

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

Attending: Ben Dubin, John Bryan, Carla Demondonca, Jay Doyle, Kathleen Durkin, Drew Emmer, Julie Gaynor, Terry Hickey, Monica Lijewski, Gregory Miller, Terri Parrish, Mary Scott, Doug Smith, Michael Tan, Santa Wallace

Commission Vice-Chair Ben Dubin introduced Terry Hickey, Director of Baltimore County Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

Mr. Hickey provided a brief update on the four pieces of housing legislation that were discussed in detail at the Commission's January 18 meeting. The bills are:

- Housing Opportunities Fund
- Townhomes minimum width to 16'
- Revisions to Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) rules
- Definition of vacant properties

Mr. Hickey noted that the four housing bills were passed by the County Council. Moving the bills through the legislative process involved some lengthy hearings and discussion of various concerns; the bills did not pass unanimously, indicating some opposition. Three of the bills will take effect April 10, 2023. The legislation regarding ADUs will take effect a bit later.

The new law pertaining to ADUs expanded the definition of "related" to "any relation by blood, marriage or adoption." Also, the prohibition against a property owner receiving compensation from an ADU occupant was lifted. The county Department of Permits Approvals and Inspections will prepare an annual report on ADUs.

At this time, it is expected that the Housing Opportunities Fund will receive an allocation of approximately \$19 million.

The County hopes to increase efforts to identify vacant homes/properties that could be suitable for redevelopment that creates new housing.

The county will strive to ensure that accessible units are included in any housing project receiving county assistance.

Mr. Hickey stated that he wishes to engage with the Commission further and allow for a more thorough discussion of *accessible* housing issues.

Kathleen Durkin reported that Developmental Disabilities Day was very successful. The governor and lieutenant governor spoke at the event, which was attended by about 500 people.

Ms. Durkin discussed the Fair Wage Act of 2023. Apparently, the state budget includes a 4% increase related to the provision of Medicaid services. An additional 8% increase is reflected to the budget, which will help provider agencies provide a minimum wage of \$15 an hour. The bill also includes Consumer Price indexing, which has generated some controversy. Presently, the 8% increase will not be programmed until January, 2024 to coincide with the minimum wage increase.

A bill is being considered that would allow an individual's disability status to be registered with the 911 emergency system. A family member, guardian or the individual can make the voluntary decision to register.

A bill related to disputes involving school system Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities is under discussion. The bill would shift the burden of proof in gathering facts from families to school system personnel.

County staff liaison to the Commission Jay Doyle gave a report on capital projects funded with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

Six capital project proposals were submitted to DHCD in February and are now being reviewed for Fiscal Year 2024 funding. All six projects are from nonprofit organizations serving people with disabilities; the projects will enhance accessibility features of residential dwellings and one public facility. The combined total amount request is \$626,000.

Fiscal Year 2019 was a slow year for capital projects. The demand for work did not reach the traditional allocation of at least \$285,000 for such projects. The demand for capital projects serving people with disabilities did increase in more recent fiscal years and has exceeded the \$285,000 threshold since Fiscal Year 2021.

Mr. Doyle noted that regulatory requirements associated with the expenditure of federal funds administered by the county have evolved in recent years and may have become stricter. Mr. Doyle highlighted language that requires grantees, in many cases, to provide opportunities for minority- and women-owned businesses to be aware of and potential bid on the projects.

Ben Dubin reported that he and Terri have been in touch with school system personnel and will be attending meetings of the school system's Citizen Advisory Committee for special education.