



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

November 6, 2015

Dr. Enrique Vega
WHO/AFC Initiative
Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization
525 Twenty-third Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037

Dear Dr. Vega:

It is with great pleasure that I write to you today on behalf of Montgomery County, Maryland, to express our interest in pursuing the World Health Organization (WHO) Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Initiative. I have worked hard as the County Executive since 2008 to ensure that older residents of our County are represented and valued by all County government departments and the wider County community. Along with the County Council, I have championed seniors as a vital and important part of our County's success. Given that by 2030 the senior population, age 65 and over, is expected to reach 230,000 individuals, an increase of over 130% from 2000, it is critical that our very diverse senior community has access to all of the available and necessary resources. As stated in the attached Montgomery County "*Senior Agenda*," endorsed by me and adopted by the County Council in 2012, the County continues to work on becoming "a community for a lifetime—a place for older adults to live safe, healthy, and vital lives."

My actions as County Executive have shown me to be a strong supporter of older adults in our County. In May 2008, I convened a "Directors' Retreat on Promoting Vital Aging in Montgomery County," to address the questions of what the County government currently does well to promote vital aging and where the County government needs to improve—now and in the future. Following the Retreat, in 2009, I created the "Subcabinet on Senior Vital Living" to advise me—in collaboration with our Commission on Aging—on needs of our older residents and to be accountable for addressing these needs. This "Senior Subcabinet" has served as the primary vehicle within County government for advancing our age-friendly mission. One of the first charges I made to the Subcabinet was to plan and conduct a "Senior Summit" which was held in November 2008. The Summit drew over 350 attendees comprised of County seniors, caregivers, public and private providers of senior services ("the Aging Network"), the Senior Sub-cabinet, faith community representatives, the business sector, academia, and community stakeholders. These participants worked collaboratively to prioritize the most critical needs of older adults in eight categories (employment, safety, communication, home and community based services, health and wellness, civic and social engagement, housing and transportation). An action plan was developed from the Summit proceedings to address these needs moving forward. This work has become known as the "Senior Initiative," a multi-year, cross departmental effort to improve coordination, community outreach, and promotion of programs designed for older adults. This initiative identified and planned for both the short and long-term needs of the senior population.

Between 2009 and 2015, the Senior Initiative, implemented through the Senior Sub-cabinet, has comprised eight separate workgroups. These workgroups embody the core principles of the WHO Age-Friendly Cities Initiative. The workgroups cover the areas of communication and outreach, housing and zoning, transportation and mobility, health and wellness, civic and social engagement, home and

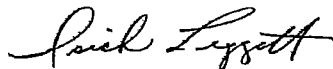
community support services, safety, and employment. County government department leaders chair the workgroups, and membership is comprised of government, private, and not-for-profit stakeholders. While each workgroup has its own chair, committee, goals, and ongoing agenda, all are working together under the leadership and coordination of the Sub-cabinet chairpersons to ensure that Montgomery County seniors are able to age in the community with safety, dignity, and vitality. The Senior Sub-Cabinet meets regularly throughout the year. Additionally, the chair of the Commission on Aging serves as a member of the Senior Sub-Cabinet.

Since 2008, my commitment to the Senior Initiative has led to many age-friendly changes to the County. For instance, we now offer increased transportation to senior centers, provide more meals to low-income senior housing sites, and have a greater variety of senior health and wellness programming. I personally reach out to the senior community regularly through visits to senior centers, town hall meetings, senior housing and visits with seniors throughout the County.

Furthermore, this month, an electronic survey is being shared with our residents to obtain their input about age friendly features and needs in our County. This survey has also been made available in paper format and translated in several languages. Several focus groups with older adults are also currently being conducted to obtain additional input from seniors who typically would not be forthcoming with feedback. All this information will be utilized for our upcoming December 3, 2015 *"Summit on Aging in Montgomery County."* We are planning on having 400 participants at this interactive day-long event. A planning group comprised of older adults, the Commission on Aging, the Vital Living Network and County staff is organizing this event. The agenda for our Summit will focus on developing a strategic plan for the next three years of my administration and recommendations for the upcoming Fiscal Year 2017 budget cycle.

As a result of our ongoing work and continued commitment to older adults in Montgomery County, I see tremendous value in working with the WHO Network to obtain the status of an Age-Friendly Community. We have been engaged in the critical cycle of identifying need, planning for services and programing, delivering needed services and programs, setting clear outcomes and monitoring progress, making adjustments and improvements and then beginning the cycle all over again. Given our journey, our many investments and our progress, our conversations with Ms. Jeanne Anthony, Senior Project Manager, AARP Livable Communities, have been reflective of our effort over many years. We are confident of joining and beginning our work for the third quadrant. This designation will fit hand-in-hand with my desire to incorporate age-friendly planning into all aspects of my administration. My colleagues and I look forward to joining the Age-Friendly Initiative, as it will further enhance our already strong commitment to making Montgomery County an Age-Friendly Community.

Sincerely,



Isiah Leggett
County Executive

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Attachments: Senior Agenda
Senior Initiative



A Community for a Lifetime:

The Senior Agenda

Montgomery County will be a community for a lifetime, a place for older adults to live safe, healthy and vital lives.

Adopted by the Montgomery County Council - December 2012

Commitment to Older Adults:

- The County will have a policy against ageism, including age stereotyping.
- Older adults are a valuable economic, cultural, and social resource and will be included in all County planning activities at the Executive and Council levels.
- Planning related to older adults will include consideration of diversity, inclusiveness, and intergenerational elements.
- Demographic data about older adults will be maintained, analyzed, and incorporated into planning.
- Resource information relevant to older adults will be distributed and accessible.
- The County will have a plan to address options for aging in place and alternatives.
- The County will promote public-private partnerships that contribute to implementation of this Agenda.



Transportation



Vision: *Montgomery County will have public and private transportation and mobility systems that enable older adults to go where they want to go, when they want to go and how they want to get there.*

- Affordable senior transportation will be a priority.
- Planning will include in-neighborhood options to make transportation accessible and to make affordable escorted transportation available.
- Planning will encompass the needs and safety of both pedestrians and those who do not drive.
- Transportation planning will include a focus on the needs of older adults as they become less able to drive.

Housing



Vision: *Montgomery County will promote choices of dwelling types so that as the needs and preferences of older adults change, they can age in place, downsize, choose rental or ownership, or find housing with the appropriate level of supportive services without having to leave the community.*

- Affordable senior housing will be promoted and made available.
- Housing options and alternatives will be part of County planning efforts.
- Visitable and livable options will be included in County planning.
- New and existing construction and redevelopment will consider the needs of both current and prospective older residents.
- The County will assist and encourage efforts to create supportive communities such as villages, co-housing and other options.
- Redevelopment planning will encourage walkable communities.
- Planning efforts will include public-private partnerships as an option to providing housing suitable for older adults.



Socialization and Leisure

Vision: *Montgomery County will encourage and support vital living of older adults by providing opportunities for physical, mental and social interaction.*

- Recreation programs will facilitate socialization and other activities that integrate health and wellness.
- Recreation programs will be available and easily accessible to older adults throughout the County, particularly in areas where there are no senior centers.
- Lifelong learning opportunities will be available.
- Libraries will be a location of activities and resources for older adults.
- Active efforts will be made to engage older adults as volunteers.



Health and Wellness

Vision: *Montgomery County will expand public health and prevention programs that promote physical, mental, social and environmental health for older adults.*

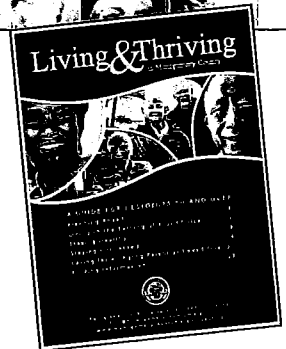
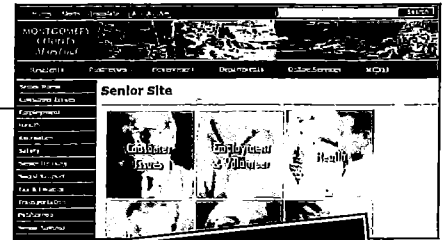
- Healthcare providers will be encouraged to accept private and public health insurance including Medicare and Medicaid.
- Medical care for older adults will be available, accessible, and affordable.
- Direct services and educational programs to plan for serious illness and to manage chronic diseases including promotion of self-management programs will be a priority.
- Access to hearing and dental care will be available.
- Nutrition support including education and meals will be provided.
- Specialized mental health care will be available as an integral part of the health services delivery system.
- Caregiver support will be a priority.
- Services to address cognitive impairment will be available, accessible and affordable for affected older adults and their families and caregivers.



Communications

Vision: *Montgomery County will distribute and publicize recognizable, understandable, timely, and accessible information on County and public resources and services for older adults.*

- Information will be understandable and accessible by older adults and their caregivers in diverse ethnic population groups
- Information will clearly state who is eligible for services at no cost and who is eligible at specified costs.
- Information for older adults will be branded uniformly for consistency and recognizable identification
- The County will use and publicize multiple media to disseminate information relevant to older adults, including social media, its regularly updated website and a 24/7 information resource line.



Employment

Vision: *Montgomery County will recognize the extent and value of the contribution of older adults to the economy.*

- The County will encourage County agencies and private companies to offer employment opportunities as older adults transition to retirement.
- The County will provide information that promotes the value of older workers.
- The County will encourage job fairs, partnerships, and forums to help older adults prepare themselves to continue in or reenter the workforce and find jobs.



Security and Safety

Vision: *Montgomery County will provide physical, financial, and technological protection and safety for older adults.*

- The County will expand its police and fire safety programs targeted toward older adults.
- The County will educate both older adults and their caregivers about the potential for financial crimes, including telephone and computer scams.
- The County's Ombudsman Program will increase its monitoring of the safety of group homes and assisted living facilities.
- The County will work to assure legal protection from financial exploitation of older adults.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY:
A COMMUNITY FOR A LIFETIME FOR EVERYONE

Introduction:

Montgomery County, MD hosted a Senior Summit in 2008 and has worked very hard, since then, to make Montgomery County a community for a lifetime, for all residents. Undeterred by the national recession and tight local budgets, the County expanded ways for boomers and older persons: to get around the County, to engage in meaningful activities, to get health and supportive services, to access affordable housing, and to benefit from safety initiatives. Further, we improved our outreach, to inform more people about these benefits and services. Following are highlights of these accomplishments.

TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

- *Maintained Ride On bus service with free weekday hours for people age 65-plus and reduced fare at all other times – also making sure that buses and bus stops are accessible.*
- *Introduced convenient, free transportation for seniors to and from each of the County's five senior centers.*
- *Provided "Connect-A-Ride," service to triple the number of people, age 50-plus, who are learning about transportation options, connecting with providers, and getting help with required forms so they can get around the County, car-free.*
- *Provided thousands of low-income seniors age 67+ access our subsidized taxi service. Dubbed "Call-n-Ride," the program serves 5,000 residents each year.*
- *Made available escorted transportation service for residents with low income who have cognitive challenges and need help getting to medical appointments.*
- *Built 175 miles of new sidewalk and 6,000 new ramps, while upgrading another 35 miles of sidewalks and ramps to meet ADA standards.*
- *Extended the timing of two-thirds of County traffic lights to provide more time for pedestrians to cross the road; this project is on-going.*
- *Installed engineering to slow traffic and give people a safer place to cross. Since these efforts, pedestrian collisions are down by 35% in areas where we installed traffic calming measures and by 45% in identified high incidence areas.*
- *Educated people about safety in parking lots, where one in four pedestrian collisions occur.*

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- *Expanded the number of villages from 4 to 14 active villages, through ongoing support and guidance. These neighborhood organizations provide social connection and friendly assistance to help people stay in their community as they age. Another nine Villages currently are in development.*
- *Expanded ways to help people stay strong by offering more exercise classes, bone builder classes, programs to assist those with chronic medical conditions, and beyond.*
- *Promoted good nutrition: Today, 4,400 people enjoy lunch at sites across the county, which represents a 20% increase. And, we doubled the number of home delivered meals to reach 2,000 older persons.*

HOME- AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

- *Continued subsidies for a limited number of group home residents and qualified assisted living residents.*
- *Continued to provide medical care and personal care services for frail elderly residents with qualified income. This includes in-home nurse monitoring, friendly visitors, escorted grocery shopping, legal assistance, case management, chore services and public guardianship.*
- *Doubled subsidies for Adult Day programs to cover two days per week, as a critical support for family caregivers. Continued short-term respite services, as well.*
- *Increased protections for residents in 190 assisted living facilities and 34 nursing homes by expanding our ombudsman program, which advocates for residents and investigates complaints.*

SENIOR CENTERS AND RECREATION CENTERS

- *Expanded hours and programs at five senior centers, including more exercise classes, lectures, cultural programs, mini-trips and much more.*
- *Engaged more residents at 13 County Recreation Centers:*
 - o *Began offering senior discounts for weekday weight rooms and fitness clinics, which engage thousands each year;*
 - o *Provided 60% more health and wellness classes and activities, everything from softball to Zumba.*
 - o *Thousands of older adults swim at County Aquatics facilities;*

- *Introduced Recreation Center mini-trips, outdoor adventures and the Maryland Senior Olympics, which engaged thousands of residents.*

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- *Several years ago, Montgomery County Volunteer Center updated its website and since then, 33,000 have volunteered through Montgomeryserves.org.*
- *Developed and expanded intergenerational programs that bring seniors and youth together, including:*
 - *Grandreaders program of seniors reading to youth at libraries during the summer*
 - *Interages, where seniors tutor and mentor children and youth visit older individuals living in facilities.*
- *Facilitated expanded offerings through Montgomery College Lifelong Learning Institute, Live and Learn, and OASIS classes and lectures.*
- *Continued to sponsor the 50+ Employment Expo and, to provide online education, career and employment resources through Montgomery County Public Libraries.*

LIBRARIES

- *Increased operating hours by 11% and conducted major renovations to enable larger collections and more meeting space.*
- *Hosted technology trainings in using computers and devices, sharing via Facebook and using email.*
- *Held classes in finance, health, consumer issues, English language learning, and much more.*
- *Made the Senior Smart Card for free and reduced fare bus service available for purchase at every Montgomery County public library.*

HOUSING COSTS

- *Continued to acquire and preserve thousands of new and existing units of affordable housing for seniors.*
- *Moved nearly a thousand more units into the development pipeline, in Aspen Hill, Bethesda, Germantown, Silver Spring, White Flint and White Oak.*

- *Maintained the Housing Opportunities rental units, in partnership with the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County*
- *Maintained the Homestead Tax Credit, the income-related property tax credit; and, the tax credit for homeowners age 70 and over.*

ACCESSIBLE HOUSING

- *Instituted new "Design for Life" program which provides partial tax credits to homeowners who install accessible features such as entry doors wide enough for wheelchairs, no-step entry into the home, better bathroom access via grab-bars or roll-in showers, and related measures to improve accessibility.*
- *Continued to provide convenient collection of refuse and recycling at the door, for people who are physically unable to bring their containers to the curb.*

SAFETY MEASURES

- *Improved fire and rescue services by building five new fire stations and improving our emergency response time by 11%.*
- *Followed Fire Safety Task Force recommendations, which significantly reduced fire deaths over nine years, especially among seniors.*
- *Introduced weekly visits by Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services to homes of elderly residents to address potential fire safety risks and tripping hazards while also ensuring that residents have home escape plans.*
- *Initiated "Keeping Seniors Safe," an outreach and education program developed and implemented by the Montgomery County Police Department. Through this program, thousands of seniors each year learn about safety while shopping; fraud and scams; identity theft and prevention; whom to call with concerns; and emergency preparedness.*
- *Launched an additional initiative to help seniors who may be missing or unsure of their location. This includes education, active searches and preventive efforts with families of an individual who has cognitive challenges.*
- *Formed the Montgomery County Elder and Vulnerable Abuse Task Force to protect seniors from elder abuse. This partnership among States Attorney's office, Montgomery County Police Department, and Montgomery County Health and Human Services has included increased staffing and increased coordination, to prevent and address elder abuse.*

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

- *Strengthened and expanded County communications and outreach, to make people aware of all the new and continuing programs and services for boomers and older persons.*
- *Initiated 311 call center, so that answers to questions about county programs and services are just a phone call away.*
- *Built a seniors website on montgomerycountymd.gov/senior, offering information online, in one place.*
- *Developed and distributed factsheets throughout the community on topics such as transportation options, vital living, older driver safety, and caregiver supports.*
- *Offer information bimonthly via Paperless Airplane, which reaches 140,000 e-subscribers.*
- *Produce Seniors Today, a monthly broadcast program on County cable and online which recently celebrated its 15th year and 150th episode.*

Montgomery County's Demonstrated Commitment to Age-Friendliness

History of government-led efforts to understand the needs of Montgomery County seniors and their caregivers and respond to them:

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|-----------------|--|
| December, 1985 | "Plan for Seniors Citizens in Need of Long-Term Care," Montgomery County Government (MCG) Division of Elder Affairs |
| March, 1987 | "The Status and Needs of Elder Citizens," MCG Division of Elder Affairs |
| January, 1987 | "Update-Recommendations: Plan for Seniors Citizens in Need of Long-Term Care," MCG Division of Elder Affairs |
| October, 1996 | "Community Conversations on Aging Report," Up-county Task Force on Aging |
| July, 1999 | "Computer Literacy for Seniors," Montgomery County Task Force on Computer Literacy |
| November, 2000 | "Making Montgomery County the Best Place to Age," Vital Living Conference Report |
| June, 2002 | "A Report on the Needs of Low-income Seniors in Montgomery County," Center for Health Program Development and Management, University of Maryland at Baltimore County |
| December, 2002 | "Strategic Plan for Senior Services In Montgomery County," Towson University Center for Productive Aging |
| March, 2005 | "An Inventory of County Government Programs Designed to Serve Senior," Office of Legislative Oversight |
| May, 2007 | "Imagining An Aging Future for Montgomery County, Maryland," Towson University Center for Productive Aging |
| October, 2007 | "Strategic Communications Plan for Addressing the Needs of Seniors in Montgomery County," Reingold, Inc. |
| March, 2008 | Formation of County Executive Leggett's Subcabinet on Senior Vital Living |
| November, 2008 | County Executive Leggett's Senior Summit |
| September, 2010 | "Village Blueprint: Tips and Strategies for Developing a Senior Village," Leslie Marks, Consultant and the Bethesda/Chevy Chase Regional Service Center |
| December, 2012 | Adoption of Commission on Aging's "Senior Agenda: Making Montgomery County A Community for a Lifetime." |
| FY2008-Present | Senior Budget Initiative |

