



**Commission on People with Disabilities
Meeting Summary Minutes
March 8, 2023**

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

Welcome and Approval of February 2023 Meeting Minutes

Trish Gallalee, Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the February 2023 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the February 2023 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd.

**The Work of Rebuilding Together, Montgomery County – Repair and Making Homes Accessible –
Maury Peterson, Executive Director, Rebuilding Together, and Shelby Badge, AmeriCorps Client
Outreach Coordinator**

PowerPoint: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CPWD/RTMCO OutreachRepairsandEligibility.pdf>

Rebuilding Together Montgomery County (RTMC) has been in operation for 33 years providing free critical home repairs, energy efficiency upgrades, and accessibility modifications for Montgomery County's most vulnerable residents – seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, families with children, and members of marginalized communities, all living in low-income households. The national founding affiliate program was known as Christmas in April and began in Texas as a 'neighbors helping neighbors' program. RTMC operates a year-round program that has helped over 2,600 homeowners throughout Montgomery County and engaged with more than 50,000 volunteers who have dedicated their time and talents to helping their neighbors.

National Rebuilding Day is RTMC's flagship event held annually in April. During this weekend event, teams of volunteers from companies, organizations and houses of worship come together to provide critical home repairs for vulnerable neighbors across Montgomery County. Unskilled volunteers are given work such as yardwork, painting or sanding that can be taught and completed in one day. This year's event will be held April 29 with 25 projects throughout the County and over 500 volunteers. RTMC is actively looking for more homeowners.

RTMC works with three licensed contractors and a handyman program for the year-round program. Those contractors are licensed and bonded and are sent out on appropriate types of jobs. As they are volunteering their time, they do get to pick and choose the jobs they work on and where in the county they want to work. Some contractors specialize in accessibility modifications including grab bars, tub cuts, comfort height toilets, handrails and ramps for persons with disabilities. One of RTMC's board members is an occupational therapist that works at Adventist Healthcare. She has provided some training for the contractors, teaching them to be cognizant of the persons needs and not just the repairs. RTMC also has a number of occupational therapist partners that are willing to volunteer their time and provide assessments.

RTMC's goal is to serve 180 families this fiscal year (July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024). RTMC recently received a Design for Life grant for \$125,000 that will help to provide additional accessibility modifications for individuals with disabilities or individuals who are 65 and older or both. The grant is for this calendar year and the first of four projects have just been approved. Projects include lowering counters for a homeowner who uses a wheelchair and a homeowner who is 91 years old and needs a number of repairs.

Maury said if the applicant is far outside of the guidelines it will need to be approved by the Board. Some funding is restrictive. One state grant requires applicants be within 30% of area median income or less, some grants require applicants to be within 50% of area median income or less and some grants are unrestrictive, The income guidelines can be overlooked on a case-by-case basis due to individual circumstances. The RTMC Board of Directors met recently and discussed raising the income levels to ensure they can help people stay in their homes. They do not want people displaced or have additional issues just because they do not meet income requirements.

Maury asked for the Commission to assist in their outreach efforts and to get the word out about their program.

Teresa Villani, Commissioner, asked for Maury to present at an amputee support group hosted by Adventist Healthcare.

How to apply and contact information for Rebuilding Together:

- Complete the homeowner application found on their website, <https://rebuildingtogethermc.org/apply-for-services> or call 301-947-9400 for any questions and to have an application mailed to you. The application is available in English and Spanish

- Submit your application with required documentation by mail, email, fax, or dropping by the office

Mailing Address: Rebuilding Together Montgomery County, Attn: Shelby Badger, 18225-A Flower Hill Way, Gaithersburg, MD 20879

Fax Number: 301-947-9411 Email: sbadger@rebuildingtogethermc.org

For more information about repairs and applying, contact:

Shelby Badger, AmeriCorps Client Outreach Coordinator at 301-947-9400 ext. 107, or email

sbadger@rebuildingtogethermc.org

Developmental Disability Awareness Month Proclamation and Other Updates – Eric Salzano and Karen Morgret, Co-Chairs, DDAC Committee

Karen attended the County Council's Developmental Disability Awareness Month Proclamation yesterday.

Video of proclamation: <https://www.youtube.com/live/hnFs4liZKmQ?feature=share&t=224>

The Council held a public hearing on March 7 for Bill 10-23, Health - Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission – Established.

Written Testimony:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/OnDemand/testimony/20230307/item6.html>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/live/fDhJPoGDo-M?feature=share&t=2435>

Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported the testimony was very compelling and participants talked about the complexities of DDA waivers and how difficult it was for those who do not speak English to navigate the system. There are many expectations for this new Commission. Betsy noted that one participant asked for an Autism coordinator dedicated to lead the county. She thanked Commissioners who had testified in support of the bill.

The County Council Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee will be holding a worksession on March 9 at 9:30am to discuss Bill 10-23. Any amendments to the legislation based on testimony given during the public hearing will be shared during this worksession. No further public comments will be taken prior to the Council taking a vote. The bill is expected to be passed unanimously by the Council. After the legislation is approved, it will take time to advertise for the positions, for the interviews and the selection process. It is anticipated that the new Commission will receive many applicants.

Inclusive Language – People First Language Versus Disability First

This topic was discussed at last month's Steering Committee meeting. In 1990, when the ADA was originally passed, a group in Boston started the movement "Disability Pride". Disability pride has been described

as “accepting and honoring each person’s uniqueness and seeing it as a natural and beautiful part of human diversity.” The movement is opposed to person first language and has grown over the years. They believe that person first language is negative and indicates that the person has an affliction. Several large cities including Los Angeles and Atlanta have celebrated disability pride by hosting parades.

Kaylee Davis, Commissioner, said as a young person with a disability she is personally very proud to be disabled and feels like her disability is part of her identify. She noted that everyone has their own journey and experience and it’s an individual preference.

Sammi Hampton, Commissioner, suggested that the Commission celebrate Disability Pride Month, which is celebrated in July. They added that person first language is very personal and is very dependent on the person.

Matt Barkley, ADA Compliance Manager, Department of General Services, said the County is required to put out ADA notices on materials and he wants to make sure Montgomery County Government is project a pro disability position. He would like the Commission to complete a poll or survey to determine the preference of disability first versus person first.

Karen Herson, Commissioner, said this topic comes up often within Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). She suggested contacting the National Council on Disability or the federal Department of Health and Human Services for their perspective and to see what language they are using.

Tonya Gilchrist, Commissioner, suggested reaching out to the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) for their perspective. She approves of the suggestion of a disability pride parade and encouraged that both disabled and non-disabled children be involved as it is important to educate young kids, especially on using correct language and not using hateful speech.

Trish would like to explore this issue further. It is important this Commission educate themselves on inclusive language. Matt agreed and said the Commission has a role to educate the public on disability issues and should be doing so in a positive way and using the appropriate language to get people to understand disability issues.

Commissioner Introduction of Issues/Barriers to Establish A Workgroup

Sammi started a discussion on creating more accessible and affordable housing opportunities. Many consumers that Independence Now serves are not homeowners, they are renters who are searching for housing. Susan Smith, Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC), reported she serves on a state disability advisory committee that oversees housing choice vouchers, community choice homes and a number of other programs. There are 37,000 individuals on HOC’s waiting list who need affordable housing. Independence Now has a waiting list with the Money Follows the Person program, which helps individuals transition from an institution, such as a nursing home, to community living in an apartment, private home, or small group setting. HOC has been opening up several new properties. The new property on Crabbs Branch has 10 universally accessible apartments. Community Choice Homes, which provides affordable rental homes for persons with disabilities who have extremely low income, wanted to take all 10 apartments for their program. Susan said universally accessible apartments should be made available to all people. Other housing projects with accessible units tend to get claimed by other agencies. Accessible and affordable housing needs to be offered by other developers, not just by HOC properties.

Karen Herson suggested having Main Street make a presentation about their residential. 70% of the units at their Rockville location are accessible for persons with disabilities. Main Street will be purchasing a second building and 100% of those units will be accessible for persons with disabilities. Susan noted that if an individual has a housing voucher through HOC and are interested in moving into the Rockville property, the voucher has to be ported through Rockville City.

Seth Morgan, former Chair, reported an affordable housing conference is held every year in Montgomery County. He attended for many years representing this Commission and every year he commented to presenters and attendees that affordable housing is not enough – it needs to be accessible and affordable. He suggested that someone from this Commission attend this years conference.

Candace Groudine, Human Rights Commission, asked what the Commission views as issues regarding public rights of way. Trish reported the Commission has been very active in providing input on the County's various plans including Vision Zero, Pedestrian Master Plan, Bicycle Master Plan, and other plans presented by the Maryland-National Capital Parking and Planning Commission. Unfortunately, sometimes plans are implemented prior to the Commission's input. The Commission has also provided feedback to Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) regarding issues with bike lanes and pedestrian safety. Trish noted that several lawsuits around the nation have been filed against bike lane installation due to lack of curb cuts and ramps, lack of parking and unsafe parking conditions.

Tonya asked what is being done regarding the caregiver crisis as many persons with disabilities are unable to find personal care aides (PCA). Even if the minimum wage is increased to \$15, people can still get a job with Starbucks or McDonalds and make more money. Staff shortages continue everywhere and is impacting many people who are not able to get their services. Susan noted that individuals who have PCAs through the waiver program are paid more than those PCAs in In Home Aide Services (IHAS) or Medical Assistance Personal Care (MAPC). Some individuals who get approved for live-in aides resort to hiring a family member. Rebecca Grayson, HOC, reported wages are different based on where the agency resides. Montgomery County would have the minimum wage increased but Baltimore would not. Sammi noted that if the nursing agency has less than 20 employees they are not required to pay minimum wage. She asked why direct support professionals for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities receive a supplement from the County to help increase wages for that population but there is not a similar supplement for personal care assistants for persons of all types of disabilities. Betsy said the Commission can look into this issue.

Chair and Vice-Chair Updates

The Steering Committee will meet briefly next Wednesday, March 15 at 5:30pm to plan for the Commission's April meeting.

The workgroup that is working to identify accessibility issues within the court system met March 7.

Ex-Officio Member Updates

Angelisa Hawes, Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL), reported the Potomac Library is scheduled to reopen on April 15 at 10am. The library closed last May for renovatins and the scope of the work includes ADA remediations, building systems remediation, and improving the library by creating a single service desk, redesigning the quiet study room, renovating the restrooms, replacing the storefront entrances, new carpeting and paint, all new furniture and some shelving, and various other improvements.

Francie Gilman, former Commissioner, reported the Germantown Library will be hosting a sensory friendly storytime on April 2 from 2:30pm to 3pm in celebration of International Autism Awareness Day.

Susan Smith will be retiring from HOC in June and tonight was her last Commission meeting. HOC will be nominating Rebecca Grayson as her replacement.

Public Comments

None

Meeting Adjourned – 7:21pm

**Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities
April 2023 Meeting and Events Calendar**

Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday April 12

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

Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday April 19

5:15pm to 6:15pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

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

