

**HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY**

10400 Detrick Avenue  
Kensington, Maryland 20895  
(240) 627-9425

**Special Session Minutes**

November 1, 2023

A Special Session of the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County was conducted via a hybrid platform (with some participating in-person and some participating online/via teleconference) on Wednesday, October 4, 2023 on Thursday, November 1, 2023, with moderator functions occurring at 10400 Detrick Avenue, Kensington, Maryland beginning at 4:07pm. Those in attendance were:

**Present**

Roy Priest, Chair  
Fran Kelleher, Vice Chair  
Jeffery Merkowitz – Chair Pro Tem  
Robin Salomon  
Linda Croom

**Present Via Zoom**

Richard Y. Nelson

**Absent**

Pamela Byrd

**Also Attending via Zoom**

Chelsea Andrews, Executive Director  
Ken Silverman, Director of Government Affairs

Aisha Memon, General Counsel

**IT Support**

Aries Cruz, IT Support

**Commission Support**

Alicia Black, Temp Assistant  
Morgan Tucker, Temp Assistant

Chair Priest opened the meeting with welcome remarks and an introduction to the Strategic Plan - Legislative Priorities Special Session of the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County. Chair Priest introduced Commissioner Merkowitz, Kelleher, Salomon, Croom and Nelson. Commissioner Byrd was necessarily absent. Chair Priest mentioned the meeting will focus on the proposed legislative priorities in 2024, which will be included in the Strategic Plan.

Chair Priest introduced President/Executive Director, Chelsea Andrews to provide an overview of the Strategic Plan Legislative Priorities presentation for year 2024. Ms. Andrews introduced Director of Government Affairs, Ken Silverman, to provide the detailed presentation.

Director of Government Affairs, Ken Silverman, presented on the proposed legislative priorities and provided the following reasons why the Commission should adopt annual Legislative Priorities:

- Clear, unified message to local, state, and federal policymakers about what HOC needs to succeed in our mission;
- Context for individual requests, making it clear we are asking every level of government to share the burden of meeting Montgomery County's affordable housing needs;
- Explains HOC's limitations to the public, applicants, customers, advocacy organizations, and other stakeholders;
- Clear guideposts for staff to allow swift response when needed, whether responding to fast-moving legislative and regulatory proposals or influencing the advocacy agendas of larger coalitions and organizations; and
- Pathways for residents and organizations to support HOC's mission in their advocacy efforts.

The proposed legislative priorities were grouped in four categories: 1) more affordable homes, 2) more rental assistance, 3) more supportive services, and 4) regulatory flexibility. Director of Legislative Affairs, Ken Silverman, highlighted that the four legislative priorities categories are grouped by 1) Federal 2) State and 3) County.

#### **A. More Affordable Homes**

Director of Government Affairs, Ken Silverman, provided a detailed presentation on the first Legislative Priority, "More Affordable Homes." A proposal was presented in regards to the Federal items to support growing the affordability of housing in Montgomery County. Mr. Silverman highlighted the FFB program which HOC is one of the largest users in the Country. The program was scheduled to sunset in 2024 and stop taking applications in 2024. With help of the Biden Administration, Mr. Silverman would like to extend the FFB program. A presentation was provided to show HOC's ask of State and County partners to provide more affordable homes. Mr. Silverman also highlighted

an item discussed during the Administrative and Regulatory Committee is to look for opportunities of zoning and regulatory improvements that will allow the opportunity to build more housing and move through the process faster.

#### **B. More Rental Assistance**

Director of Government Affairs, Ken Silverman, mentioned that HOC is looking for opportunities to grow rental assistance that HOC can provide residents in Montgomery County at the Federal, State, and County Level. HOC recommended the vouchers program should be an entitlement program or at minimum fund the program at a robust level which will serve more people. Commissioner Nelson commented that he is not comfortable with making vouchers an entitlement. Commissioner Kelleher highlighted from an economic standpoint, it will put money in the hands of a population that has not had it in order to acquire housing of choice and the money will encourage the private sector to build the kind of housing that residents are looking for. Commissioner Kelleher inquired at what level will it be an entitlement. Chair Priest mentioned the realtors and property owners are not getting enough funding to operate the properties under the current rent structure schedule. Commissioner Croom highlighted the other programs should also be an entitlement. President/Executive Director, Chelsea Andrews, highlighted that this is a national movement and noted that several agencies are asking for the voucher entitlement and the ask is a door opener for a broader discussion on the need for subsidies. After further deliberation amongst the Commission, Director of Government Affairs agreed to create a fact sheet to explain the current program as well as possibilities for more rental assistance.

#### **C. More Supportive Services**

Director of Government Affairs, Ken Silverman, discussed the need of more supportive services through the following efforts: 1) Continuing to robustly fund and expand the direct services programs that HOC currently has funding for, 2) Increasing our level of partnership and collaboration with agencies across the government to make more services available, 3) Searching for any opportunity to reduce administrative burdens for applicants and customers to be able to access services and coordinate more closely with agencies that are offering overlapping services, and 4) Engaging with elected officials and looking at properties in their districts to help find opportunities to apply for grants and other funding opportunities that would allow HOC to benefit those properties on an individual basis.

#### **D. Regulatory Flexibility**

Director of Government Affairs, Ken Silverman, suggested asking Congress to expand the Moving to Work Program to allow all Public Housing authorities to apply for waivers and gain access to the regulatory flexibilities. The Moving to Work Program allows the Public Housing authorities in the program to waive any of the federal

regulations that guide the vouchers and public housing programs. The slots available for the programs does not currently allow HOC to qualify. At the state level, there has been engagement with a State Delegate an information will be shared shortly. The Commission further deliberated on regulatory flexibility.

Staff recommended that the Commission indicate support for the proposed Legislative Priorities for 2024. Director of Government Affairs, Ken Silverman, highlighted that approving the presented priorities would not have a direct fiscal impact on HOC, however it would result in more resources available to serve Montgomery County. Commissioner Kelleher made a motion to support staff's recommendation. Commissioner Nelson seconded. Affirmative votes were cast by Commissioner Priest, Merkowitz, Kelleher, Nelson, Croom and Salomon. Commissioner Byrd was necessarily absent and did not participate in the vote.

Chair Priest thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 6:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chelsea Andrews  
Secretary-Treasurer

/jlk