



**Commission on People with Disabilities
Meeting Minutes
April 13, 2022**

****MEETING WAS HELD VIA ZOOM ****

Welcome and Approval of March 2022 Meeting Minutes

Seth Morgan, Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the March 2022 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the March 2022 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd.

Update on Montgomery Parks and ADA Compliance – Bob Green, Senior ADA Compliance Project Manager, Montgomery Parks, M-NCPPC

Website: <https://montgomeryparks.org>

Bob reported Montgomery Parks (MP) is getting ready for [summer camps](#). For inquiries regarding inclusion services, programs, and accommodations, please contact the Program Access office at 301-495-2581 (V), MD Relay: 7-1-1 or 800-552-7724, or email ProgramAccess@MontgomeryParks.org.

The MP Program Access Office has made a variety of adaptive equipment available throughout the county for people at no additional cost to the user. The Access on Wheels trailer offers adaptive equipment such as wheelchairs, mobi-mats, beds, comforting tents, and portable ramps that can be used at events. MP also brings a golf cart to events to assist individuals.

The MP Program Access Office is in the process of sending sensory bags to all Maryland-National Capital Park Police. Each bag offers calming tools for individuals dealing with extreme stress that will allow officers to connect with an individual who may have a disability or a mental health issue, helping to de-escalate a stressful situation. The bags were previously distributed to the Search and Rescue team and K-9 units for use as a tool for first responders.

Communication boards have been installed at two parks and will become standard installation at all playgrounds. The hands-on, interactive device creates a more inclusive and equitable play environment for park visitors who have autism, who are recovering from a stroke or brain injury, who are non-verbal, and who have learning disabilities and/or developmental disabilities. The boards can also facilitate communication between individuals who speak different languages. The boards are in Spanish, English, and Braille. Sign language will be added. Bob said they have been contacted by three states that are interested in installing communication boards in their parks.

Upcoming MP events include a Shine Brighter Together event for Autism Acceptance Month on April 23 at the Wheaton Regional Park and an All-Anglers Fishing Rodeo on May 22 at King's Local Park in Clarksburg.

Montgomery County was selected by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) for a Project Civic Access review in 2006. Project Civic Access is a proactive, ongoing initiative of the Disability Rights Section (DRS) of the DOJ Civil Rights Division to ensure ADA compliance in local and state governments throughout the country. DOJ inspected approximately 112 County government buildings and facilities. In addition, they inspected polling places, ballfields, golf courses, and local parks. Montgomery County signed a legally binding settlement agreement to address the findings in August 2011. Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) was a

cosigner of the Agreement. The Agreement required the County to remediate all problems identified by DOJ within a negotiated timeline and to survey all remaining buildings, facilities, and programs not surveyed by DOJ. MP continues to work on the transition plan that was submitted to DOJ in 2016. They have removed 2,900 barriers in their system and have over 20 parks that are either fully or generally accessible. Betsy Luecking, Staff, noted that Bob began working with this Commission due to the DOJ settlement agreement. As part of the agreement, MP had to seek input from persons with disabilities on their projects. This input also helps to determine project priority with budgets. Commission meeting minutes have been cited to show DOJ that MP has been collaborating with this Commission.

Bob reported that social equity will be used when prioritizing projects moving forward. MP has purchased new parks and will be adding new amenities including pickleball. As projects are being developed, Bob will be reaching out to the Commission for advice, input, and suggestions.

Bob previously reported that MP is researching different playground surfaces. He is working with Commissioners Mario Damiani and Jeneva Stone to have an informal discussion on playground surfacing. It is a controversial topic. Wood fiber is a common, safe medium but it is not accessible. There has been a movement at the county and state level to eliminate rubber surface tiles due to lead. Two years ago MP tested several rubber surface tiles at parks. The first round of tests showed some had lead while the second round of tests showed none of them had lead. MP ended up removing that surfacing from all of those parks. Some members of the movement are recommending brass which is not accessible or a safe surface. Playground surfacing will be an ongoing discussion but it will be difficult to build a consensus.

MP have made accessibility improvements to their website to make it more user-friendly. Extraneous documents and pictures have been eliminated. The search tool will be expanded to allow users to more easily locate accessible playgrounds or to rent particular amenities such as shelters.

MP is working on approximately 300 projects at any one time. Projects range from specific accessibility projects to park renovations to stream restorations. The small 1/5 acre Edith Throckmorton Neighborhood Park in Kensington is expected to be completed soon. The park was renovated in 2022 and includes community open space with a labyrinth, multi-level playground, nature play, gathering terrace with a ping-pong table, accessible walkway and boardwalk. Hillandale Local Park in Silver Spring is currently undergoing renovations and is expected to reopen during summer/fall 2023. The Caroline Freeland Urban Park in Bethesda is in the final stages of design and should have a permit for construction later this year. MP has hired a consultant for the Adventure Playground located at the South Germantown Recreational Park. It will be a \$1.5 million renovation project that will take several years.

MP was approached by local citizens about the Strathmore Local Park which is completely inaccessible. It does not have parking spaces or walkways. The renovation project proposes to renovate a large part of the park to include an onsite parking lot, a loop path, a soccer court and basketball court (to replace the existing tennis courts), a new playground, accessibility upgrades, additional park improvements, and stormwater management. The park should be under construction in late winter. Bob noted that the community is very excited about the renovation project.

MP had a pre-bid meeting this afternoon to upgrade the boat ramp at Seneca Landing. Bob hopes to have that project under contract in May or early June with construction starting after Labor Day.

The floor was opened to questions.

Seth said asked if parks that were grandfathered into the DOJ settlement agreement will be made more accessible moving forward. Bob said no parks were grandfathered in. The target is to make one in three parks accessible regardless of age. Community access and geographic distribution throughout the county helps to prioritize projects as well. Wheaton Regional Park is an old park and the first regional park. Six or seven projects have been completed at Wheaton Regional Park to improve accessibility. MP has updated a Wheaton Regional Master Park Plan that will be sent to the Montgomery Planning Commission for review. A main focus of the

revised master plan is to improve accessibility throughout the park. Trails are very popular and Bob acknowledged that some trails are substandard.

Betsy asked how MP is funded. Bob said MP receives two funding sources. Smaller local neighborhood parks are funded out of local tax revenues. Larger non-local parks such as Brookside Gardens or Wheaton Regional Park are funded out of geo-bonds. Both are subject to approval by the Planning Commission and the County Council.

Betsy asked about installing a shelter over the picnic tables at Riley's Lock. Shelters are essential in the heat to avoid heat stroke and other issues. Bob said the Commission can advocate for a shelter through the County Council. He agreed that a shelter would be great to install as it can become very hot. He noted that he visited Riley's Lock today and new picnic tables have been placed on the patio and under trees. Betsy said Team River Runner (TRR) gave a presentation to the Commission on Veterans Affairs about the need for an accessible launch at Riley's Lock. TRR hosts a kayaking program there for veterans with disabilities. Betsy connected TRR with Bob as she knew that MP was responsible for the area. As a result, Bob acquired funding through a grant from the state and MP installed a floating launch for non-motorized boats improving accessibility and safety for kayakers, canoeists and paddle boarders at Seneca Landing Special Park at Riley's Lock along the Potomac River. As part of the project, MP also installed an accessible drop-off area and walkway, three accessible parking spaces and a fully accessible picnic area with tables and grills. Betsy said the accessible launch is used heavily by the entire community. Bob said he has met people from Annapolis and Hagerstown who have come to use the accessible launch.

Marcus Bolston, Commissioner, asked how long the average project takes to make a park accessible. Bob said it varies a lot and depends on the type and size of the project. He typically works on 10 to 15 projects per year. A relatively small project can take less than a year from concept to construction. Larger projects, especially ones that require public input, can take several years. For example, in 2016 a facility plan for the Caroline Freeland Urban Park was being developed and MP is just now getting into the final design phase. The permitting process automatically adds at least six months to any project. Presenting before the Planning Commission also adds time. Funding can also be reduced or removed which can cause project disruptions.

Trish Gallalee, Vice-Chair, asked if MP has made any improvements to Cabin John Regional Park. She noted that parking is a challenge if you are trying to access a picnic shelter or the dog park. Bob agreed that it is a challenge and the dog park, picnic shelters and amphitheater area need a complete renovation. The playground is also completely inaccessible. He and a fellow project manager are beginning to review the park and have completed preliminary designs. They have looked at moving accessible parking into the dog park and picnic shelter area to make the distance and grade work better. He would appreciate the Commission advocating for this project to be moved closer to the top of the list. He does not get to determine prioritization for larger projects.

Seth said this Commission has collaborated with MP and Bob in the past when they sought input from individuals with disabilities. He asked if the Commission will be asked to provide input in the near future. Bob said he fully intends to bring several projects before the Commission for input.

Mario asked if the Commission would consider creating a subcommittee to work on recreation issues and assist with reviewing MP projects. Seth suggested discussing this issue further at a Steering Committee meeting.

Jametta Anderson, Commissioner, said she appreciates that parks have been evolving to be more accessible for younger individuals with developmental disabilities. She asked how parks could be made more accessible for older adults with developmental disabilities as well as more accessible for older adults who want to be active. Bob said he welcomes the opportunity to discuss this issue further. Many parks and recreational opportunities are geared towards younger children and active adults. MP is working to incorporate opportunities for individuals of all ages and abilities into their parks and programs. Input will be helpful in making decisions moving forward.

Update on Montgomery County Government ADA Compliance – Matt Barkley, ADA Compliance Manager

Website: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DGS-ADA/Home.html>

The Montgomery County ADA Compliance Unit was created as a result of the DOJ's settlement agreement. Betsy said that Nancy Greene, former ADA Compliance Officer, was a part-time employee prior to the DOJ settlement agreement. The ADA Compliance Team now has six employees.

Matt reported the ADA Compliance Team has been working on ADA modifications in community centers and recreation centers while the buildings are currently being renovated. The ADA Compliance Team works closely with the Department of Building Design and Construction and the Department of Facility Management. ADA modifications are taken into consideration when projects are developed to ensure equal access to all County programs and facilities. The Team is currently working on 16 facilities and will begin renovating three pools after Labor Day. Smaller projects that can be resolved quickly such as installing grab bars or installing a curb cut to major multimillion dollar projects that can take several months such as pool renovations. The Team has also recently been resolving several sidewalk complaints as well as providing alternate formats of information found on the County's website.

Matt envisions hosting community feedback forums or listening sessions in the near future. ADA projects priority levels are consumer and community driven. Racial equity is also a priority. It has been demonstrated again and again that accessibility benefits everyone.

Commissioners can contact Matt at matthew.barkley@montgomerycountymd.gov or 240-777-6197 (V).

Chair and Vice-Chair Report

Seth reported that public participant Rabbi Reeve Brenner from last month's meeting is the founder and owner of a for-profit recreation system, Bankshot Sports. Agendas will now include the following statement: "For profit companies who want to speak should contact the Commission in advance." Public participants generally are not invited to speak during presentations and time is set aside at the end of the meeting to allow the public to speak. This policy will be strictly enforced moving forward.

Seth will be testifying before the County Council on April 19 at 1:30pm and presenting the Commission's FY23 budget priorities. Betsy emailed a draft of the priorities to Commissioners early today for review. The following priorities were presented before the Commission:

- Pedestrian safety and ensuring sidewalk installation is completed prior to County roads being opened to bicyclists.
- Early intervention screen program for children ages 0 to 3 – supporting the MoCo Better Beginnings program.
- Funding to supplement programs serving people with developmental disabilities.
- Designate manager to oversee employment programs and outcomes for contractors to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

A motion was made to accept the FY23 budget priorities. The motion was seconded. Betsy suggested making an amendment to include funding a shelter for the picnic area at Riley's Lock. A motion was made to accept the FY23 budget priorities with the amendment. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the motion was passed unanimously.

Larry Bram, Commissioner, reported that he will also be testifying in support of MoCo Better Beginnings.

Commissioner Day Al-Mohamed is the White House Domestic Policy Council's new Director of Disability Policy. She will present during a White House briefing for Americans with disabilities tomorrow at 2pm.

The Commission will have a presentation on the Montgomery County Pedestrian Master Plan from the Montgomery County Planning Department at the May meeting.

No Steering Committee meeting will be held this month.

County Executive Marc Elrich is [currently seeking applicants for the Commission](#). The deadline to apply is April 22, 2022. Seth's term will be ending and Commissioners interested in serving as Chair or Vice-Chair should contact Betsy.

Commissioners discussed meeting in person versus continuing to meet virtually. Virtual meetings are more convenient and have increased attendance, but in person meetings allow for side discussions and socialization. It was suggested that meetings be offered both virtually as well as in person with a hybrid model due to continued concerns over the coronavirus. Betsy said the meeting room at the Executive Office Building where the Commission previously met in person is not equipped for hosting hybrid meetings. The Health & Human Services building at 401 Hungerford Drive currently only has one conference room that is equipped to host hybrid meetings. Staff are in the process of trying to modify the larger downstairs conference room to host hybrid meetings. Aside from technology, accommodation logistics such as sign language interpreters need to be considered in order to ensure the meetings are accessible to all participants. Seth suggested continuing with virtual meetings until summer break and re-examining the issue in September.

Trish reported the City of Rockville has been making progress with sidewalk installation. They have installed a 5-foot sidewalk at the corner of First Street and Old Baltimore Road with access to the Glenview Mansion. Betsy noted that the City of Rockville passed legislation that requires sidewalks in new construction. The County does not have similar legislation.

Ex-Officio Member Reports

Susan Smith, Ex-Officio Member, Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC), reported on several HOC residential properties. Hillandale Gateway is a new mixed-use development that will include age-restricted units. Wheaton Gateway is a mixed-use development that will feature mixed-income and multi-family housing. Shady Grove Westside is a mixed-use development that will house HOC's Gaithersburg Customer Service Center on the first two floors and the upper floors will be residential. Elizabeth Square's construction will be completed soon. Residences on the Lane are age-restricted apartments located in downtown Rockville. Elizabeth House in downtown Silver Spring will have a pool which should be completed this summer. Four other HOC properties are in the process of being renovated and will include universal design. Susan also reported that the County has recently acquired funding for hoarding supports for individuals that may need organizers or cleaning. She has been involved in HOC's hoarding program for 12 years and is on the Gaithersburg Hoarding Task Force. She has made many referrals from HOC's hoarding program and without funding it has been difficult to get those individuals the appropriate assistance.

Susan also reported as Liaison to the Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC). MHAC has a new subcommittee focused on climate change and how it impacts mental health.

Denise Isreal, Ex-Officio Member, Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), reported MCDOT has also resumed information tables at county events. They recently attended a transitioning youth fair held at Montgomery College and they will be attending an active aging event being held on May 5, 2022 at Bohrer Park in Gaithersburg. MCDOT has kicked off a planning study for the North Bethesda Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)/Flash Bus Service to assist in determining the street layout, location of stations and the endpoints of the corridor. Public are encouraged to take the [project survey](#) to help refine goals and recommendations for the study. Survey is open until April 29, 2022. MCDOT continues to actively recruit part- and full-time Ride On bus operators. The federal mask mandate for public transportation has been extended through May 3, 2022. **[UPDATE:** Effective April 19, 2022 - Passengers using Montgomery County's Ride On buses are no longer required to wear a mask but are strongly recommended to voluntarily wear them. The change to the County's masking policy comes after announcement on April 18, 2022 that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) decided to suspend enforcement of a mask mandate on all modes of public transportation. TSA's decision

came after a Federal judge's ruling that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's mask mandate was unconstitutional. Ride On bus operators will no longer be required to wear a mask because of this change.]

Announcements

None.

Meeting adjourned – 7:25pm

**Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities
April 2022 Meeting and Events Calendar**

Developmental Disability Advisory Committee (DDAC) – Monday, May 9

4pm to 5:30pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday, May 11

6pm to 7:30pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday, May 18

5pm to 6pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I
Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

