



# Howard County Council

George Howard Building  
3430 Court House Drive  
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043-4392

Deb Jung, Chair

District 4

Liz Walsh, Vice Chair

District 1

Opel Jones

District 2

Christiana Rigby

District 3

David Yungmann

District 5

## Minutes - Approved

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, January 9, 2024

Hybrid Meeting (Virtual and In-Person Meeting)

Video Streamed on <https://cc.howardcountymd.gov/watch-us>

9:30 a.m.

Chair Jung opened the meeting at 9:36 a.m.

**Members present:** Chair Deb Jung; Vice-Chair Liz Walsh; Christiana Rigby; and David Yungmann.

**Members absent:** Opel Jones.

**Staff Present:** Michelle Harrod, Council Administrator; Theo Wimberly, Administrative Manager; Isaiah Anderson, Executive Assistant; Owen Kahn, Legislative Analyst; Charity Respass, Administrative Staff; Roz Hightower, Administrative Staff; Owen Clark, Acting County Auditor; Lori Buchman, Office of the Auditor; Gary Kuc, County Solicitor; and Amanda Mihill, Office of Law.

### 1. Pension Oversight Report

Howard County Retirement Coordinator Scott Southern gave an overview of the Pension Oversight Report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022. Mr. Southern summarized the purposes and methods of drafting for the report and the recommendations. The recommendations include hiring an actuary to conduct an actuarial audit. Mr. Southern responded to questions from the Council about the real estate asset class and if it is too heavily weighted with office space; concerns about private equity in the hedge funds, ESG goals, and Russian assets; the various implications of the discount rates at 7.25%; pressure to divest from fossil fuel industry and how the Commission could be persuaded to divest; and how the voluntary 457 plan and the pension plan interact with one another. Mr. Southern gave concluding remarks on the strengths of the pension plan.

*Council requested information:*

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<http://cc.howardcountymd.gov>

- Please provide a summary of the investments that are included in the Alternative Investments Core/Non-Core Real Estate (shown on page 5 of the Pension Oversight Commission Report)
- Please provide a comparison of the County's discount rate as it compares to other plans.

## **2. Court House / Council Space**

The Administration gave an overview of the project to reimagine the use of the old Courthouse in Ellicott City. The Courthouse is 80,000 square feet with 60,000 useable square feet and has been through several phases of construction and renovation. The Project Advisory Group recommended preserving historical character and converting it to a public or civic use. The proposed uses include the Center for the Arts, the AAPI cultural center, and Roving Radish and shared kitchen. The project is currently in the schematic design phase with a goal to start construction this coming summer.

The Administration responded to questions from the Council on cultural uses of the Courthouse and other Howard County buildings; opportunities to build panels above the parking lot; what would need to be done to preserve the building without tenants; how a longer term plan may be better for the County; the amount of space in the building that will be lost to renovation; the potential for using the parking lot area for stormwater management; development plans for the area that surrounds the Courthouse; the needs and demand for a full commercial kitchen and who it could be served; and the feasibility of outdoor escalators or other devices to move people up and down the hill.

There was a general discussion about the proposed architectural drawings for renovations to Council space. Chair Jung asked about the walls separating office space and if the walls reach the ceiling and sufficiently soundproofing. Mr. Yungmann asked about covering the skylights and replacing them with overhead lighting. There was a discussion about renovations to the Banneker Room and how new spaces may affect the audience capacity.

The Council requested new drafts of architectural changes; that conferences rooms begin construction as soon as possible; that the member suites begin construction in the summer; and that the Banneker Room changes begin construction in August 2024. The Council agreed to move forward with design and pricing for the proposed changes.

*Council requested information:*

- Please provide the cost estimates for repairs and maintenance that are required to preserve the old Court House. Please include the funding sources that will be used to pay for the repairs and maintenance.
- Please indicate how much of the work proposed for the old Court House is optional versus required.
- What is the overall vision for the area at the top of the hill around the old Court House?
- What is the long-range plan for the Roving Radish?
- Please confirm the timing for renovating the conference rooms.

### **3. Campaign Election Fund Commission Update**

Ms. Geckle from the Campaign Election Fund Commission gave an overview of their recommendations to changes to the Fund. The recommendations included clarifying that the timeline lasts through the primary and general election; allowing a candidate to keep a post-election fund under certain conditions; clarify the timeline for the State to review campaign finance reports; allowing candidates in uncontested elections to receive a percentage of matching funds; and increasing the amount a person can donate and the amount a candidate receives due to the CPI adjustment. Ms. Geckle responded to questions from the Council on if an uncoordinated effort could be funded by the Citizens Election Fund; if the language on uncontested elections is clear enough to be properly executed and the rationale behind the ratio; how the calculation was made in the letter that predicted the number of future candidates; how the calculation of the number of candidates may change depending on the party affiliation of the primary candidates; a specified date that the County would need to act on following a candidates application for public financing; the time that it takes to certify a candidate; the availability of a new system to replace MD CRIS; restrictions on what a candidate could do prior to being certified as a CEF candidate; the timeline for announcing a political campaign; the process for special elections and appointments if a vacancy occurs during a term; and the next steps for adopting the Commission's recommendations. Chair Jung suggested the Council share their amendments with Chair Jung to establish a consensus before legislation is introduced. Chair Jung gave concluding remarks on the benefits of the Citizen Election Fund.

*Council requested information:*

- Please confirm if the language related to Issue 6, allowing candidates in uncontested elections to receive a percentage of matching funds, referred more to when a candidate could no longer receive funds.
- Please provide the calculation that supports the funding recommendation.

### **4. Reports**

- a. MACo/NACo**
- b. Council Administrator**

Ms. Harrod discussed the timeline for Charter amendments and that the deadline for submitting Charter amendments is 95 days before the general election. The State Board of Election date is no later than August 2, 2024. June pre-file would be the last opportunity to introduce legislation to meet this deadline. Mr. Kuc emphasized this deadline is the date Office of Law must have the prepared ballot question to the State Board of Election and reminded the Council that Charter amendments require a supermajority to pass.

Ms. Harrod discussed the rules and procedures for certificate and Honorary Resolution requests. There was a discussion about the purpose and method of presentation of resolutions and requests. The Council agreed that Honorary Resolutions are signed by all Council Members; while Certificates are from one Council Member. It was agreed that the Chair can sign a certificate as on behalf of the Council as Chair.

- c. County Auditor**

Mr. Clark submitted his report and highlighted the office's work in the last month.

Chair Jung closed the meeting at 12:14 p.m.