



Howard County

Subject: Testimony on Council Bill No. 11-2016, reorganizing the Executive Branch of Government related to the Office of Transportation

To: Dr. Calvin Ball, Council Chairperson

From: Lonnie R. Robbins, County Administrator



Date: February 8, 2016

The above-referenced Council Bill reorganizes County Government pursuant to Section 403 of the Howard County Charter. The Bill removes the Office of Transportation from the Department of County Administration and transfers those functions to the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ). It clarifies the duty of DPZ with regard to Transportation functions.

As stated in the County Executive's correspondence of December 22, 2015, this legislation follows the observations made by the Executive's Transition Committee. The Committee found, and the experience over the last year has demonstrated, a shifting focus from public transit and roads to a greater emphasis on pathways, sidewalks, and other transportation-related elements within the Office of Transportation. As the Regional Transportation Agency ("the RTA") of Central Maryland continues to evolve and develop its public transit services, the future need of personnel resources from the County for oversight will decrease compared to the amount of personnel resources that was needed to establish the RTA. By moving the transportation function back to DPZ, transportation will be better integrated into comprehensive and community planning as well as the planning review process. The operations of the Regional Transportation Agency are managed by an outside contractor, thus reducing the need to focus County resources towards this effort.

Overall, the Administration remains committed to creating an environment for all of the citizens of Howard County that provides several transportation options, including driving, biking, walking, or taking public transit, and we believe that this reorganization will put the County on the right path to achieve that goal. We also believe that this reorganization will better integrate transportation planning with transportation services.

Fiscal Impact

There will be minimal fiscal impact to this proposal as staff currently assigned to the Office of Transportation will be reassigned to DPZ.

Attachment



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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December 22, 2015

The Honorable Dr. Calvin Ball, Chairperson
Howard County Council
3430 Courthouse Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

Dear Chairperson Ball:

I am submitting this reorganization plan to the County Council in accordance with Section 403 of the Howard County Charter.

Charter Requirements

Section 403 of the Howard County Charter requires the County Executive to submit to the County Council, "a detailed explanation of the reasons for reorganization and an evaluation of the financial impacts. For purposes of this Section, 'reorganization' shall mean any change which prescribes, alters or defines functions and responsibilities and advocates, reallocates, expands or deletes powers of various departments, agencies, boards and other bodies of the Executive Branch."

The Executive Reorganization Plan must be submitted to the Council at least 120 days prior to submission of the next current expense budget, and the legislation implementing the Plan must be introduced within 60 days of submission of the Plan to the Council.

The proposal to be submitted to the County Council will pertain to the reorganization of the Office of Transportation ("OT"), the Department of Housing and Community Development ("DHCD") and the Department of Citizen Services ("DCS").

Summary of Proposed Plans

These recommendations for reorganization are based on extensive work conducted by County residents on the transition team as well as a work group of community members and DCS and DHCD administrators. The work group conducted a comprehensive review of services we currently provide and the constituencies we serve. Their work will help to create a more robust department that will better meet the needs of our citizens, particularly as we look at a growing aging population, a large number of residents who are veterans, and children and families who need support.

Office of Transportation

- Assign duties and function of the OT to the Department of Planning and Zoning (“DPZ”).
- There is minimal fiscal impact to this proposal as an equivalent number of staff will be reassigned to DPZ.

Department of Housing and Community Development

- Separate the programs, functions, and personnel of the Howard County Housing Commission (“Commission”) from DHCD.
- Transfer statutory programs and grants management to the Department of Citizen Services.
- As addressed in the discussion below, there is minimal fiscal impact to this proposal.

Department of Citizen Services

- Create an Office of Housing and Community Partnerships to include the following functions: grants management, housing opportunities, coordinated system of homeless services, community partnerships, and the multi-service center.
- Create a function within DCS that would be charged with providing support services for veterans.
- As addressed in the discussion below, there is minimal fiscal impact to this proposal.

Office of Transportation

Background:

The OT currently exists within the Department of County Administration and is charged with promoting and enhancing the County’s transportation and transit operations. Prior to 2011, the Office’s functions had been within the Department of Planning and Zoning.

The proposed plan will transfer those functions to DPZ. In its work, my transition committee found that there was a shifting “focus from public transportation and roads to place more emphasis on pathways, sidewalks, and other transportation elements.” The transition committee concluded that transportation planning needed to have a larger role. By placing the Office under the DPZ, the Office can be better integrated in the planning review process. As we look forward to redevelopment of Downtown Columbia and the revitalization of our aging Village Centers, building a sustainable transportation network will be critical. The OT has recently completed work on a Bicycle Master Plan and is working to finalize an update of the Pedestrian Master Plan. As we explore improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities, developing a potential future transit center, and look toward integrating our existing system with other regional systems, we will need seamless integration of transportation planning with plans for development and redevelopment.

The operations of the Regional Transportation Agency (“RTA”) are largely managed by an outside contractor with oversight from the County and the fellow member jurisdictions, thus eliminating the need to contribute a large amount of personnel resources towards this effort. Improving our current bus system is still an important objective of the administration, but I am confident that this can still be addressed by the Office acting in a supervisory role over the RTA.

Reorganization Synopsis:

This Reorganization Plan transfers the OT to the DPZ. Staff currently existing in the OT will remain and, therefore, there is minimal fiscal impact to the County.

Department of Housing and Community Development

Background:

The DHCD works to provide affordable housing opportunities for low and moderate income residents of Howard County. The DHCD administers a range of Federal, State, and County funded programs providing opportunities for affordable home ownership, loans and grants for special needs housing programs, rental assistance, community facilities and programs. The DHCD also provides loans for settlement and down payment assistance, assists in home ownership preparedness, operates the Community Development Block Grant, Community Legacy and the HOME program.

The Commission, an independent State chartered Public Housing Authority, began in 1990. Its Board of Commissioners consists of seven members appointed by the County Executive and approved by the County Council. The Commission develops and manages housing resources for

low and moderate income residents of Howard County. The Commission also owns and manages 1,700 residential properties (850 market-rate and 850 affordable housing units), maintains these properties, develops affordable housing opportunities for the citizens of Howard County through partnerships with developers or land acquisition for development and operates the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Reorganization Synopsis:

A. Separate the Housing Commission from the Department of Housing and Community Development.

The purpose of the Housing Commission is to build and manage diverse housing units for low- and moderate-income families. It is already a separate public authority created pursuant to the provisions of Subtitle 13 of Title XIII of the Howard County Code, with the County Executive appointing the members to the Commission, with approval of the County Council. Under this Plan, the Commission will be a mostly separate entity from County government. The only links that will remain to County government include the appointment of Commission members and any other connections required by State Law. Separated in all other aspects, the Commission should be able to develop more units that are affordable using enhanced financing methods and more expedient processes.

The separation will strengthen both entities and eliminate the need to resolve the potential for or the perception that conflicts of interest exists when the Commission and DHCD are both parties to an agreement or project. The separation will also eliminate the public confusion surrounding the role of the Commission and DHCD.

The Commission currently pays for and manages 30 positions housed within the DHCD. There are eight positions in the Grants Management and Housing Opportunities (i.e., homeownership programs) divisions which directly serve County Government and these positions will be retained within County Government. There is minimal fiscal impact as the Commission currently pays 100% of the salary and benefits for Commission-function positions. Given the smaller number of employees remaining, the Grants Management and Housing Opportunities divisions would be moved into the reorganized Department of Citizens Services as a separate Office. This reorganized DCS will be able to provide a wide range of human services to our residents under one umbrella, continuing to work towards our goals of reducing homelessness and fostering self-sufficiency.

B. Transfer all Department of Housing and Community Development statutory programs to the Department of Citizen Services; move the Grants Management

Division and Housing Opportunities Division to a new Office of Housing within DCS.

Services related to the housing needs of low to moderate income families will be better met through the reorganized Department of Citizen Services where a “no wrong door” approach will ensure that our residents receive comprehensive, sustainable support. There should be minimal, if any, impact on the General Fund, as the housing positions are already funded and there are administrative positions with the existing DCS organization.

Department of Citizen Services

Background:

As the County’s human service agency, the Department of Citizen Services touches the lives of County residents across their lifespan. The department provides services to children and youth, their parents and guardians, persons with disabilities, family caregivers and older adults. The department plays a significant role in oversight, training and monitoring of early care and education and assisted living providers, and organizations seeking information to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It also mediates, investigates and resolves consumer complaints and provides support for individuals in crisis and the non-profits who serve them. The DCS is comprised of the Office of Children’s Services, Office of Consumer Affairs and the Office on Aging. Other components of the Department include: Disabilities Services and ADA Compliance, the Community Service Partnerships program (which provides County funding to nonprofit human services agencies), Homeless Services and specific emergency management responsibilities.

Reorganization Synopsis:

- A. Related to the reorganization of DHCD, create an Office of Housing and Community Partnerships which will include the following divisions:**
 - 1. Grants Management**
 - 2. Housing Opportunities**
 - 3. Homeless Services**
 - 4. Community Partnerships**

- B. Create a function within DCS that would be charged with providing support services for veterans.**

The County must recognize the need to serve the veteran population in the County. This function will help veterans access the federal and state benefits they have earned and to connect them to the various County departments and community partnership programs that meet their needs. Carroll County is one of the neighboring counties that has such a program and has offered to act as advisor and mentor in starting up this function in Howard County. There are currently about 20,000 veterans in Howard County (7% of the population). There is minimal fiscal impact related to this creation.

I look forward to working with you and the other Councilmembers on these important matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allan H. Kittleman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Allan H. Kittleman

County Executive

cc: County Councilmembers
Jessica Feldmark