

**Communications Committee Meeting  
Minutes  
June 21, 2020**

**Attendees**

**Commission Members**

Jean Dinwiddie, Co-Chair  
Beverly Rollins, Co-Chair  
Wayne Berman  
Ruby Moone  
Katie Smith  
Marsha Weber

**Alumni Members**

Chuck Kaufman, Alumni Member  
Marcia Pruzan  
Isabelle Schoenfeld

**Staff**

Mary Anderson, Montgomery County Public Information Office  
Monique Gardner, African American Health Initiative  
Jennifer Long, Montgomery County  
Joelle Modderman, Montgomery County Public Information Office  
Betty Ring, Montgomery County Councilmember Sydney Katz' office

**Guest**

David Engle, GROWS

After roll call, members approved the minutes of the May meeting of the Communications Committee.

**Discussion with Mary Anderson, HHS Liaison to the Public Information Office**

Mary Anderson has been with the county for almost 30 years. Currently she is with the Department of Health and Human Services and is the liaison to the Public Information Office (PIO)). She covers all aspects of the work in which HHS is involved. It is a large department. The PIO is the link for the CoA to use to get information out to the public.

The PIO gets information to the public in a number of ways. For one, HHS has a public website. It also has two social media channels, a Facebook page, and a Twitter account.

There are a variety of other venues the Office uses based on the information that is being distributed, and the event. One method is a press release. They go out electronically. Information goes out in print (such as through newspapers) and through broadcast (including TV). Anyone can sign up to get press releases. They are distributed through a special platform as well as through the Montgomery County website under “News.” In addition to sending out press releases the PIO uses social media such as Twitter.

Ms. Anderson sends information to regional recreation and senior center directors for them to distribute. They all have electronic ways to share data. Also, County Councilmembers have communication resources, and she shares with them. The regional center directors send weekly newsletters that are relevant to residents in their region and for the entire County. Ms. Anderson stated that she uses free sources that are already in existence.

Jean noted that the CoA production, *Seniors Today*, would like to start issuing press releases. What is the process for doing that? Ms. Anderson responded that the CoA should provide her with a document that indicates the who, what, where, when, and why of the program and she will develop a press release. She needs the information about three weeks before the show airs. She will draft a press release and then send it back to the CoA for review. After that another PIO person will re-review it. Occasionally, she can get a press release out sooner than that but she cannot guarantee it.

Jean asked how the PIO is reaching the County’s diverse communities. Ms. Anderson responded that the list of organizations that the Office distributes information to includes diverse communities. Chuck Kaufman commented that the Juneteenth event recently held at BlackRock Center for the Arts was not listed in the Washington Post, and it should have been. He asked whether the PIO can get the CoA’s press releases to public media. Ms. Anderson responded that her Office’s distribution list includes public media. She commented, however, that just because a press release is sent out it does not mean it will be picked up.

Chuck asked whether the CoA could get a copy of the PIO’s media distribution list. Ms. Anderson responded that she does not maintain it but she will try to get a copy. She noted that all of the CoA’s press releases must be sent through the PIO office. If the CoA hears of or comes in contact with organizations not on the PIO’s list, it can request that those organizations be added by providing Ms. Anderson with the name of the outlet and email contact information. Chuck noted that he would like to see a single, 1-stop distribution list.

Beverly Rollins asked whether the PIO provides information to Montgomery Community Media. Ms. Anderson responded that MCM is a private community organization and not part of Montgomery County government. Jean asked whether the CoA can contact MCM when it wants to get information out, especially about the *Seniors Today* name change. Ms. Anderson responded that the CoA can use MCM as it deems necessary but AFTER the PIO has approved the press release. Joelle Modderman added that the PIO can also provide “visuals” for the CoA after the PIO has approved the press release. Ms. Anderson stated that the CoA can work with the PIO to prepare a press release and then the information can be put on things like electronic sign boards at public places such as senior centers and libraries.

Jean noted that there are all kinds of things available that the CoA could publicize. Ms. Anderson commented that she is constantly talking with County leadership and that she would be happy to put out messages for the CoA. There are endless possibilities that the CoA and the PIO can talk about. While she is currently a one-woman “team,” Ms. Anderson stated that hopefully she will get a student intern in the Fall.

Ms. Anderson continued, stating that the CoA and the PIO need on-going information sharing; she needs to put things on the County’s calendar. She noted that the County Executive started a weekly newsletter during COVID and that will be continued. It comes out on Thursdays and the editor is Neal Greenberger who works in the PIO.

Marcia Pruzan clarified whether the CoA can contact reporters on its own accord. Ms. Anderson responded that she needs to approve all press contacts. However, the CoA can magnify the message AFTER the press release is out as long as it is discussed with the PIO. Ms. Anderson needs to be kept in the loop. She asked that we also work with Jennifer Long, the committee’s HHS staff representative.

Chuck Kaufman stated that the CoA would like to send the PIO raw information but would like to see the distribution list that the PIO uses. That list should also include other Montgomery County government contacts that the PIO works with.

Ms. Anderson reiterated that she will send the CoA the public information distribution list that the PIO uses if she can get it. She will also send the names of the folks who work for the County who are also involved in getting out press releases. She will also send a link of the County PIO folks who are assigned to work with the various Montgomery County offices.

Ms. Anderson stated that the distribution list for the press releases is different from publications like the weekly newsletters or other information that goes to the regional center directors. It is not automatic that people who are on one list will receive the same information as people on another list. In response to a question, Ms. Anderson stated that the PIO is not on Instagram.

Beverly asked whether the CoA can request to whom the PIO sends information. Ms. Anderson responded that the CoA will need to help her develop a list of people and places it would like information to go to regularly; it should develop a distribution group. Information will go out to this distribution list in addition to the “blast” group.

Jean asked who the CoA should contact to have develop posters at senior centers with QR codes. Ms. Anderson responded saying that in Joelle Modderman’s office there are two graphic designers. The CoA would work with one of the designers to develop posters. Those posters will then need to get printed, but money is needed to print those posters. Ms. Anderson stated that she will need to get answers to whether the recreation and senior centers have to approve the posters. Joelle Modderman added that many of those places have virtual monitors and information can also be placed on them.

Marcia Pruzan commented that many years ago the CoA tried to get senior centers to play episodes of *Seniors Today* but the centers did not have the time or the resources to do it. Chuck Kaufman asked how the CoA can get noticed when it has something important to say.

Ms. Anderson responded that it is the million-dollar question. There is no great answer. If the County had a big marketing budget it could get more notice. But it has to rely on free media. Wayne Berman asked whether the CoA can use postcards to announce things that can be distributed at places such as senior centers. Ms. Anderson responded that yes, postcards and other types of instruments can be used to get out information. But those things have to be paid for. Marsha Weber asked whether HHS has a budget for public information. Ms. Anderson responded that HHS is not a revenue generating department like some of the other County departments that have a marketing and outreach budget. Marsha then asked whether HHS has ever had a budget for public information and when was the last time that it requested one. Ms. Anderson responded that yes, she has asked for money for things such as another employee to help her with her duties. Marsha commented that maybe the CoA should include that in its budget priority list.

In closing, Ms. Anderson stated that she will see whether she can get the distribution list that was requested and that she will also respond to the other questions that were posed to her before the meeting and that she did not get to during today's meeting.

After Ms. Anderson signed off Marsha Weber asked whether the Committee is interested in getting help for the PIO? Possibly advocate for a Senior Fellow position to work with Mary Anderson? Or finding a way for the PIO to get money? Marsha commented that Mary Anderson needs help and money.

### **Seniors Today Update**

Jean noted that she and Beverly narrowed the list of suggested new names for *Seniors Today* down to five. The Committee members discussed the five choices and then voted on the one that they liked best. *50+ in Montgomery County: A Community for a Lifetime* won.

Jean noted that the three guests for the July program will be Vivien Hsueh of the Chinese American Senior Services Association, Sarna Marcus, representing the LGBTQ+ community, and David Baldrige of the International Association for Indigenous Aging.

### **Status of New Member Orientation Booklet and CoA Member Handbook**

Beverly noted that the New Member Orientation Booklet is complete and that she is currently working on the Members' Handbook. She will share the list that Is Schoenfeld developed a few years ago regarded what should be included in the Handbook. Is commented that the Handbook will probably require little updating every year but the Orientation Booklet may have to be updated regularly.

### **Communications Committee Summer Schedule**

Jean and Beverly have decided that the Communications Committee will continue to work over the summer.

### **Adjourn**

Jean closed the meeting by reminding Committee members that the next meeting is July 19, 1p.