

**Communications Committee Meeting
January 23, 2023**

Attendees

CoA

Jean Dinwiddie, Co-Chair
Beverly Rollins, Co-Chair
David Engel
Kendell Matthews
Katie Smith

Alumni

Austin Heyman
Chuck Kauffman
Rev Vikram

Staff

Shawn Brennan, Age-Friendly Montgomery
Jennifer Long, Aging and Disability Services
Patrice McGhee, Director, Area Agency on Aging

Guests

Stuart Rosenthal, *Beacon* Newspaper

Roll Call

Jean Dinwiddie called the roll. The December 2022 meeting minutes were approved.

Guest Speaker

Patrice McGhee, Director of Montgomery County's Area Agency on Aging, discussed the status of the hiring of a staff person with funds from the County's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). She also discussed how the CoA's proposed Ambassador Program will be implemented. Dr. McGhee asked what information the Committee has on other nearby jurisdictions regarding their Ambassador Programs, and what the CoA would like to see in Montgomery County. Jean responded that Montgomery County offers lots of services but most residents do not know what it offers. The Committee hopes the proposed Ambassador Program will give a brief introduction to the CoA and also explain what services the County offers. After a brief introduction, the presenters could say that they would like to know more about the concerns of the individuals in the audience. The session would provide information and seek knowledge.

David Engel stated that he would like for the Program to have outreach to all parts of the County, including under-served areas. Patrice asked about what jurisdictions we have researched. Jean and Beverly noted that Marcia Pruzan has done some research and she has talked with individuals from Frederick County and Howard County. We have also met with representatives from Alexandria, and D.C., and have heard about a program in Loudoun County.

Jean commented that organizing and maintaining an Ambassador Program would be too much work for a volunteer, and that is the reason why the ARPA hire is needed to work on this. CoA members are all volunteers and maintaining the program would be expecting too much from a volunteer.

Patrice said that it now looks like the ARPA hire will work with external partners and also the County's Public Information Office. That person will develop a strategic marketing plan. The County is looking for an individual with a marketing background to fill the position. That person will be tasked with developing a strategy to get information out to older adults, especially under-served, home-bound older adults. She stated that until individuals need a service they do not often know that it exists. She commented that the County will not be able to hold focus groups or listening sessions to obtain the information for the Ambassador Program.

Jean stated that volunteers could hold the listening sessions and focus groups. David reiterated that the CoA needs the administrative help, which the ARPA person could do. Jean added that the ARPA employee could vet the volunteers. David commented that the ARPA employee could also let the public know who should be contacted for information.

Patrice stated that in addition to the ARPA monies, the Maryland Department of Aging gave Montgomery County a grant to hire three individuals to get information out to the communities. Staff is calling them "connectors." These connectors will act as Ambassadors, working to distribute information. They will work with the marketing "broker," which is what the County is calling the ARPA hire. The broker will not be setting up the events, the connectors will be doing it. She suggested that the CoA could work with the connectors for its Ambassador Program. David agreed that the Ambassadors and the connectors should be in sync. He noted that the broker can also be involved by identifying the areas that need help – the broker will help with that and advise the connectors.

Patrice noted that two connectors have already been identified and interviews for the broker are now being held. Jennifer Long stated that the two connectors are now in training. One connector is a retired County employee.

Patrice stated that the grant program for the connectors only lasts one year and the ARPA program only last two years. The broker will help to ensure that all messages to the public will be the same. David asked whether the connectors and broker could help to formulate a long-term plan. Patrice responded that developing a long-term plan will be included in their responsibilities. Katie Smith asked whether the broker could observe what the connectors will be doing and possibly carry on with those duties after the connectors are gone.

Jean stated that the CoA is looking to County staff for the administrative support of the Ambassador Program; that is, coordinating the efforts of the CoA volunteers. Patrice responded that the connectors could help with that.

Jean asked Jennifer whether she sees the goals of the CoA's Ambassador Program as well as those of the connectors and broker as achievable. Jennifer responded that some things will have to be worked out but it should be an exciting opportunity. Chuck Kauffman stated that Jim Resnick, retired Battalion Fire Chief at Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service, has been performing work as envisioned for the Ambassador Program for years. He suggested that the CoA work with him and Woody Davis. Chuck stated that the CoA should not reinvent the wheel; members should discuss the program with Montgomery County staffer Pazit Aviv, Jim Resnik, and the individual from the Jewish Council for Aging who works with a similar program. He said that the CoA does not have the capacity to do this type of work. The CoA should piggyback on their existing presentations and events. The CoA can coordinate its activities with their events.

Austin Heyman noted said he shares some of Chuck's concerns but obviously Jim Resnick's staff goes out and talks about fire and safety and so on, not so much about other programs and services available to older adults. He stated that in terms of the CoA, it should think of a more modest approach – maybe five or six individuals from the CoA could act as Ambassadors. Perhaps the goal should be to hold six Ambassador sessions in the next year; try holding them in a library. Austin noted that coordination of the events could be a real problem. He suggested trying a pilot program.

Patrice stated that County staff will not stop going out into the community to give presentations even after the connectors start working. Staff will continue making presentations. The new connector and broker positions will not hinder current staff efforts. She said that yes, the two programs are time-limited, but the broker will work with all the County departments. That person will partner with the Public Information Office and other County departments and will work to find the under-served communities. And the connectors will work with the broker in his or her efforts. Beverly Rollins asked whether the CoA should have a contact person working with the new connectors and Patrice responded yes. David suggested that the CoA may need to do a better job of finding out the needs of the under-served communities and could possibly shadow the connectors.

David asked for clarification between what the Area Agency on Aging does and what Aging and Disability Services does. He asked Patrice to address that at the next CoA meeting. Patrice stated that COVID revealed that we are not doing a good job of reaching the home-bound. A homebound list has been established and the County is working on a plan for how to communicate with them. Kendell Matthews asked whether there are any target communities that the CoA should focus its efforts on from a marketing perspective. Patrice said that each department collects data on whom they are serving, and where. The County's strategic plan for marketing will be looking at the County as a whole and will be doing a deep dive into the areas where service is needed. Staff will be looking across the board.

Patrice finished by reporting that the marketing broker position has been posted. She asked CoA members to suggest to individuals with a strong marketing background to apply for it.

Reaching Out to Older Adults for Information for the 2023 Summit on Aging

Shawn Brennan, the staffer for Age-Friendly Montgomery, addressed the Committee to discuss ideas for Montgomery County's 2023 Summit on Aging. She reported that the planning group is at a very early planning stage for the event and that there has been a lot of change within HHS. There is no budget yet for the Summit. One idea that staff is toying with is to have older adults meet in libraries and discuss what they would like to hear at the Summit. She said that libraries tend to be good meeting places. It would be helpful if staff could find individuals willing to facilitate the conversations and take notes. And a way to let the community know about the Summit needs to be determined. She suggested that an episode of *50+ in Montgomery County* could feature a segment about it.

Chuck commented that the Summit is a good idea; it will strive to highlight information about County services. A list should be made of the information that the organizers want individuals to know about. For publicity purposes something big should be focused on. Chuck noted that he has an idea for selecting the major focus: work on a questionnaire on what organizers want to highlight as the focus; that is, do a survey. Shawn responded that staff are working on developing a focus.

Austin stated that it would be appropriate for the CoA and Age-Friendly to discuss the Summit with the County Executive. They could ask the CE what his expectations are. He suggested that focus groups be held to allow individuals to voice what topics they want to discuss. He reminded everyone that the CE and County Council will have to execute what comes out of the Summit.

Rev Vikram asked what the CE and Council plan to do with the information that comes out of the Summit – how will they use it? Shawn said that a meeting will be held tomorrow (Tuesday, January 24) to discuss those questions. The CE committed to being at the Summit, as did the County department heads. Shawn noted that she will announce at the January 24 meeting that Austin recommends holding focus groups. Rev agreed that focus groups would be helpful.

Katie said that if a theme would be assigned to the Summit it would be helpful; it could be generic and wraparound a lot of issues. A theme is a good marketing tool. Stuart said that for prior Summits the CoA pushed for a monthly information page in the *Beacon*. He noted that doing so is an easy solution for getting publicity for the event.

Jean reiterated that there is no budget for the Summit; therefore, the different County government departments may have to chip in. Shawn asked for volunteers to hold the focus groups. David volunteered and said that Marsha Weber may be interested. He stated that he will bring it up at the upcoming CoA meeting. He also suggested that perhaps the homebound older adults that Patrice mentioned could get the *Beacon* direct mailed to them.

Jean summed up the discussion by noting that focus groups could be held to come up with a theme. Rev commented that possibly one theme could be "Life after COVID...how are people

coping?” Issues such as “What do people need post-COVID? What do they want? Where do we go now?” could be addressed. Kendell suggested that Shawn may also want to tap the Villages to hold focus groups and develop ideas for the Summit.

David asked whether the connectors should attend the focus group meetings. It would be an opportunity for them to be in the community. Also, include Ambassadors in the training. Kendell reminded everyone that the Ambassador messages need to be the same.

Status of Library Materials

Jean noted that she sent three emails to the library director, Anita Vassallo, but has not received a response.

David stated that there is a document called “Services for Seniors” that is issued every year. There is a whole page that says what the libraries will do. The CoA needs to point that out in its communications with Director Vassallo and ask why they were not included in the library’s strategic plan.

David is also looking into when the library commission meets. There is an advisory committee for each library. At the upcoming CoA meeting, he will ask for a volunteer to attend those meetings. The goal is to have a better working relationship with the libraries. Jean said that she has been taking a gentler approach with Director Vassallo to establish a partnership, but it appears to be time to be more direct.

Jean noted that this topic will be discussed again at next month’s Communications Committee meeting.

50+ in Montgomery County Update

Katie Smith provided the following updates:

- January program features an interview with County Executive Marc Elrich
- February program features an interview with Council President Evan Glass
- March program will discuss intergenerational programs
- April program will discuss the CoA’s May public forum topic
- May program will feature centenarians

Jean reminded everyone that the 50+ Planning Committee meets 1st Friday of each month.

Website Update

Beverly asked Shawn whether Communications Committee members can review the next draft of the CoA website. Shawn is not sure that it can happen. Hopefully staff will soon get clarity on what still needs to happen on the website; staff are still not sure whether Tremayne Jones will be able to make necessary changes, which would be the best case scenario. Shawn stated that she should know more about this on Wednesday, January 25. She asked David to remind the CoA

that the site should have the last five years of CoA meeting minutes and agendas. Shawn stated that she would try to connect with David after Wednesday's meeting.

David commented that the CoA would really like the site to go live; the accuracy can be checked after it is up and running. Jean agreed that staff should just go with it and make changes/corrections after it is live. She suggested that maybe CoA member, Arunima Ghosh, could work with Tremayne to ensure that the website is up-to-date. Jean said that she will approach Arunima to see whether she is interested.

Adjourn

Action Items

1. The newly hired connectors will help with administrative support of the Ambassador Program; that is, coordinating the efforts of the CoA volunteers.
2. The CoA will appoint a contact person to work with the new connectors. (BR suggestion— Marcia Pruzan?)
3. The CoA may need to do a better job of finding out the needs of the under-served communities and could possibly shadow the connectors.
4. County staff will be looking across the board to see where best to focus the efforts of the connectors and the broker.
5. If CoA members know individuals with a strong marketing background they should suggest that they apply for the broker position.
6. The CoA should ask for volunteers to facilitate focus groups to discuss what items they feel should be addressed at the Senior Summit. Notetakers are also needed. The newly hired connectors should attend. Some of the focus groups could take place at the Villages.
7. *50+ in Montgomery County* should feature a segment about the Senior Summit.
8. A list should be made of the information that the Senior Summit organizers want individuals to know about. For publicity purposes something big should be focused on. Possibly develop a questionnaire on what organizers want to highlight as the focus; that is, do a survey.
9. It would be appropriate for the CoA and Age-Friendly to discuss the Summit with the County Executive. They could ask the CE what his expectations are. Focus groups should be held to allow individuals to voice what topics they want to discuss. Shawn noted that she will announce at the January 24 staff meeting to discuss the Summit that the CoA recommends holding focus groups.
10. A theme should be developed for the Senior Summit.
11. The CoA should push for a monthly information page about the Summit to appear in the *Beacon*.
12. The CoA needs to point out “Services for Seniors” in its communications with Library Director Vassallo and ask why older adult services were not included in the library’s strategic plan.
13. At the upcoming CoA meeting, David will ask for a volunteer to attend the library advisory committee meetings.
14. Staff will provide more clarity on what still needs to happen on the website after the January 25 staff meeting.

15. David will remind the CoA that the new CoA website should have the last five years of CoA meeting minutes and agendas.
16. Shawn will connect with David about the new CoA website after the January 25 staff meeting.