

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Melvin "Mac" McClintock, Chair
Kelsey R.M. Bush, *Commission Liaison*



Francis Jack Russell, President
Kenneth R. Dement, Commissioner
Lawrence D. Jarboe, Commissioner
Thomas A. Mattingly, Sr., Commissioner
Daniel H. Raley, Commissioner

St. Mary's County Human Relations Commission
November 3, 2010
Minutes

Attendees: Melvin McClintock (Chair), Wayne Lockley, Deborah Dennie, Sarah Tyson, Kelsey Bush (staff liaison), Cynthia Brown (staff), Adrienne Raines (staff)

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 5:38 p.m. by Commission Chair, Mac McClintock. The Chair called the meeting to order and the meeting started with the members introducing themselves.

Approval of Minutes: The approval of minutes from the previous meeting was tabled.

The meeting was televised and representatives from organizations were invited to inform the Commission and community about programs offering assistance to those in need.

Tom Dennison, Government and Public Affairs Manager for the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative (SMECO), informed the Commission that assistance is available to those having difficulty paying their electric bills, particularly in the winter months. He stated that SMECO has an in-house program called "Project Match" that enables customers to donate additional money when paying their bills. This additional payment goes to the Tri-County Community Action Fund, where they apply the funds to those who cannot pay their utility bills. SMECO also offers rebates for utilizing energy-efficient equipment, and a Quick Home Energy Check Up to determine ways to reduce energy usage. Customers can also request a more comprehensive Energy Audit for a fee. T. Dennison advised that this information is disseminated to the community via bill inserts, monthly newsletters, the company's website and the customer service call center. He stated that state laws prohibit disconnections for non-payment during severe weather, defined as 32 degrees or colder for a sustained period. T. Dennison stated that SMECO's goal is to provide electricity, not disconnect service. He explained that when the temperature drops below freezing, heating systems require more energy to heat homes, thus raising utility bills. Customers are strongly encouraged to contact SMECO before they receive a termination notice so that payment arrangements can be made. M. McClintock inquired how customers with medically-dependent equipment such as respirators are handled during outage or severe weather situations. T. Dennison advised that they can request placement on a call-list. SMECO would then contact them to inform them of alternate sheltering locations, usually schools and other facilities with back-up generators, where the customer can seek refuge until the situation is such that they can return home.

Ken Sothoron, Sports Supervisor for the County's Recreation and Parks Department, informed the Commission of the many fall and winter sports programs available to the community. Among the multitude of options highlighted were gymnastics, youth football, basketball, ballet, indoor soccer, dancing and fitness classes. He reminded the Commission that the Great Mills swimming pool is open and offers swimming lessons year-round. Popular family events like the Family Skate Nights at Leonard Hall Recreation Center are also available to the community. In addition, the Carver Recreation Center hosts the 21st Century After-School Youth Program, funded by a Maryland State Education Grant and enhanced by the St. Mary's County Public Schools and County Libraries. K. Sothoron explained that this program is available Monday through Thursday to the South Hampton community. Students residing in the southern end of the county are welcome to participate provided that they can arrange their own transportation. The program assists children with homework and offers educational games, a computer lab, field trips and enrichment activities. K. Sothoron advised that more information is available in the Winter Program Guide, on the County's website and by calling the Recreation and Parks Department information line. The Department also posts information on the internet through their Facebook page. Residents can register for activities in person at the Government Center office or online via the County website. Recreation and Parks offers a scholarship program that allows low-income families receiving County assistance to receive a 50% discount on registration fees.

Jeanne Schmitt, Assistant Director of the County's Department of Social Services (DSS), informed the Commission about the programs available to residents in need of assistance. She stated that DSS has developed a Freezing and Inclement Weather Plan that provides assistance to homeless and displaced citizens. Partner agencies such as Angel's Watch Regional Shelter and Three Oaks are on stand-by when inclement weather is anticipated. Additional beds are made available at these facilities, and local hotels and motels are utilized. J. Schmitt advised that DSS provides 24/7 emergency response through the Sheriff's Department. Emergency assistance is typically provided with the stipulation that recipients come in to the DSS office the next day to discuss and develop a long-term plan. The WARM (Wrapping Arms 'Round Many) Nights Program, launched in 2009, is spearheaded by the faith community with collaborative efforts provided by various agencies and County departments. WARM Nights provides bus service to the host church for that week, where residents are provided with dinner and shelter, breakfast and a bag lunch. Those wishing to donate food or hygiene items to WARM Nights' sheltering efforts can contact their local church, DSS or Walden-Sierra for more information. J. Schmitt also advised that DSS partners with the Department of Human Services to provide donated Christmas gifts to children of families in need through the Christmas Caring Program.

Cynthia Brown, Interim Director of the Department of Human Services (DHS) informed the Commission about the Christmas Caring Program, a joint effort of the DSS and DHS. The program matches families currently receiving assistance from DSS with individuals and organizations who wish to "adopt" those families to provide donated Christmas gifts for their children. C. Brown stated that this long-running program is successful in providing thousands of County children with a holiday experience they may not have otherwise. She also informed the Commission that to eliminate duplication of efforts, this year Toys for Tots will be collaborating with the Christmas Caring Program to ensure that more families receive assistance.

C. Brown introduced Toys for Tots Coordinator Bruce Vandebos. He announced that this year marks the Toys for Tots' 40th Anniversary. B. Vandebos gave a brief history of the national program, reiterated the partnership this year with DHS and reviewed the procedures for donating to Toys for Tots. He stated that new unwrapped toys can be dropped at any of the collection boxes throughout the community and assured the Commission that donations will be distributed to residents of St. Mary's County. Collection boxes are located in local restaurants, retail outlets, grocery stores, banks, schools and government facilities throughout the County. Marine Corp League representatives will be present to collect donations at the Lexington Park Wal-Mart on November 26th and 27th, and toy distribution to families in need will occur on December 18th and 19th at the Carver Recreation Center.

Announcements:

The 5th Annual Philanthropic Day Luncheon is being hosted by Charles County this year. It takes place on November 19th at the Greater Waldorf Jaycee Community Center from 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. K. Bush stated that the organizers are looking to regionalize this event in the future.

The 7th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Prayer Breakfast will be held at the St. Mary's College on November 17th at 8:15 a.m. in the J. Frank Raley Great Room in the Campus Center. The event includes a community breakfast, speakers and music celebrating the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. The cost per person is \$8.00.

Next Meeting: December 1, 2010, at 5:30 p.m.
Governmental Center, Potomac Building, Room 14

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 6:33 p.m.