

FCAG Meeting, Monday March 20th 2023 at 6 pm

Present: Pastor Will Green, Kersi Shroff, The Reverend Anne Derse, Rabbi Abbi Sharofsky, Dr. Gareth E Murray, Kenneth Nelson, Daisy Thom, Sultan Chowdhury, Tal Widdes, Carmen Castro-Conroy, Eugene Wright, Richa Agarwala, Kam Shah, Adbul Qadar Chaudhry

Ramadan begins on the evening of Wednesday, March 23rd through the evening of Thursday, April 20th.

The major themes:

- Submit to God as the Almighty, the Creator.
- Abstain

Additional notes about Ramadan

- Persons of the islamic faith abstain from food and drink, as well as behaviors which may be harmful to our bodies or relationships, from dusk to dawn.
- It is required for every able-bodied man and woman beginning at the age of accountability, generally around puberty.
- There are special prayers which accompany the times of abstinence, including evening prayers called [Tarawih](#) which may be prayed individual or congregational settings.
- Larger gathering
- Fasting is ascribed to the muslims as it was ascribed by the prophets and teachers of the religions prior to them, according to the Koran.

Joint Advisory Meeting Discussion

- It was helpful to recognize the overlap between different groups, including both needs and areas of organizing.
- Kate shared that the sharing of pronouns at the beginning of the meeting caused some discomfort for some participants and encouraged FCAG members to speak with her directly if they had specific concerns. She mentioned the importance of helping LGBTQIA+ persons feel comfortable and respected.
 - When asked to provide clarity about the discomfort, Kate shared that some people verbally refused to share pronouns and that folks intentionally misgendered persons on the call.

- Abbie shared that there was an additional meeting of chairs of the individual advisory groups. She learned that there will be a survey released later this spring for the LGBTQIA+ community in Montgomery County to better understand their experience. She suggested that we have a joint meeting with the LGBTQIA+ Taskforce to understand this survey and the data it reveals.
- Kate mentioned that she's spoken with Aminah, the LGBTQIA+ Advisory Group Liaison, to speak with the group about curriculum being released in County schools this Fall.
- Gareth shared that communities of faith are sometimes afraid to lean into these kinds of hard questions in ways that recognize our shared humanity.
- Anne shared that, from her perspective, this is more than an academic discussion. There are real-world implications because of the conversations and questions emerging right now. She spoke specifically about impacts on trans kids and LGBTQIA youth.
- Terry spoke and offered to bring up this conversation at the next Human Rights commission meeting.
- Gareth asked if a survey or questionnaire had been sent out the faith organizations so that we could coordinate a list of affirming congregations and communities. Anne spoke in affirmation of this idea.
- Sultan spoke in affirmation of the value in recognizing our shared humanity and care for the well-being of all people.
- Draft Montgomery County Budget
 - Now that this Budget request has been shared with the County Council, it will go through a series of hearings. Members are encouraged to participate at the hearings, but FCAG members may not speak on behalf of the FCAG.
 - Abbi shared that the fine line here between serving on this advisory group and organizing our faith communities means we can speak and lobby on behalf of the individuals congregations and communities.

Abbi offered to providing training and pointers on how we can organize within individual communities to sharing convincing stories.

- Some highlights included a pilot program with Enterprise that will help 7 houses of worship go through a 24 month process to develop affordable housing, there is an increase of \$200,000 to the Faith Community Security Grants, funding for youth, senior and disability services, and support for newcomers in Montgomery County.

- Some clarity was provided on the Affordable Housing Cohort model that, in order to receive funding, communities will have to be a part of the cohort.
 - Anne asked for clarity about the support being budgeted for newcomer support. Kate will, if a formal request is submitted, share that with the appropriate people for clarity.
- Meeting on May 15th with the County Executive
 - There will be a dinner held at Silver Spring United Methodist Church, time TBD
- Police Board Request
 - The Montgomery County Police Department is putting together a Board to examine use of force, particularly as it impacts vulnerable populations. FCAG has been asked to provide recommendations of names to serve. Kate will send language on what is being requested so that we can share with our congregations and communities. FCAG members are asked not to share this information broadly within their faith communities.
- Other Notes
 - Tal asked whether or not there might be opportunities for collaboration between the FCAG and Action in Montgomery, particularly on issues of affordable housing and newcomer issues.
 - We have an upcoming advisory group training on May 3rd, 2023 at 7PM
 - On Wednesday, March 22nd there is a panel event on Anti-Semitism at the County Office Building, sponsored by the Committee Against Hate and Violence. It will be viewable online.
 - Abdul reminded us that there will be an Iftar dinner April 1st at 6:30PM.
 - On April 4th there will be an Iftar dinner at the County Executive Building at 6PM.
 - Kersi shared that at 5:24PM Nayrouz began. In the Zoroastrian calendar it is an important religious event, as well as a large cultural event . It denotes the start of spring and the re-growth, recreation of the earth. A few years ago UNESCO acknowledged the cultural significance of Nayrouz, as did the Montgomery County Council a few years ago.

Budget information:

You can view the budget here:

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OMB/Resources/Files/omb/pdfs/fy24/psprec/FY24_BudgetinBrief.pdf

You can view more details here:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISOPERATING/Common/Index.aspx?FY=2024&VER=REC>

1. **Affordable Housing, Request by Kersi and RLUWG:** Montgomery County designate \$1,000,000 in the FY 2024 budget to work with faith institutions to develop affordable housing on their surplus properties, focusing on predevelopment costs.
 1. CE Budget: \$385,000 for a one-year pilot program for a Faith-Based Housing Development Initiative to provide real estate development assistance, legal resources, capital, and training that will help faith-based organizations develop underutilized real estate assets/land into affordable homes and other community facilities.
 2. This will be matched by other capitol funds, and will be closer to \$800,000, and will help seven houses of worship embark in a 24 month program to develop affordable housing and pay for predevelopment costs.
 3. This is a pilot, with the opportunity to increase in funds moving forward.
2. **House of Worship Security, Request by Chris:** \$1.5 million in addition grant funding plus funding for staff to support the process.
 1. This budget expands support for nonprofit organizations at high risk of experiencing hate crimes and provides \$1,000,000 to enhance the security of their facilities and the safety of our residents.
 2. Last year was \$800,000 so this is a \$200,000 increase, meaning that an additional 15-25 houses of worship and non-profits will receive support next cycle.
3. **Afterschool/Youth Program Support, Request by Chris:** Provide increased funding for after school programs to address increased drug addiction, mental health crises and gang violence of \$200,000
 1. \$11.9 million for programs within the Community Grants budget and the Cost
 2. CE's budget recommending that we target the following areas for community grants funding in FY24:

i. **\$1.5 million for Youth Support grants;**

ii. **\$1.5 million for Senior Support grants;**

iii. **\$1.5 million for Individuals with Disabilities**

Support grants;

iv. **\$1.3 million to provide grants for nonprofit partners who serve underserved communities;**

v. **\$1.0 million for grants to provide nonprofit technical assistance and management support;**

vi. **\$1.0 million in Community Project Fund grants for small, emerging, and volunteer-led organizations;**

vii. \$560,987 to support Nonprofit Incubators;

and

viii. \$400,000 for continuation of the Place Based Management Grant Program

1. While this isn't exactly what we asked for, it is a lot of funding for a lot of issues I know we've discussed
2. I will need your help getting information out once these grants are live to the communities passionate and working on these issues.
4. **Newcomer and Migrant Support/Welcome Center, Request by Anne:** Establishing a cabinet-level County Office of Refugee and Immigrant Services, Establishing a Refugee and Immigrant Welcome and Services Center, Establishing immediately a joint working group with the County Council with a six month mandate and Reserving one million dollars in the budget would provide \$50,000 to finance the work of the working group, \$250,000 to establish the MoCo Office of Refugee and Immigrant Services, and \$700,000 to lease and equip a site for a Welcome and Services Center and launch its work.
 1. CE's budget: Implement a robust legal immigration service referral and data collection system housed at the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center
 2. Provide additional resources to offset discontinued Federal funds for tenants to access legal assistance, counseling, and education services.
 3. Recommend funding for a Legal Services Coordinator position supporting the "Bienvenidos: Aqui para Ti" initiative led by the Department of Health and Human Services to coordinate legal education, screenings, consultations, wraparound services, and representation for unaccompanied migrant children, asylum seekers and/or families/sponsors.
 4. Also will include the grants in #3

i. This is the area I have the least clarity on.

The CE has said publicly that he is working on a plan for newcomers and migrants, but this budget does not declare any new departments, working groups, welcome centers, etc. It is acknowledging and making space for support for newcomers and migrants, but I haven't been able to get a full breakdown on the plans and financing.

Budget hearing information:

April 11th

- [FY24 Operating Budget](#)
 - 1:30PM and 7PM

April 13th

- [FY24 Operating Budget](#)
 - 1:30PM and 7PM