



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961... The Voice of the People of Howard County

Date: 9 December 2024

Subject: **Testimony on Budget**

Good evening, Dr. Ball

I am Paul Verchinski, testifying as a Board member of the Howard County Citizens Association (HCCA) and we would like to provide some suggestions regarding the budget.

We note and congratulate you that “The first Age-Friendly Howard County Five-Year Progress Report has been completed and approved by AARP.’ This Report was facilitated and launched by you on December 3, 2019. It has a five-year development history with participation by over 3,000 community residents including many of our members. In the past HCCA has initiated discussions on older adult issues via Forums held with the Howard County Office on Aging.

In the Report you note “Howard County government as the primary responsible party for many of the action steps”. This report will only be as good as its implementation in a timely manner. None of us are getting any younger as time goes by! Most county residents over 65 want to continue to enjoy and live in their current residences. The older adult population now comprises over 20% of the county’s 340,000 population or approximately 70,000 individuals.

The following are suggestions based on the Report:

1. We are aware that Howard County Office on Aging and Independence recently received a \$100,000 grant to assess residences for long term livability provided they are income qualified. This is a high priority since residents need to know if they can successfully age in their existing residences, if they need to make substantial renovations, or if they need to move to more suitable accommodation. We suggest that one Full-time Equivalent Occupational Therapist be hired to provide home evaluations similar to what is being done through the grant. At one time, the Office on Aging provided this as a county service when residents reached age 65.
2. Howard County is noted for its volunteers and the number of nonprofits. We note in the Report that “28% of all respondents reported they would like to volunteer more in the coming year”. This clearly benefits all residents. However, Howard County does not have a Volunteer Clearinghouse whereby residents could call to find available volunteer opportunities and for nonprofit organizations to post volunteer positions. We suggest one Full-Time Equivalent be hired and located in the Office on Aging and Independence since many volunteers are retired.

3. For more than 10 years the county has offered tax credits to assist older adults. These credits do make a big difference in an era of rising inflation and few pensions. The Aging in Place Tax Credit provides a 20% credit for individuals who have owned their home for 40+ years. The County Council extended eligibility to a total of eight years. For residents that initially received this credit, the eight years will expire next year. We suggest you budget for a further extension of the credit beyond eight years.

As a side note, we suggest the Department of Licenses, Inspections, and Permits update the Universal Design Guidelines. “Universal Design guidelines have been mandated in all 55+ communities for nearly 20 years.” During the past 20 years, the AARP has substantially revised its Universal Design Guidelines. This should be done especially because of the proliferation of the construction of 55+ communities in our county. The number of 55+ units which have been constructed since January 2020 and are planned to be built as of this month total 1440 units. The source is the Department of Planning and Zoning which filled our request which is appreciated.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide our suggestions for the upcoming budget and would appreciate feedback regarding our testimony.

Paul Verchinski
HCCA Board of Director