



Commission on Veterans Affairs Meeting Agenda



January 21, 2025

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Michael Wilson, Chair

Anneke Vandenbroek, Vice-Chair

Join the meeting via Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/7390017153?omn=86749192621>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 739 001 7153 followed by #.

If a Commissioner would like to speak during the meeting, they can raise their hand if on video and Chair will recognize you or you can use the “hand raise” function under the reactions tab at bottom of page. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the middle of the page and the functions will be at the bottom of the page. Use the Zoom app to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press *9 to raise your hand. Those calling into the meeting can press *6 to mute or unmute their phone.

- 6:00 Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance, Approval of December 2024 Minutes – Michael Wilson, Chair**
- 6:10 Housing Accessibility Rehabilitation Program (HARP) and Habitat for Humanity Veteran's Programs – Sarah Reddinger, Vice President of Housing & Community Strategies, Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland**
[Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland HARP](#) / [Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland Veteran Home Repairs](#)
- 6:40 Follow up Discussion on:**
- Should Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs be Renamed like the Calvert County Commission for Veterans and Military Families and Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families
 - “Our Community Salutes” for High School Graduates Enlisting into Military
 - Public School Holidays - Veterans' Day and Purples Star Schools – What is MCPS doing for Gold Star and Blue Star Families?
- 7:10 Chair and Vice Chair Updates – Michael Wilson & Anneke Vandenbroek**
- 7:20 Updates from Commissioners**
- 7:30 Adjourn**

ADA Reasonable Accommodation: If you need a sign language interpreter or any other reasonable accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact carly.clem@montgomerycountymd.gov or call 202-853-1109 or via MD Relay at 711. ****See Commission duties on next page**

Duties of the Commission on Veterans Affairs

The Commission duties include:

1. research, assemble, analyze and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of veterans and their families;
2. institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans;
3. advise the Executive and the Council on the status of programs and services in the State and County related to the needs of veterans and their families; and
4. assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Minutes
January 21, 2025**

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

Call to Order - Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance

Michael Wilson, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). He 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 December 2024 Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the December 2024 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and December 2024 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

Housing Accessibility Rehabilitation Program (HARP) and Habitat for Humanity Veteran's Programs - Sarah Reddinger, Vice President of Housing & Community Strategies, Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland

Habit for Humanity Metro Maryland Website: <https://habitatmm.org/>

Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland (HFHMM) is a nonprofit corporation that was formed under the laws of the State of Maryland on November 3, 1982, for the purpose of creating decent and affordable homeownership opportunities in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. HFHMM's unique homeownership model provides a solution to this problem by breaking down barriers through community partnerships, increasing access to homeownership opportunities through the rehab of vacant, distressed properties, new construction, home repair programs, and advocacy for additional housing units.

HFHMM's homes are built, rehabilitated or repaired by a largely volunteer workforce. Built and rehabilitated homes are then sold to qualified families at no-profit and financed with affordable, no interest mortgages. Repaired homes are currently owned by low to moderate income families whose income is 30%-80% of the current median income, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for Montgomery County and Prince George's County. The families' monthly mortgage payments or repayments are paid directly to HFHMM and go into a revolving fund which helps to build even more Habitat homes. In addition to a down payment and monthly mortgage payments or repayments, homeowners invest anywhere between 200 to 500 hours of their own labor – "sweat equity" – into building their homes. HFHMM oversees the lending arm to make sure buyers are successful.

HFHMM provides lending services to lower income families that are traditionally locked out of the housing market. Applicants spend no more than 30% of their income on their housing costs. Single family homes built by HFHMM use universal design features that are able to accommodate all families for all stages of life including zero step entries, wider doorways, and installing extra blocking in bathroom walls for grab bars. The main level is designed completely liveable for a person who uses a wheelchair. HFHMM will be building a duplex in Rockville and the first level will use universal design.

HARP (Home Accessibility Rehabilitation Program): Through the Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs, HFHMM administers HARP which is a free program designed to assist low-income people with renovating their homes to make them more accessible to those with disabilities and to older adults with or without a demonstrated disability. While there are income limits to the program, older

adults and disabled individuals of any age can qualify. Work is performed by local non-profit groups Habitat for Humanity or Rebuilding Together. Eligible services include grab bar installation; stair lift installation; tub cut or walk in shower conversion; indoor/outdoor railing installation; and ramp installation.

HARP eligibility requirements: Be a current resident of Montgomery County; home must be owner occupied for at least one year; at least one permanent occupant of the home must be either 1) aged 65 years old or above, or 2) disabled at any age; household income must be at 80% or below Area Median Income though priority will be provided to households earning 50% of AMI or below ([see chart](#)); be current on the mortgage; and have a current homeowner's insurance policy. Funds are available to immediately assist applicants. HFHMM hires occupational therapists (OT) to work with homeowners with identifying issues. These services are also free under HARP.

The County gave \$750,000 to HFHMM and \$750,000 to Rebuilding Together to administer HARP. That funding will eventually run out and it is important to advocate to the County Council and the County Executive to keep this program going. The County had been investing \$300,000 of their own funds into the program. There was a waiting list prior to the ARP funds being implemented. HFHMM and RT have been advocating additional funds that can be flexible in their use for additional health or safety issues, like repairing a roof due to leaks. HFHMM looks at the home holistically.

Veteran Home Repairs: HFHMM Veteran Repair program is a construction-based resource aimed at identifying and addressing health and safety related repairs to the homes of qualified families in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. Funding for the Veteran Repair Program comes, in part, from the Home Depot Foundation, and allows us to serve the critical repair needs of Active Duty and Veteran households in the community. In order to be considered for the Veteran Repair Program a household must have an active duty or general/honorable discharge vet living in the home as their primary residence.

For more information, contact Geria Forrest, Home Preservation Client Coordinator, at 301-990-0014 ext. 1019 (V) or via email at geria.forrest@habitatmm.org.

Home Repair Program: HFHMM Home Repair program is a construction-based resource aimed at identifying and addressing health and safety related repairs to the home. The goal of this program is to provide owner-occupied homes with a safe, healthy, and accessible environment. Funding for our repair program comes from a number of different sources which all have their own stipulations on how and where we can spend that money. Because of this, we cannot give any concrete timelines as to when funding will be available for a given home. At a time when we do have funding that is applicable to the needs of your home, you will be contacted directly.

Eligible services include roof repair/replacement; water heater replacement; zero-step entry solutions; porch repair or replacement; drywall repair or replacement; plumbing repairs (major or minor); minor electrical repairs; and accessible bathrooms. Offer up to \$20,000 for home repairs in addition to any accessibility repairs.

Repair and Accessibility Modification Program (RAMP): RAMP program is a construction-based resource aimed at identifying and addressing critical health, safety and accessibility related needs in the homes of families where at least one household member struggles with one or more Activities of Daily Living (ADL's). The goal of this program is to provide owner-occupied homes with a safe, healthy, and accessible environment in a comprehensive way using the expertise of an OT, and optional consultation with a Registered Nurse (RN) to determine best-fit accessible solutions for housing challenges.

Weatherization Program: Weatherization projects are entirely free to the homeowner and are designed to improve the energy efficiency, overall indoor air quality, and comfort of your home. The Maryland Energy Administration grants HFHMM with funding every year to address services relating to air sealing, insulation, duct sealing, appliance replacement with Energy Star certified appliances, and HVAC system repairs and/or upgrades in eligible homes upon professional evaluation. HFHMM can also add solar polars that can help a homeowner reduce their electric bill every month.

Energy Equity Initiative (EEI): The Department of Environmental Protection granted funding to HFHMM to provide a program intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, provide gap funding for health and safety repairs, and offer climate adaptations for low- and moderate-income homes in Montgomery County. EEI is designed to fill the gaps of program funding for critical home repairs and climate resiliency services and to connect LMI households with important tools to adapt to the changing climate. Health and safety problems are repaired, allowing participation in state-offered efficiency and weatherization programs. The home can be electrified to potentially improve indoor air quality, including removing fossil-fuel appliances.

The floor was opened for questions and comments.

- **Is assistance available year-round?** Yes.
- **How many veterans have sought assistance?** HFHMM has served at least 12 veteran households since July, which is the beginning of their fiscal year. Sarah will send additional data to Betsy to share with Commissioners.
- **Are gold star families eligible for the veterans program?** It depends on the funding source. Interested applicants can reach out directly to HFHMM. Home Depot funding is more flexible, whereas federal funding has strict guidelines. Advocacy would need to be changed at the federal level.
- **Is HFHMM connected to ServingTogether?** Not that Sarah is aware, but she will look into this. It was reported that ServingTogether receives \$160,000 in annual funding from Montgomery County to provide information and referral services to veterans.
- **Can HFHMM assist homeowners that have the money to make repairs or modifications, but who do not know where to start?** It is in Habitat for Humanity's international charter that applicants must be income qualified to receive services. HFHMM does not look at assets included the value of the home. Compensation from the VA does count as income. Wayne Miller, Silver Spring Vet Center, said that veterans receiving 100% disability from the VA will be over-income and not qualified for services. HFHMM has been having conversations at how to look at VA income. If applicants are over income but have the resources, HFHMM does work with several contractors and also offers virtual classes once a month where experienced home inspectors can answer questions.
 - It was suggested that the Commission list trusted contractors and occupational therapists in the Veterans Network Directory. This Commission also needs to research and get a better understanding of all housing resources opportunities that exist and determine ways to share this information with veterans. Outreach could a press release as well as sharing information via the veteran e-subscribe list maintained by Betsy Luecking, Staff, and local veteran service organizations. Commissioners Bernard Chesman and Miguel Sapp will convene a housing workgroup along with Sam Korper, Liaison to the Commission on People with Disabilities. It was suggested that the Greater Capital Area Association of REALTORS® (GCAAR) be reviewed to see what accessible features are noted when a home is listed for sale.

Follow-Up Discussions

- **Should Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs be Renamed like the Calvert County Commission for Veterans and Military Families and Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families (MDVMF)?**

It was asked if the Commission has the resources available to serve military families. It is not known if the currently available resources to veterans are different for those needed to serve military families. Adding the term 'Military Families' implies that there would be resources available to support family members directly and not just veterans. Michael will contact Dana Burl, Deputy Secretary, Military Family Policy and Programs, MDVMF, for more information. If the Commission did change its name, it would require legislation from the County Council. It could also alter the type of voting members on the Commission to include active duty members and/or military family members.

Scott Schlesinger, Commissioner, also serves on the Maryland Veterans Commission. He noted that

while the department name changed the Maryland Veterans Commission did not add military families to its title.

- **“Our Community Salutes” for High School Graduates Enlisting into Military**

OCS is a nonprofit organization founded that recognizes graduating high school seniors who will be enlisting into the military upon graduation. Greg Jolissaint, Howard County Commission for Veterans & Military Families, is coordinating with “Our Community Salutes” for an event to be held on April 29. They are still in the process of identifying a location. Montgomery County currently does not participate in the program. It was noted that Magruder High School in Derwood and John F. Kennedy High School in Silver Spring have ROTC programs. Elwood Gray, Commissioner, will reach out to the ROTC program at Magruder High School for more information and determine if they would be interested in joining Howard County’s program.

- **Public School Holidays - Veterans' Day and Purples Star Schools – What is MCPS doing for Gold Star and Blue Star Families?**

Mike Subin, Commissioner, has met several times with Julie Yang, President, Montgomery County Board of Education. Mike is not attendance tonight and this issue will be added to the Commission meeting agenda next month.

Chair and Vice Chair Updates

Michael reported Project Opportunity is currently accepting applications for class beginning March 10 in at the Montgomery College Takoma Park Campus. [Project Opportunity](#) is a free entrepreneurship training program designed solely for veterans (Active Duty, Guard/Reserve Personnel, and Veterans) who want to start their own business or expand their current small business. Program graduates are in various stages of their business ventures, ranging from finalizing their business plan to actual launch and earning income.

Michael plans to attend the American Legion Post 295 (Germantown) meeting in February. He encouraged Commissioners to do outreach to their local veteran service organizations and attend their monthly meetings.

Anneke Vanderbroek, Vice-Chair, reported there is an American Red Cross national disaster distress helpline that can connect individuals with counselors as well as resources for housing, clothing, and other immediate needs. Call or text 1-800-985-5990.

Updates from Commissioners

It was suggested that the Commission discuss outreach efforts including developing a speakers bureau that could meet with veteran service organizations and exchange information and resources. It was also suggested that veteran service organizations be invited to Commission meetings for them to make recommendations.

It was suggested that the Commission have an in-person informal engagement such as a lunch. The Commission will also discuss holding future in-person meetings at the next meeting.

The [MDVMF 2024 annual report](#) is now available.

MilitaryOneSource has a good resource for [military funeral honors](#).

Jenn Hodge, Local Behavioral Health Authority, Department of Health and Human Services, will send Betsy a one-pager on homeless diversion programs to share with Commissioners. She oversees a grant that prioritizes veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness. Eligible veterans are assigned a case manager through the public health system.

Adjournment

7:24 p.m.

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Bernard Chesman; Drew Garza; Elwood Gray; Veronica Pei; Miguel Sapp; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Christopher Thomas; Anneke Vandenbroek, Vice-Chair; Michael Wilson, Chair

Commissioners Absent: Grace Caulfield; Jameelah Johnson; Michael Subin; Charles Von Goin

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Joseph Eyong (Congressman Jamie Raskin)

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes); Charles Richardson (Senator Chris Van Hollen)

Commission Liaison: Sam Korper, Commission on People with Disabilities

County Staff: Jen Hodge, Local Behavioral Health Authority, Department of Health and Human Services

Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

Public Present: Bill Gray; Wayne Miller, Silver Spring Vet Center; Sarah Reddinger, Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland; Muriel Cooper, Committee Evaluation and Review Board; Patti Alexander