

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY ARCHIVES**  
**Guide to the Records of the**  
**MONTGOMERY COUNTY ETHICS COMMISSION**  
**1978-1989, 1998**

**Record Group 15: Boards, Committees, and Commissions**

**May 4, 1998**  
**Revised, February 2, 2016**  
**Updated 2018**

Montgomery County Archives  
Montgomery County Records Center  
8540 Anniversary Circle, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877  
(301) 926-5002  
[archive@montgomeryhistory.org](mailto:archive@montgomeryhistory.org)  
[www.montgomeryhistory.org](http://www.montgomeryhistory.org)

### **ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY**

The Maryland State Ethics Commission in September 1981 published in the *Maryland Register* and subsequently distributed a set of criteria and examples of model laws to guide local jurisdictions in the formulation of local ethics regulations. One of the first Maryland counties to comply with the law, Montgomery County drafted an ethics ordinance under Chapter 19A of the Montgomery County Code. This law established an Ethics Commission to formulate policies, rule on conflicts of interest, receive and investigate complaints, offer advisory opinions, decide who must file financial disclosure statements, register lobbyists and collect relevant information from them, and generally administer its provisions.

County Executive Charles Gilchrist appointed the first five-member commission. John Harman was the first chairman, and Clyde Sorrell of the County Attorney's Office served as legal counsel. Because the commissioners served on a part-time basis without compensation and met approximately every two to four weeks, Mr. Sorrell was charged with day-to-day supervision of the Commission's activities and staff.

The Commission was later enlarged to seven members, of whom only four could be members of the same political party. Russell I. Brown was appointed chairman upon the resignation of Mr. Harman in 1984. One of the new Commission's first acts was to develop policies and procedures to ensure compliance with the law, and to disseminate them to County employees and the general public. However, the Commission devoted most of its time to considering requests for waivers from ethics prohibitions and outside employment, and to providing advice and opinions on ethical questions. The bulk of its activities was concentrated on requests for approval of outside employment by County employees, both in formulating and revising policies, and in rendering judgments on hundreds of specific cases.

### **EXTENT**

1 cubic foot: 1 records box.

### **SCOPE AND CONTENT**

The records of the Montgomery County Ethics Commission comprise material from the files of Clyde Sorrell of the County Attorney's Office, who served as legal counsel during the earliest years of the Commission and supervised its activities on a day-to-day basis. The records span the years 1978 to 1986, with bulk dates of 1983 to 1985, and document the establishment and evolution of the Commission as it sought to provide guidance for and address in a consistent manner ethical concerns and conduct. Materials include correspondence, reports, minutes, agendas, resolutions, statements, appointments, brochures, clippings, forms, press releases, and notes. Because most are duplicates of records still held by the Ethics Commission and are confidential in nature, only policy and procedure records, general interpretations and guidance, and historically significant material relating to the establishment and development of the Commission are included. Minutes, original documents addressed to Mr. Sorrell, and items with handwritten notes are restricted because they contain confidential information.

The records contain several drafts of policy and procedure statements, comments on them by County department heads and other concerned individuals, and a December 1984 synopsis for County employees. Records also include material from the Commission's predecessor, the Public Disclosure Advisory Board, and other background material generated in the years before the law was enacted. These items illustrate the ethical concerns of County officials and residents that led to the passage of an ethics ordinance, as well as early attempts to address those concerns.

These records are arranged in alphabetical order by folder title.

### **CONDITIONS GOVERNING ACCESS**

This collection is open for research. Some material is restricted due to content or privacy reasons; folders with restricted content are marked as such in the finding aid and will not be served to researchers. If you have questions about restricted material, please contact the archivist.

### **LANGUAGE**

English.

### **PROVENANCE**

These are the records of Clyde Sorrell of the County Attorney's Office, and were transferred from the Montgomery County Records Center in 1998.

### **USING THESE RECORDS**

To request records listed in this finding aid, the following information should be given to the archivist:

Record Group 15, **Records of the Montgomery County Ethics Commission**, Series Number and Name, Box Number and Folder Title(s).

The preferred citation for materials from these records is:

Montgomery County Archives; Gaithersburg, Maryland. Record Group 15: Boards, Committees, and Commissions. Records Title: The Records of the Montgomery County Ethics Commission. Series number and series name. Box number and folder title, if appropriate.

### **PROCESSING PROCEDURES**

General processing procedures consisted of discarding duplicates, unnecessary binders, and routine transmittals. If records contained oversized documents and photographs, they were removed from the original location in their assigned series and placed in separate containers. Separation sheets would then be inserted in the original location within the folder to indicate the new location of any records placed elsewhere.

Preservation copying of newspaper clippings was performed whenever feasible. Records in folders were arranged, unless otherwise indicated, in forward chronological order, with undated records appearing at the end of the folder.

Because these are the records of Clyde Sorrell, legal counsel to the Commission, most were duplicates and confidential in nature. According to Section A-31 of Chapter 19 of the Montgomery County Code, the Commission must retain records for four years, and then may discard them. In order to safeguard the confidentiality of the information contained in the records, only policy and procedure records, general interpretations and guidance, and historically significant material relating to the establishment and development of the Commission were retained. The majority of confidential material was disposed of in accordance with the practices of the County Ethics Commission, which retains the record copies of all its transactions. However, some items containing confidential information, such as minutes, original documents addressed to Mr. Sorrell, and those with handwritten notes, were retained.

**PROCESSING STAFF/FINDING AID AUTHOR**

MCA staff.

**BOX INVENTORY**

**Box 1**

Annual Report, 1988, 1989, 1998  
Background Material, 1978-1981  
Background Material, 1982  
Civil Actions, 1984-1985  
Correspondence, 1981-1982  
Correspondence, 1983  
Correspondence, 1983 **(RESTRICTED)**  
Correspondence, 1984  
Correspondence, 1985  
Correspondence, 1985 **(RESTRICTED)**  
Handbook, Draft, 1984  
Hearing on Policies and Procedures, 1985  
Legislation/Regulations, 1982-1985  
Meeting, April 12, 1983  
Meeting, April 26, 1983  
Meeting, April 26, 1983 **(RESTRICTED)**  
Meeting, May 10, 1983  
Meeting, July 26, 1983 **(RESTRICTED)**  
Meeting, November 14, 1983  
Meeting, December 12, 1983  
Meeting, January 9, 1984  
Meeting, January 9, 1984 **(RESTRICTED)**  
Meeting, March 12, 1984  
Meeting, April 2, 1984  
Meeting, April 18, 1984  
Meeting, April 18, 1984 **(RESTRICTED)**  
Meeting, May 7, 1984  
Meeting, June 4, 1984  
Meeting, June 4, 1984 **(RESTRICTED)**  
Meeting, July 2, 1984  
Meeting, September 17, 1984  
Meeting, October 1, 1984  
Meeting, January 14, 1985  
Meeting, February 5, 1985  
Meeting, April 1, 1985  
Meeting, April 1, 1985 **(RESTRICTED)**  
Meeting, May 30, 1985  
Meeting, July 1985 **(RESTRICTED)**  
Meeting, August 1985  
Meeting, November 4, 1985

*(Box 1, cont.)*

Meeting, November 4, 1985 (**RESTRICTED**)

Meeting, January 13, 1986

Minutes, 1983-1985 (**RESTRICTED**)

Procedures, 1984-1985

State Ethics Commission Opinions, 1979-1983