



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
February 21, 2023**

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

Call to Order

Wayne Miller, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Wayne asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. He recognized prisoners of war and asked for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the October 2022 and January 2023 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the October 2022 and January 2023 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

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

Website: <https://rebuildingtogethertmc.org/>

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

Please review slides for presentation.

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. Maury reported that many of their volunteers are actively interested in helping veterans.

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. Bill Gray, former Chair, said some homeowners may have concerns about who is doing the home repairs or improvements as they may only know of RTMC from National Rebuilding Day. Maury explained that those volunteers are given work such as yardwork, painting or sanding that can be taught and completed in one day. 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 ramps, chair lifts, and roll in showers for persons with disabilities.

RTMC has previously received grant funding from the Disabled Veterans National Foundation and can apply for additional grant funding. The Home Depot Foundation is also willing to donate up to \$10,000 worth of materials for a veteran's house.

It takes approximately two weeks from the time RTMC receives the application for the initial assessment. Depending on the difficulty of the project, repairs and modifications start within three months. Oftentimes it is based on scheduling with licensed contractors or the ability to acquire necessary equipment or parts.

RTMC's goal is to serve 180 families this fiscal year (July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024). Non-profit partners who need facility refreshes such as yardwork, painting or minor repairs, can also apply. Any non-profit that serves veterans is encouraged to apply.

Rebuilding Together affiliates are located in Anne Arundel, Charles, Frederick, Howard, Kent, and Queen Anne's Counties, and Baltimore, Fairfax, and Washington, D.C. All affiliates work together.

Maury asked for the Commission to assist in their outreach efforts and to get the word out about their program to veterans. RTMC does not have a market budget and typically gets information out through the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development or county resources as they do receive some funding from Montgomery County Government. Most referrals come from word of mouth. Shelby noted that RTMC is trying to connect with every non-profit in the county to establish a referral service. Betsy suggested connecting with Destiny Nettles, Program Manager, ServingTogether, and David Skisano, Veterans Benefits Specialist, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, suggested developing a program where an individual who can pay for repairs be able to do so and that payment could be used to fund projects for those who cannot pay. She also suggested including power washing in their list of available services as this could be a skill taught to volunteers. Maury reported RTMC had met with nonprofit consultants to discuss a potential earned income project, but due to the pandemic and supply chain issues as well as an increase in supply costs that idea had been sidelined. She agreed with Dr. Macri and liked the idea of focusing on projects that can be completed in one day, including installing ramps, railings and grab bars.

Dr. Macri asked if RTMC works with injured servicemembers at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Maury said services received by WRNMMC require an in-kind value and they do not accept free services.

Wayne asked if a 100% disabled veteran who is over income eligibility but needs assistance with their home due to their disability would be able to receive services. 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 Home Depot Foundation does not have income requirements – the applicant just needs to be a veteran. Veterans can be reluctant to ask for help or think they are over the income eligibility but Maury encouraged veterans to call RTMC to see if they can help given the circumstances. 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.

How to apply and contact information for Rebuilding Together:

- Complete the homeowner application found on their website, <https://rebuildingtogethertmc.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@rebuildingtogethertmc.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

Planning for Honoring Vietnam Veterans in March and the Planning of Display Cases

Carly Clem, Staff, reported Bill has volunteered to assist with setting up the display cases at the Silver Spring Civic Building (SSCB) for March which the Commission recognizes as Vietnam and Vietnam-Era Veterans Month. March 29 is National Vietnam War Veterans Day. Carly asked Commissioners to share events happening in March to be posted on the website: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/VETERANS/Vietnam.html

The SSCB display cases are currently set up for Black History Month honoring Black County residents who served in the U.S. armed or uniformed services. Michael Theard, President, 9th and 10th Cavalry Association, loaned items about Buffalo Soldiers for the cases. He will be partnering with the Commission to create a permanent display case for Buffalo Soldiers as the Great Hall at the SSCB was renamed Buffalo Soldiers Great Hall in 2018. Black History Month website: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/VETERANS/BlackHistoryMonth.html

Carly reported that she received an inquiry from the Tuskegee Airmen East Coast Chapter who are interested in partnering with the Commission to create a display at the SSCB on Tuskegee Airmen. She asked if the Commission was interested in pursuing this inquiry and for a Commissioner volunteer to take on this project. Dr. Elwood Gray, Commissioner, volunteered. Carly will work with Dr. Gray.

Carly shared the Commission's Fallen Hometown Heroes website: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/fallenheroes. Betsy reported that a plaque was recently installed in the Rockville Memorial Library that recognizes the name change from the original Rockville Library. The name change was instituted in 2010 at the request of Gold Star families and Commission. The words on the plaque include, "To honor County residents Killed in Action in service to our Country in military conflicts since our County's founding in 1776, the Rockville Library was renamed the Rockville Memorial Library at the request of Global War on Terror Gold Star family members and the Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs." The plaque is located on the first-floor lobby of the library, next to a digital display honoring the County's Fallen Hometown Heroes. The Fallen Hometown Heroes digital display honors County residents killed in action dating to World War I.

Betsy reported the U.S. Census Bureau does not include uniformed services for USPHS and NOAA Commissioned Corps in their census counts. The U.S. Census estimates that there are approximately 38,000 veterans living in Montgomery County but that number could be much higher. Austin Morris, Representative, Senator Chris Van Hollen, offered to reach out to the U.S. Census Bureau about this issue and find out why uniformed services are not included.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, asked if uniformed servicemembers for U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps are included in the Fallen Hometown Heroes list. Mike will contact USPHS as they may have a record of those who have been killed during war. Dr. Gray suggested contacting Vietnam Veterans of America to see if they have records for Vietnam. It was also suggested to include National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). It was noted that uniformed servicemembers are included and recognized during all recognition months that the Commission has currently designated (Black History Month, Vietnam and Vietnam-Era Veterans Month, Women Veterans Month, and Veterans Day/Month).

Chair and Vice Chair Report

Next Commission meeting is March 21 from 6pm to 7:30pm. It was suggested that the Commission have a presentation on the PACT Act.

Updates / Announcements

Dr. Macri report she will be Chairperson at a National Think Tank on VA Women's Health System Modernization on March 16. She will also be providing opening remarks.

Dr. Gray reported he was the recipient of three prestigious awards at Morgan State University during the 23rd Buffalo Soldiers Banquet. He also met Secretary Anthony C. Woods, MDVA, at the event.

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Respectfully submitted: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I; Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager