early April. Angie Boyter suggests adding to the letter, a request for Dr. Ball to sign the bill. Pete Brunner will send Carl DeLorenzo some information on a part of the bill dealing with the Employee Retention Credit. Victoria Hathaway said that we should not have anything that discourages an older adult from moving to a safer dwelling in the County. Instead it should encourage people to stay here and stay safe.

Office on Aging and Independence Report

Jenna Crawley shared an infographic that showed the services and programs provided by OAI during the past year of COVID-19 and the outcomes. They included Grab & Go Meals program, 50+ Center Virtual programs, MAP services, Telehealth visits, SHIP, Ombudsman program and Guardianship program.

Vaccine efforts – As of last Friday, 16 clinics have been held, that were organized by OAI, the Health Department and the Mobile Integrated Community Health Team. First dose vaccines have been administered at independent living facilities, such as senior buildings and assisted living facilities that did not sign up for the federal pharmacy program. Second dose vaccines are now being started. DCRS is working closely with County administration to provide additional popup clinics in communities that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and are showing by the data that they have not accessed the vaccine.

The Governor has made several announcements recently about the lifting of restrictions. The office and the department are starting to look at what their restart phase will entail. The Ombudsman Long-term Care program will resume visits at long term care and assisted living facilities in April. The Ellicott City Fitness Center will reopen in mid-April. The Bain Fitness Center will come online soon. The virtual 50+ Center offerings will continue. There is no date yet for the reopening of 50+ Centers.

The AARP tax program where AARP assists individuals with tax preparation, is continuing at the Bain 50+ Center and the East Columbia 50+ Center thru April 15th.

Cycle2Health is planning to resume with a kick-off in May.

On April 1st, there will be a public planning and rezoning hearing for the East Columbia 50+ Center.

Older American’s month will be in May. Jenna is proposing that the Commission do some type of dedication or activity as part of the office’s virtual 50+ Center.

Geetha Jayaram shared that seven rotary clubs and some other clubs in Howard County have raised $55,000 in PPE items to be distributed to our area nursing homes and assisted care living facilities, that were not under an umbrella where they had enough funds to purchase them. The clubs have also assisted at all the vaccine clinics held at Howard County Community College.

Chair’s Report

Reginald Avery reminded everyone that the Commission on Aging retreat is on Saturday, April 17th. Jenna Crawley will send an invite to the Commissioners. Reginald will send the retreat information.
New Business

- No new business

Sharing from Commissioners

- Geetha Jayaram – Geetha said she is happy to meet everyone.
- Angie Boyter – Wants to know if on a professional basis, information could be sent to the physical therapists in Howard County about the Livable Homes Tax Credit. And wanted to recognize Michelle Rosenberg on the wonderful job she has done over the past year on the Virtual 50+Plus helping people keep social contact and exercise.
- Jennifer Asher – Came across a relevant article in the Washington Post about Baby Boomers and the pandemic. One of the most recent and unexpected shifts in retail shopping was the almost immediate embrace of online shopping by people in their 60’s, 70’s and 80’s. It was a 49% increase from 2019. Started off with groceries and then grew to include other areas. This aligns with what the Commission has been talking about that seniors are a significant economic force in our community and the country.
- Michael Willis – Kudos to Jenna and her team. The list of numbers in the presentation display were very impressive. Things have been changing on a daily basis. The work done was very helpful and supportive.
- Pete Brunner – Has mentioned to Carl Delorenzo the Employee Retention Credit. It was enacted a year ago but did not get much press. If you took the paycheck protection program you were not eligible. But a new law enacted in late December 2020 changed things. If you did apply for the paycheck protection program, you can now apply retroactively for the Employee Retention Credit as of March 13th, 2020.
- Sue Song – There is a problem in the Asian community with violent attacks, especially on seniors. A rally against racism toward Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) will take place at the Columbia Lakefront at 5:30pm on Wednesday, March 24, 2021. There will be another rally at the National Mall on Saturday, March 27, 2021. Right now, a lot of Asian seniors are experiencing fear and having a hard time doing things they used to do. Additionally, a lot of Korean seniors are having trouble registering for the COVID vaccine. We are trying to assist them help through volunteers. Also the Korean community appreciates the online classes and offerings that Regina Jenkins and her team are doing.
- Susan Hailman – The Village in Howard has volunteers who have helped low vision seniors to register for the vaccine and helped with transportation to get the vaccine. They are also working with a group called Volunteers to help seniors with yard work. The Village in Howard is doing another fund raiser, a virtual 50/50 raffle.
- Victoria Hathaway – She is a past President of COGS which is having its 30th anniversary in Howard County this year. She is offering to help get the word out through COGS on various topics, such as tax credits.
- Wei Guo – She would like to echo Sue’s comments on the Asian community. This afternoon, Governor Hogan, his wife and Dr. Calvin Ball had a public meeting on the subject. She also mentioned the March 24th rally at the Columbia Lakefront. She is part of the Age-Friendly Housing group. The group is continuing to give recommendations on housing.
- Eletta Morse – She would like to thank Jenna and her team for their amazing work. She would like to support the tax credit efforts. She just had a meeting with eight of her friends, and three of them are in the process of deciding whether to move out of the County or not. The tax issue is a big one for them.

Adjournment

Angie Boyter motioned to adjourn. Michael Willis seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 8:38pm.

Recording Secretary: Donna Tugwell

Future Meetings: COA Retreat April 17, April 26, May 24, June 28, July 26, usually no August meeting, September 27, October 25, November 22, no December meeting