

**Communications Committee Meeting  
Minutes  
December 16, 2024**

**Attendees**

**CoA**

Jean Dinwiddie, Co-chair  
Beverly Rollins, Co-chair  
Dixie Butler  
Virginia Cain  
Vernell DeWitty  
David Engel  
Kathleen McGuinness  
Yvette Monroe  
Marie Sloan  
Katie Smith  
Marsha Weber

**Alumni**

Marcia Pruzan  
Revathi Vikram

**Staff**

Shawn Brennan, Age Friendly Program Manager  
Jennifer Long, Montgomery County Aging and Disability Staff  
Sara Swarr, Montgomery County Recreation Manager

**Roll Call**

Jean Dinwiddie took roll and asked for approval of the November 2024 minutes. The minutes were approved.

**Ambassador Program**

***Update on new requests and status of Program***

Jean reported that the Program is spreading by word-of-mouth and we are getting presentations scheduled. For instance, we just held two presentations within the past week. And the press releases and the information on the County's Senior website really help; we have two more presentations scheduled for the near future. Our new Aging and Disability staffer, Peter Illig, has been hired so we will be able to meet with him soon to discuss the future of the Program.

### ***Information for caregivers***

Marcia Pruzan reported that she recently attended a meeting with Caregiving Support Program Manager, Ruth Kershner, who told her the Ambassador Program would be a good way to get information to the public regarding caregiving. Jean commented that we could include some of the County's caregiving handouts at the presentations and we could also include them in the library liaison program.

### ***Hospice Ambassador Program?***

Beverly Rollins reported that the County's Palliative Care and End-of-Life Coalition would like to start a hospice/palliative care Ambassador Program and would like to know whether the CoA's ambassadors would be willing to do hospice/palliative care presentations. A question was asked whether the current CoA presentations would simply include a couple of hospice/palliative care informational PowerPoint slides, or would the entire presentations be about hospice/palliative care. Beverly responded that she was not sure but will ask the Coalition members. Marcia noted that she is reluctant to take on another type of presentation because it might spur other groups to ask us to do presentations. Revatha Vikram agreed, saying that we cannot become Ambassadors for every program. We could possibly include a few slides. Marie Sloan agreed, taking on doing other types of presentations may be too much for our Ambassadors. Jean suggested we develop a slide and show it to the Coalition members and ask whether it would be ok, maybe one line about what hospice/palliative care is.

### **Library Liaison Program**

Jean reported that she and Beverly stuffed envelopes full of the CoA's suggested older adult informational documents and sent them to the County libraries. Prior to sending them Jean contacted one of the Regional Managers who provided names of the librarians to send them to. Lots of information was sent with a personalized letter in each envelope. This seems to be the way to go in the future. The new Committee Co-chairs will need to decide how often this should be done. In addition, the new Co-chairs will decide whether they want to invite the County's new chief librarian to a future meeting.

### **Postcard to Replace CoA Brochure**

Jean noted that no progress has been made on this but it needs to be done.

### **Reframing Aging**

Shawn Brennan provided background on the Reframing Aging effort. It arose out of the State's Longevity Initiative, which is an Age-Friendly-type of endeavor. The State is looking at things such as transportation and other issues that affect older adults.

The State's Secretary of Aging thinks we need to work on ageism. It is easy to discriminate against individuals based on their age. An agreement between some agencies was made about

10 years ago with the Framework Institute to look at how to address ageism. The Institute created the Center to Reframe Aging and it has been doing some training on how to stop ageism and how to reframe how we do and write things. Shawn noted that she is looking into rewriting some of the County's documents to get past the discrimination in some of the writing. She stated that she has a few concepts she can share with us.

Shawn stated that one big thing that she has noticed is that aging is often catastrophized by using terms such as the Silver Tsunami. And phrases like "social isolation will kill you" are common. She asked, "Why can't we say something like "social connections will help you?" Instead of making harsh comments related to aging, we can say things such as "there are solutions and we can invest in them." Shawn also asked, "How do you describe older adults? Elderly? Senior citizen? Senior? Are there less insensitive ways to say it?" Kathleen McGuinness responded that she has seen that individuals prefer the term older adult. Shawn added that the preferred term may differ between cultures.

Shawn commented that where we can avoid referencing age, we should. Jean noted that we need to be careful of our own language, and Beverly agreed. Katie Smith asked whether there is any kind of implicit bias training being given on this topic. Shawn responded that the State Secretary may try to introduce this initiative to other government leaders in the State, like the Cabinet secretaries. Dixie Butler stated that it is a lot on how we see ourselves as older adults. We need to stand up for ourselves; this needs to happen internally. Older adults have to see themselves as viable, useful human beings. She said that she does not know how to communicate this to older adults that they need to take up for themselves. Shawn added that it is easy to let yourself think that being older is bad. Mass media, for instance, sends out a lot of negative vibes.

Shawn stated that we should try to create a culture that is good for all of us. We need to watch our language. And there is a lot of diversity. People are discriminated against because of their age. We should not use off-putting language and we should make sure our message is getting across. There is application for advocacy work in the realm of getting rid of ageism.

David Engel said that he is including Reframing Aging on a document he is preparing to send to the County Council as a topic for a possible forum. He asked Shawn whether the Reframing group might be willing to help with planning such a forum. Shawn responded that they may want to charge for their services. Jean asked Shawn whether she would write something for the *Beacon* newspaper regarding this initiative and Shawn responded that she will. David commented that using AI could help in the writing of non-ageist text. Marcia suggested that we meet with David Gamsey, the former head of the Jewish Council for the Aging, for more ideas.

Shawn said that if the CoA wants to do a Factsheet on Ageism, she can get feedback from an AI tool that she has access to through the end of January. Revathi noted that we must look at how different cultures look at age because different cultures treat older adults differently. We have to look at cultural sensitivity.

## **David Engel and Kathleen McGuinness, 2025 Co-Chairs of the Communications Committee**

Jean introduced David and Kathleen. David said that he is happy that some alumni are still helping and he will appreciate them continuing to do so in the future. He stated that the Committee will work not only to get information out to the public but also work to get information out to the other CoA members. For instance, he asked whether the Committee should compile a list of informational emails and send them to the CoA members? He noted that this will be discussed at future Communications Committee meetings. Also, he asked who will be formatting Factsheets for the different Committees? He stated that the Committee will continue the programs that Beverly and Jean started such as the Ambassador Program and the Library Liaison Program. But, the Committee needs to figure out a lot of things to create a sustainable system. There will be 3 co-chairs, David, Kathleen, and Marie. Kathleen said that her mission will be to keep the Ambassador program going.

The group decided to schedule the January Communications Committee meeting for January 13, 2025, one week earlier than normal because of Martin Luther King Day. David asked whether the Committee should hold in-person meetings and the discussion was generally in favor of having at least quarterly in-person meetings. David noted that the technology exists to hold hybrid meetings.

### ***50+ in Montgomery County Update***

Jean reported that the upcoming 50+ programs will include:

- December – Staying Connected During the Holidays
- January – Michelle Escobar, Avoiding Scams
- February – probably someone from the Sandy Spring Harriett Tubman

She noted that the 50+ Planning Committee meets the first Friday of every month.

### **Adjourn**