

**HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY**

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

**Special Session Minutes**

**August 14, 2023**

A Special Session of the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County was conducted via hybrid platform (with some participating in-person and some participating online/via teleconference) on Monday, August 14, 2023, with moderator functions occurring at 10400 Detrick Avenue, Kensington, Maryland beginning at 10:34 am. Those in attendance were:

**Present**

Roy Priest, Chair  
Frances Kelleher, Vice Chair  
Jeffrey Merkowitz, Chair Pro Tem  
Richard Y. Nelson, Commissioner  
Pamela Byrd, Commissioner  
Robin Salomon, Commissioner

**Absent**

Linda Croom, Commissioner

**Also Attending**

Chelsea Andrews, Executive Director	Bonnie Hodge
Kayrine Brown, Deputy Executive Director	Sean Asberry
Aisha Memon, General Counsel	Ali Ozair
Paige Gentry, Deputy General Counsel	Lynn Hayes
Elaine Cole	Monte Stanford
Tia Blount	John Broullire
Ken Silverman	Marcus Ervin
John Willhoit	Gio Kaviladze
Paige Gentry	Zachary Marks
Patrick Mattingly	Richard Congo

**Attending Via Zoom**

Darcel Cox	Timothy Goetzinger
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**IT Support**

Aries Cruz  
Genio Etienne

**Commission Support**

Jocelyn Koon, Senior Executive Assistant

Chair Priest opened the meeting with welcome remarks and an introduction to HOC's Strategic Planning Special Session. Chair Priest provided an overview of the Strategic Planning process and thanked staff and the consultants for their time spent thus far. Chair Priest introduced HOC's Executive Director, Chelsea Andrews, who further elaborated on the strategic planning process and introduced Public Works, the strategic planning consultants. Ms. Andrews introduced the President of Public Works, Eric Schruner, who opened the floor to Public Work's team, Kristi Guillory, Linda Rhodes, and Johnny Mack for introductions.

Mr. Schruner provided a broad overview of Public Work's Strategic Planning project, and discussed the following concepts: a) identifying the proper area of focus such as providing more housing; b) acquisition, rehabilitation, and construction of housing by HOC; c) private market of housing to make it more affordable and accessible to customers; and d) increasing self-sufficiency in general and in specific populations. Mr. Schruner expressed the interest amongst the Commissioners in regards to resident services and the desire for more resident involvement in the work that HOC performs.

Mr. Schruner introduced Dr. Linda Rhodes who provided feedback from the community, which was made up of 2,600 voices whom influenced the Strategic Planning report through: 1) interviews, 2) focus groups, 3) town halls, and 4) electronic surveys. The major messages received through stakeholder engagement were that those surveyed are interested in HOC and housing issues in the community. Dr. Rhodes highlighted that HOC customers highlighted wanting safe and affordable housing. Dr. Rhodes noted there were a few notable challenges amongst HOC customers such as: 1) the available jobs pay very low wages, 2) the Wait list is challenging, 3) unable to afford rent prices in Montgomery County and keep up with the cost of living, and 4) others living with disabilities and health issues have difficult times finding housing.

Mr. Schruner introduced Kristi Guillory of Public Works who provided the presentation on HOC's values. Kristi Guillory discussed what Public Works has done to think about developing organizational value. Ms. Guillory opened the floor to the Commission to provide feedback on the core values of HOC. Chair Pro Tem Merkowitz resonated with the terms such as innovative, empathetic, people first, sustainable and equitable. Chair Priest commented customer-centric, remaining tech savvy, connectivity and agility is very important. Vice Chair Kelleher noted quality, safe and affordable housing are critical to have as well as highlighted key values such as: integrity, competence, customer focus, commitment to prioritize those most in need, accountability for results, collaboration in HOC and with partners outside of HOC as well as diversity and transparency.

Mr. Schruner introduced Dr. Johnny Mack who provided a presentation on HOC's Vision and Mission. Dr. Mack defined Mission as where we are going and why are we are here. He defined Vision as what will be found as we get there in the future. Dr. Mack inquired with the Commission if HOC's current Vision and Mission statements remain relevant and responsive to the opportunities seen today at HOC. Chair Priest and Chair Pro Tem liked the current Vision and Mission statements and agreed they can both be simplified to capture the essence of HOC. Vice Chair Kelleher commented that advocacy should be included in our vision statement as well as removing the amenity rich wording and replacing it with "quality housing." Chair Pro Tem Merkowitz suggested the Commission statement should be an aspirational statement. Chair Priest noted the vision statement can be shortened to one line and the mission statement can define the mechanics on how to proceed.

After additional deliberation amongst the Commission and Public Works regarding the Mission and Vision of HOC, the meeting went into recess at 12:30 p.m. and reconvened at 1:34 p.m.

Chair Priest introduced Executive Director, Chelsea Andrews, who reintroduced Public Works to provide the remainder of their Strategic Planning presentation. Mr. Schruner provided an overview on the strategies and policies of the Strategic Plan. The topics discussed were customer services, resident services, internal operations, staffing, and resource constraints. Public Works discussed a high level overview on opportunities and ideas that have been gathered from stakeholder input, Commission feedback and secondary research on what peer entities are doing.

Mr. Schruner reintroduced Dr. Rhodes who provided the presentation on HOC's Customer Service and Residential Service. Dr. Rhodes highlighted ways to improve customer service by developing more relationships with nonprofit partners and community organizations as well as increasing accessibility for residents. Dr. Rhodes also highlighted the importance of streamlining the housing path waitlist and investing in technology. The Commission and Public Works LLC deliberated on the specifics of customer service as it relates to the improving the Strategic Plan. Chair Priest inquired about the main five main goals pertaining to the Strategic Plan and did not agree with the presentation and asked for high level strategic direction. Executive Director, Chelsea Andrews, commented that improving customer service is a short term strategy. Commissioner Nelson asked that a strategic goal is the "provision of good quality customer service and communication".

Mr. Schruner reintroduced Ms. Guillory who provided the presentation on Data, Staffing and Capacity. Ms. Guillory highlighted that HOC is under staffed due to various reasons which results in large workloads and effects customer service. Ms. Guillory mentioned changing Human Resources' strategies as a potential focus in the strategic plan. Ms. Guillory also noted the importance of diversity and inclusion, investing in staff training, mounting real DEI efforts and investing in data systems. Chair Pro Tem Merkowitz agreed the presented items should be considered once the high level strategic goals are implemented.

Mr. Schruner transitioned to the final topic of the presentation, Housing Development, Real Estate and Finance. The main focus of the strategic plan should be to 1) set and authorize annual targets for acquisition, rehab and construction; 2) plan to obtain funding and/or revenue wherever available; and 3) develop and agree to policy and priorities. Mr. Schruner asked the Commission what would they set as HOC's priorities. Chair Pro Tem Merkowitz mentioned he would have appreciated a deeper dive on data within Montgomery County. Vice Chair Kelleher mentioned the importance of the strategic decision is to find more affordable housing for low and moderate income people as well as mixed income housing as a matter of philosophy. Chair Pro Tem Merkowitz mentioned the strategic plan will be the framework in bringing the Commission and staff together in making decisions.

Chair Priest asked for the next step to explain the five high level strategic directions during the next meeting with Public Works. Executive Director, Chelsea Andrews, provided closing remarks and discussed the undertone of addressing the poverty in Montgomery County as well as changing the trajectory of families. Ms. Andrews also highlighted improving the outcomes of our residents.

Chair Pro Tem Merkowitz thanked Public Works for the work presented and asked for a deeper dive on information provided. There was no formal action taken.

With no further items for discussion, Chair Priest adjourned the meeting at 3:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chelsea Andrews  
Secretary- Treasurer