

MEETING MINUTES	COMMISSION ON AGING MEETING		
Date	July 14, 2020	Meeting Time	10:00 AM- 11:45 AM
Chairperson	Barbara “Reba” Cornman	Meeting Location	Zoom meeting

Attendees:

COMMISSIONERS	Status	STAFF	
Barbara ‘Reba’ Cornman, Acting Chair	√	Amanda Smith, Ph.D.	√
Allan Jensen, M.D.	√	D’Paul Nibbler	
Barbara C. Brody		Jeff Amoros	
Betsy Simon	√	Erika McClammy	√
David L. Roth, Ph.D.	√	Heang Tan	
Elizabeth F. Johnson	√	James Macgill	√
Elizabeth Tanner, Ph.D.	√	Mary Anne Brennan	
Bishop Dr. J. L. Carter		Molly Martin	
Rev. Lee Michaels		Raia Contractor	
Sarah Matthews	√	EX-OFFICIOS	
Hon Sharon Middleton, Councilwoman	√	Chris Ryer	
Stephanie Brooks-Wiggins		Michael Braverman	
Susan Francis, Esquire	√	Michael S. Harrison	
Thomas Cudjoe, M.D.		Randi Walters, PhD	
Tracey Murray, DNP	√	Reginald Moore	
W. Daniel Hale, Ph.D.	√	REPRESENTATIVES	
INVITED GUESTS		Sean Bloodsworth, DSS	
Rona Martiyan, Dietitian Consultant		Holly Freishtat, Planning	
Elizabeth Briscoe, MD Philanthropy Network	√	Alice Huang, Planning	√
Lauren Averella, Civic Works	√	Alice Kennedy, Housing	
Michael Friedman	√	Leslie Yancey, Rec & Parks	√
Tasha Cornish, St. Mary’s Outreach Center	√	Nicole Hart, Housing	√
Aileen Tinney, Catholic Charities			
Marina Nellius, Medstar			
Margaret Pittman, Morgan State University	√		
Nichole Battle, GECO	√		
Tiffany Nicolette, CHAI	√		

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Ms. Cornman called the meeting to order at 10:04 AM. She welcomed the Commission members and guests.

II. Review and Approval of Minutes

Ms. Johnson moved that the minutes of the June 9 meeting be approved, seconded by Ms. Matthews. The vote was unanimously in favor of approving the minutes.

III. Commission Report

Ms. Cornman said that there would be a Commission report this year. She will recruit a small group of Commissioners to work on the report. Jim Macgill will provide staff support.

IV. Comments by the Health Commissioner

Dr. Dzirasa, Baltimore City Commissioner of Health, joined the meeting. She thanked the Commission for its important work. She acknowledged how hard the Health Department Division of Aging has worked as part of the COVID 19 Pandemic response. She noted that the Department has five major goals for its response:

- 1) Minimize the spread of the COVID 19 virus.
- 2) Protect vulnerable populations.
- 3) Reduce outbreaks.
- 4) Minimize the disruption of City services.
- 5) Help the City return to normal operations.

Dr. Dzirasa noted that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on the African-American and Hispanic communities in the City, with mortality rates higher for those populations. She also pointed out that congregate living facilities such as nursing homes and assisted living have been hot spots for the virus. The Department has worked to assure that these facilities have adequate personal protective equipment (PPE). The Department also is increasing the amount of testing in the City, and is generating public messaging around prevention.

Ms. Cornman asked what the City's plans were for restoring services. Dr. Dzirasa said that there is a Citywide oversight committee and that there is a recovery team is working under the committee's direction. There are regular planning meetings to bring services back on line.

Ms. Cornman noted that telehealth applications could be beneficial to older adults, during the pandemic, but many older adults in Baltimore do not have the required technology or

connectivity. Dr. Dzirasa said that this was an issue worth exploring with City leadership. Dr. Tanner said that home health staff can assist patients with telehealth applications.

Mr. Friedman asked how the Department was responding to the psychiatric needs of older adults during the pandemic. Dr. Dzirasa said that the Department has close relationships with Behavioral Health Systems Baltimore. A major challenge is the level of training needed for first responders who often encounter individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.

Ms. Simon said that the Commission was proud of Dr. Dzirasa's leadership. She noted that the Commission was embarking upon a conversation about ageism and racism, and asked for guidance from the Commissioner. Dr. Dzirasa said that the Health Department has had internal discussions on racism and equity. She said it was important to create a space where everyone feels empowered to participate in the discussion. She said she looked forward to hearing the Commission's recommendations.

Ms. Cornman introduced Dr. Hale and Dr. Pittman to lead the discussion about racism and ageism. Dr. Hale said that it is clear that the voices of older adults, particularly African-Americans, are not being heard when the future of Baltimore City is discussed. He said that the Commission could help remedy this by holding a public hearing, consistent with its role as defined in its enabling legislation.

Dr. Pittman said that the pandemic has highlighted divisions within our country that were already there, and that as a society, we tend to avoid addressing critical issues by using euphemisms. She thought it would be positive if the Commission examined the impact of racism, ageism, and the intersectionality of the two. She said that she would be willing to help facilitate a public hearing process, making use of her students.

Dr. Hale asked if there was interest on the part of the Commission in moving forward with a public process. In the discussion that followed, Commission members made the following observations:

- We need to acknowledge that racism is at the root of many of the critical issues that BCHD and its partners are addressing.
- The issues of racism and ageism is a very large and broad topic: we should try to break it down into specific components.
- Loss of housing, particularly due to tax sales, has a disproportionate impact on African -Americans in the City.
- We need to change public messaging about aging; the language we use (including jokes) perpetuates ageist stereotypes.
- Many older adults are capable of providing help to others, but are overlooked and not valued as assets. We need to emphasize strengths, not deficits.
- The Health Department should take some specific actions to improve services. There are not enough senior centers in west Baltimore. More employment opportunities should be available for older adults, including the Senior Community Employment Program. African-American vendors should have more

opportunities, including Eating Together in Baltimore contracts. BCHD staff should look more like the community they serve.

- A new Mayor, Council President, and six new Council members will be coming into office this year. This is an opportunity to look at City policies that need to be updated, across all City agencies.

Ms. Matthews moved that the Commission move forward with a public process addressing racism and ageism; Ms. Simon seconded with an amendment that the process should address how racism and ageism affect older adults. The Commission voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

Ms. Tan noted that the Commission on Aging is a public entity, and that its proceedings are always open to the public. She recommended that the Commission create a committee, to be led by Dr. Hale and Dr. Pittman to devise plans for the public process.

Ms. Cornman said that the Commission's partners should participate in the committee. The following Commission members and partners agreed to be committee members:

Reba Cornman
Betsy Simon
Tracey Murray
Susan Francis
Sarah Matthews
Dan Hale
Margaret Pittman
Michael Friedman
Tiffany Nicolette

Updates

Ms. Tan said that Code Red activities would begin this week, including box fan distributions through a partnership with the Health Department, Parks and Recreation, Civic Works, and the Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success. MAP is the point of contact for City residents 55 and over who need fans. Ms. Averella said that Civic Works would be making fan distributions at community sites over the coming weeks on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and that eligible residents could also pick up fans at Civic Work's offices on Wednesday.

The Department of Housing and Community Development is also offering an air conditioning program; referrals are being made through MAP. Ms. Hart said that Housing staff would be doing assessments of houses where air conditioning is requested, to verify that each house has the requisite wiring to support an air conditioning unit.

Ms. Huang said that the Department of Planning is continuing to coordinate a grocery box program that now includes produce boxes. Interested residents should call MAP for a referral to the program.

Ms. Hart said that the deadline for rental assistance has been extended through July 19; the application is on-line at DHCD's web site. Applicants must be able to document that COVID 19 has had an impact on their incomes to qualify.

Ms. Tan introduced Erika McClammy Director of Client and Legal Services, and Kelsey Johnson, the Health Department's Equity Officer. Ms. Tan said that as of the previous week, the Department's food initiative for older adults had provided over a million meals since the pandemic emergency began in March. She also noted that MAP took over 4,000 calls in one week. Ms. Simon asked about the coming phase-out of the Salvation Army food deliveries. Ms. Tan said that recipients of these meals would be transitioned to other food sources. Ms. Matthews said she had observed too much food being delivered to some housing sites, resulting in waste, while other locations were underserved.

Ms. Matthews noted that the Board of Elections does not make any special provision for older adults. During the recent primary there were long lines at polling places, with some voters who use wheelchairs having to wait for hours. Ms. Tan said she would reach out to the Department's Government Affairs office to see how this issue might be addressed.

Ms. Francis posted several items in the Zoom chat

- MVLS resources - tax/economic stimulus payments - 1.443.451.4091 – MVLS tax hotline updates on housing and consumer deadlines - <https://mvlslaw.org/covid-19-consumer-housing-legal-updates/>
- MVLS has an Equal Justice Works Fellow starting tomorrow to focus on older adult exploitation issues - Andrea Marcin - amarcin@mvlslaw.org.

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 AM.