

Baltimore County Commission on Disabilities
February 15, 2023, Virtual Meeting Minutes
via Webex

Attending: Ben Dubin, Mike Bullis, John Bryan, Shakima Davey, Carla Demondonca, Kathleen Durkin, Jay Doyle, Drew Emmer, Julie Gaynor, David Greenberg, Terry Hickey, Monica Lijewski, Colleen Mahony, Terri Parrish, Mary Scott, Doug Smith, Michael Tan, Santa Wallace

Commission Chair Terri Parrish introduced Terry Hickey, Director of Baltimore County Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

Mr. Hickey provided an update on the status of the four housing bills that the county administration put forward in January. The bills are now under review by the County Council. Mr. Hickey noted that he spoke on behalf of the bills at length during the County Council work session held the night before today's Commission meeting.

Mr. Hickey noted that establishing an official definition for vacant properties will hopefully allow the county to create a registry of such properties. Such a registry could be analyzed and shared in a manner that would foster opportunities for redevelopment, including redevelopment for affordable and accessible housing. Vacant properties may be residential or underperforming commercial properties. The county can take a pro-active position in helping owners of such properties navigate complexities, including tax liens. The county may be able to incentivize positive transitions/transformations of such properties.

New construction of townhomes can be an effective way to increase the inventory of affordable/accessible homes. The bill to allow for 16'-wide-townhomes is viewed as an incentive that can increase opportunities for development of townhome projects that include affordable and accessible units.

The bill to modify language in support of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) was discussed at length during the council work session. ADUs are being discussed at the national level and the federal government may provide assistance to help foster the development of, availability of, ADUs. An ADU ("granny flat") can be within the footprint of an existing dwelling, including an addition to an existing dwelling; or an ADU can be a separate structure in the yard.

The County allows ADUs presently, but the approval process is stringent, challenging (permitting, public hearing, public posting of property). An ADU may be within a dwelling but must include a key feature such as a kitchen or bathroom that enables it to function independently. There is a national constituency that supports ADUs, which can be a great way to foster inter-generational living and generally meet critical housing needs.

Laura Riley, Director of Baltimore County Department of Aging, testified in support of ADUs at the Council work session.

The proposed ADU legislation has drawn some opposition from Towson/Timonium area representatives because certain college fraternity houses or off-campus housing units with large numbers of un-related occupants have triggered neighborhood complaints for many years. The proposed legislation would expand the definition of “related” and allow for some compensation to be paid by the person residing in an ADU. Can the county effectively monitor ADUs to prevent abuse of their legitimate intent? The local age-friendly task force supports ADUs as does AARP, which is developing a platform plank focused on seniors and people with disabilities.

Mr. Hickey encouraged Commission members to consider the housing bills under County Council review and express their views to members of the County Council if they so desired.

Kathleen Durkin stated that The Arc Baltimore faces a serious, ongoing challenge in providing accessible housing to certain clients. Ms. Durkin noted that in some cases, residents of a group home have lived together for many years and that the dwelling could be a good candidate for an ADU providing enhanced accessibility; however, the residents are not related.

Mr. Hickey commented upon the Voluntary Conciliation Agreement (VCA) in the context of accessible housing. Mr. Hickey emphasized that the VCA gives high priority to households that are receiving Housing Choice vouchers. There is presently a 10-year waitlist for these vouchers. There is a significant constituency of disabled people seeking accessible housing who are not receiving Housing Choice vouchers and who are not likely to apply to the voucher program because in most cases it cannot address their needs for a period of 10 years. At the present time, the county is not able to set aside a pool of vouchers for people with disabilities.

Mr. Hickey indicated that, because DHCD has now initiated housing legislation, it may be possible to consider a legislative approach to providing more housing to serve the needs of people with disabilities, and aging-in-place needs.

Mike Bullis suggested that Disability Rights Maryland be engaged in the discussion of housing options/legislation.

Mike Bullis, Kathleen Durkin and David Greenberg provided a report on legislation and budgets being considered by the Maryland General Assembly

Ms. Durkin reported that the overall budget presented by Governor Wes Moore was favorable to the Disabilities community.

- The budget supporting activities associated with developmental disabilities increased by 20%.
- Favorable funding levels have been proposed to support transitioning youth and emergency placements.
- Proposed funding is favorable for increasing staff to help reduce waiting lists.
- \$20 million has been proposed to support the ongoing rate process undertaken by the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA).
- A 4% wage increase has been proposed related to the provision of Medicaid services; an additional 8% wage increase has been proposed as part of the governor's overall minimum wage proposal. In this context, a \$15 minimum wage is an important goal.

Additional legislative items were discussed. The intent of the bills discussed is noted below:

- Establishing the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council as an independent unit of State government (separate if from its current position under the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA)).
- Prohibiting landlords from terminating a lease because a tenant makes too many calls to 9-1-1.
- Requiring closed captioning at movie theatres.
- Requiring the Division of Rehabilitation Services in the State Department of Education to post on the Division's website the total number of open cases in the Division's caseload, and update the information every month.
- Requiring county boards of education to construct communication boards in each public school playground on or before October 1, 2028.
- With regard to disputes/disagreements involving school system Individual Education Plans, shifting the burden of proof in gathering facts from families to school system personnel.
- Codifying the Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council as an instrumentality of the State to submit, monitor, implement, and evaluate the State Plan under the federal Rehabilitation Act.
- Requiring that training materials used by the program of instruction for election judges include oral and written instruction in the various methods an election judge may use to

assist or accommodate elderly and disabled voters in voting.

- Providing those voters are eligible for curbside voting under certain circumstances; requiring that curbside voting be made available to all registered voters with disabilities.
- Authorizing the Maryland Department of Health to reimburse a residential service agency for personal assistance services only if the personal assistance services are provided by an individual classified as an employee.

Drew Emmer, Chief of Capital Planning and Development for Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks, provided illustrative exhibits and discussed selected county park facilities:

- Sparrows Point Park: accessible path, accessible kayak launch, destination playground with accessible features
- Fort Howard Veterans Park, accessible path, accessible kayak launch
- Rocky Point Park, accessible path to the waterfront
- Rockdale Park, adding accessible path; this park features raised garden plots
- Stansbury Park, reworking the fishing pier, accessible path
- Rosedale Park, parking lot expansion, accessible paths