



Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs Meeting Summary Minutes June 16th, 2020

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

I. Call to Order

Wayne Miller, Vice-Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Dan asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Wayne 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.

II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the May 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the May 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Montgomery County COVID-19 Recovery Planning Framework, Roles and Responsibilities – Odile Brunetto, Chief, Aging and Disability Services, Montgomery County Health & Human Services

Handout: [Montgomery County COVID-19 Recovery Planning Framework](#)

Handout: [COVID-19 Recovery Information Coordination Flow Chart](#)

Odile Brunetto, Chief, Aging and Disability Services (ADS), was recently appointed as Chief, ADS after serving as Acting Chief for two years. She began her career with the County 30 years ago and was in charge of services for individuals who were homeless. She recognized that this Commission has been a strong advocate for Veterans who are homeless. Odile thanked Jim Campbell, Commissioner, for serving as liaison to the Commission on Aging.

Odile reported that County Executive Marc Elrich and County Health Officer Dr. Travis Gayles announced today the County has achieved its benchmarks and will officially enter [Phase 2 of reopening](#) on Friday, June 19 at 5 p.m.

County Executive Elrich and the County Council have asked several groups to work together on a safe and measured incremental recovery plan. All groups have been asked to make recommendations that align with four guiding principles for recovery efforts: racial equity, inclusion, innovation and sustainability. There are five recovery mission areas: government operations and services; economic revitalization; health and human services (HHS); housing; and education. County Executive Elrich has also convened a new advisory COVID 19 recovery group comprised of Chairs from several selected Commissions including the Commission on People with Disabilities and the Commission on Aging. This advisory group is chaired by Dale Tibbetts, Special Assistant to County Executive Elrich.

The HHS recovery group is led by HHS Director Dr. Raymond Crowel. HHS has six areas to plan for an incremental recovery: early child care and education; behavioral health and domestic violence; public health; housing and homelessness; older adults and persons with developmental disabilities; and service access equity. Odile reported Public Health has been extremely busy addressing the current COVID-19 crisis. Until now they have stopped providing immunizations but are preparing to resume those services as children need to receive certain vaccinations prior to attending school as well as the upcoming flu season. Odile also reported Robin Riley, Director, Department of Recreation, and her staff are planning for the possibility of the

County offering summer camps for children whose parents work essential positions in the County. Summer camp would be limited to half a day with two staff for 13 children.

Odile is co-chair of the workgroup addressing older adults and persons with disabilities along with co-chair Kim Mayo, Administrator, Community Support Network. The workgroup has a Steering Committee comprised of 13 providers from the developmental disability community and the senior services community to focus on the needs of people with disabilities and older adults. The workgroup also includes two analysts from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and four ADS staff that includes Odile, Kim, and Kimberly Johnson, Home Care Supervisor, ADS. The workgroup has had two meetings. They will continue meeting weekly until the end of October and will be providing Dr. Crowel updates on a weekly basis. Their task is to determine what is needed to recover in a planned, safe way 30 days at a time. They will also be determining what will need to be done if there is a second wave of the virus.

At the first meeting, they highlighted all the needs aware of in the community and workgroups will be focusing on the following four priority areas for the first 30 days.

1. **Testing, PPE (personal protective equipment), contract tracing, and safe quarantine:** Many providers who serve older adults and persons with disabilities are still in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis. There is a huge need for testing for their staff and clients, a need for protective equipment, a need for contract tracing to follow those who have been diagnosed as positive, and a need for a special quarantine facility for those who have tested positive and cannot self-quarantine at home for a number of reasons.
2. **Provider sustainability:** A number of providers have not been able to provide regular services and have had reduced revenues and reduce reimbursement. There is a lot of anxiety about their ability to sustain their business considering that the Federal Payroll Protection Program is set to end this month. Some providers have said they will have to layoff employees. Odile has been meeting weekly with medical adult day service providers. Home care agencies have had difficult maintaining staff that are able and willing to provide personal care services in the home. Costs for such services have increased tremendously from \$28 per hour to \$43 per hour. Many families cannot afford this increase.
3. **Access to services and social equity:** This includes telemedicine, social isolation and volunteerism. While there are many opportunities available online, not everyone has the equipment needed to participate or access to internet from their home. There are also language and accessibility barriers. HHS has partnered with the Information Technology department to apply for a Federal grant that would provide funding for additional equipment and assist individuals with qualifying for internet. There are also concerns about social isolation. Odile announced Serving Together's (ST) new initiative to provide fresh produce to Veterans. This is one way to connect person-to-person and to talk to Veterans about other services they need. Face-to-face volunteerism is at a strict minimum currently and this workgroup will be discussing how to shift from face-to-face to online volunteerism.
4. **Communication:** There will need to be communication with clients, family members, personnel, non-profit agencies and stakeholders regarding the phases of recovery. The workgroup wants to receive feedback. There is concern about the term "reopening" as many providers never closed and have been providing services in group homes or at individual residences. There will be more focus on "recovery". The workgroup has asked Odile to work closely with the Commissions under ADS – the Commission on People with Disabilities, the Commission on Aging, the Commission on Veterans Affairs, and the Board of Public Guardianship – and to share information and feedback with the workgroup.

There are other areas the workgroup will be focusing on including employment, access to benefits, transportation, food access, mental health, suicide prevention, and safety of staff.

Odile presented before the Commission on People with Disabilities last week and they shared their concerns which included mask fit testing and COVID-19 test timeliness. Mask fit testing is important to ensure the individual wearing the protective equipment is using it properly and that it is effective. The mask fit testing has been available for hospitals and nursing homes and the County wants to expand that testing. In regard to COVID-19 tests, the nose swab test results can take as long as 10 to 15 days. There is a test producer located

in Montgomery County that has developed self-administered oral tests using either a cheek swab or spit and test results are available within 48 hours. The County has a contract with this company and tests will be given to priority personnel first include police, fire and public safety personnel, and then be rolled out to hospitals and nursing home employees. As production and test availability increases, these tests will be made available to the general public.

Odile offered to attend future Commission meetings including throughout the summer to continue discussions and provide updates.

The floor was opened to questions.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, said the Commission has concerns about Veterans with PTSD that have been in isolation and are starting to self-medicate. There are also concerns about the increase in suicides. The Commission wanted to tape a special episode of Homefront that would have focused on services available to Veterans from the DC VA Medical Center and Holy Cross Hospital but has not received an answer from the Public Information Office. Mike asked if these concerns will be addressed as part of the reopening and services provided. Odile said the Mental Health Advisory Committee and the Commission on Aging have had a series of online meetings regarding mental health needs and suicide prevention. They are preparing to send a letter to County Executive Elrich and the County Council. The Commission on Aging Executive Committee will be meeting this Thursday to discuss and finalize the letter. Odile will send the letter to Betsy to review and suggested that the Commission join and sign the letter or send their own letter. She also suggested that a Commissioner join the conversation.

Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, reported that Governor Hogan recently announced the launch of the Caregiver Services Corps (CSC), a program to support Maryland seniors who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Cynthia is a volunteer with CSC. CSC deploys volunteers and other resources to the homes of seniors who need urgent assistance with everyday tasks when their typical caregiver becomes unable to help them due to COVID-19 exposure, illness, or other challenges. Those in need of assistance should call 2-1-1 to be connected with the Caregiver Services Corps help center. Trained staff at the call center will triage the caller's needs and help match them with a volunteer. The call center is available 7 days a week and is capable of taking calls in many languages. Cynthia suggested that the communications workgroup connect with non-profits and County programs such as the Asian American Health Initiative to identify culturally and linguistically appropriate communications. She added that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has implemented a [COVID-19 Telehealth Program](#) provides \$200 million in funding, appropriated by Congress as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, to help health care providers provide connected care services to patients at their homes or mobile locations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Program provides immediate support to eligible health care providers responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by fully funding their telecommunications services, information services, and devices necessary to provide critical connected care services until the program's funds have been expended or the COVID-19 pandemic has ended. Cynthia reported she is a member of the Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention. She is also a member of the Maryland Veterans Commission (MCV) and is on the opioid subcommittee which has met with Steve Schuh, Executive Director, Maryland Opioid Operational Command Center. Cynthia noted that substance abuse use is not improving and is actually getting worse. Odile said the County was informed about CSC several weeks ago and has made several requests. Unfortunately, those requests for service has not be received yet. The County is trying to determine the barriers for receiving service. Odile understands that CSC has worked in other parts of the state. The County recognized the need for PPE for individuals volunteering in CSC and Public Health has organized supplies for those volunteers. Odile will report back to Betsy when she has a better understanding of the program. In the meantime, families who need assistance with caregiver supports can call Aging & Disability Resource Unit at 240-777-3000 and staff will assist them to find resources. The Arc Montgomery County provides respite care to people of all ages and types of disabilities. There has been a decrease in service requests as families are anxious and afraid of having staff in their homes. The County was able to connect grandparents that are caring for their two grandchildren who have Autism to the respite care program. They are now using the program on a regular basis.

Melissa Barber, Serving Together (ST) said they operate a coordinated referral network or one-stop shop for Veterans that can address social isolation, food insecurity, or income support. ST will be partnering with Kaiser Permanente to allow for a seamless transition into services electronically, allowing staff to track services confidentially.

Jim said one of the best support systems for Veterans is when they are able to socialize together and re-establish the sense of team that got them through their service. Veterans are also able to more easily identify if a fellow Veteran may have mental health or other issues in-person. He asked when Veterans groups will be able to meet again. He suggested the County figure out a way for these groups to meet in a helpful and healthy situation. Specifically, there is a group of WWII Veterans that meets regularly at the Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center. Odile said the Department of Recreation is discussing the possibility of having outdoor only groups for older adults at senior centers with one staff person per 9 older adults. The restrictions are still very strong at this point and there are limitations. She will notify Robin about the WWII Veterans group.

IV. Chair and Vice Chair Report

None.

V. Updates / Announcements

Wayne announced the Silver Spring Vet Center will begin seeing individuals in the center on Monday for individual counseling only. Group counseling will still be virtual. There has been discussion to have group counseling outside but space would first need to be identified.

Betsy received information from Jackie Ogg, Commissioner, about advanced care planning for in the event of serious illness. Jewish Social Services Agency offers a program: <https://www.jssa.org/advance-care-planning/>. Betsy announced that Team River Runner will begin their kayak sessions next Sunday, June 28th. Commissioners are welcome to attend and see the new accessible launch that was installed.

Betsy reported that the County is in the process of identifying budget cuts. Aging and Disability Services has been asked to prepare a 6% or \$2.6 million cut. It is the largest budget cut in the last 30 years.

Jim suggested having his daughter speak at the Commission's September meeting. She is responsible for building the new U.S. Navy fleet frigates with a budget of \$5.3 billion.

The Commission decided to meet in July to continue ongoing discussions and stay up to date on developments.

Robert Koffman, Commissioner, announced President Trump will launch the ROADMAP to prevent Veteran suicide (PREVENTS) live from the rose garden tomorrow June 17th at 2pm. PREVENTS stands for President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans to End the Tragedy of Suicide.

Melissa reported Montgomery County Active Duty, Veterans, and military connected families can request free produce boxes from ST. They are maintaining a list of individuals who have requested the service. Teens Helping Seniors, a volunteer group, will pick up the produce boxes and deliver them on Thursdays. View flyer: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A&D%20Docs/CVA/STProduceBoxFlyer.pdf

Adjournment: 7:00pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, July 21st, 2020 via Zoom from 6pm to 7pm. Please view the agenda for information on how to join the meeting.

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