



Age-Friendly Network Meeting Summary

August, 5 2025 | 1:00pm – 2:00pm | Virtual Meeting

Attendees:

DHHS: Dr. Bridgers, Dr. McGhee, Dr. Johnson, Eldora Taylor, Shawn Brennan, Lauren Byers, Mario Wawrzusin, Pazit Aviv, Peter Ilig

Recreation: Adriane Clutter, Sara Swarr, Stacy Sigler

Office of Community

Partnerships/Volunteer Center: Lindsay Neimoller

Montgomery Connects: Mitsuko Herrera

OEMS: Jeremy Costin

County Council: Jackie Rivera-Oven

African American Health Program: Ama Lee

Montgomery Parks: Jennene Blakely

Department of Transportation: Denise Isreal

Department of Housing and Community Affairs: Robert Love

Commission on Aging: Laurie Pross, Linda Bergofsky, David Engel

COA Alumni: Beverly Rollins

Montgomery County Village Consortium: Barbara Taylor

WorkSource Montgomery: Cynthia Grissom

Suburban Hospital: Katie McGrail

Non-Profit Community: Janine Tursini, Arts for the Aging; William Clements, Gaithersburg HELP; Mary Sweeney, Charles E. Smith Life Communities

Ascendient, Inc.: Emily McCallum

Foundation/Big Picture – Shawn Brennan, Age Friendly Program Manager

What is Age-Friendly Montgomery?

- Age Friendly Montgomery is a community-wide initiative aimed at ensuring that Montgomery County is a place where residents can enjoy a high quality of life throughout their lives.
- The initiative includes a diverse range of stakeholders, such as government agencies, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. It focuses on actively listening to community members' challenges and responding collectively to their needs. The collaborative, multi-sector approach is essential for the initiative's success.
- Montgomery County has been part of the age-friendly network for 10 years. The 10th anniversary provides an opportunity to reinvigorate the initiative and raise greater awareness within the community.

Department of Health and Human Services – Dr. James C. Bridgers, Jr., Director

Dr. Bridgers mentioned that DHHS is monitoring the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 and changes at the federal level that may impact our aging community. Once these are identified, the Age Friendly Network will be notified.

Age-Friendly Community Needs Assessment – Emily McCallum

- ❖ Emily McCallum, a consultant with Ascendient, Inc. working with Age Friendly Montgomery, introduced the upcoming community Assessment. (Kate McGrail applauded Ascendient's work with the County's Community Health Improvement Plan.)
- ❖ Focuses on 10 different domains of life for seniors in Montgomery County.
- ❖ Some assessment goals include understanding success over the past 10 years, identifying service gaps, comparing current data with previous assessments, and gathering community insights.
- ❖ Ascendient will work with County staff to put together a comprehensive survey for seniors that explores feelings about their lives, their willingness to stay in Montgomery County, and perceptions of current services
- ❖ Focus groups and community listening sessions will also be held.
- ❖ We will look at the Maryland Longevity Ready plan to ensure we use data and other resources effectively.
- ❖ Misti emphasized the importance of technology in the needs assessment and suggested including specific questions about seniors' needs related to technology.

TEBS/Montgomery Connects

Established the Montgomery Digital Resource Network in response to the federal government's cancellation of several grant programs. The goal is to find more effective ways to share information about free resources available to individuals who need access to computers, devices, and training programs. This initiative aims to enhance communication between service providers and those seeking assistance.

The 2025 Maryland Digital Opportunity Summit is an event for organizations; it is not open to the public. It will aim to facilitate introductions and discuss collaborative efforts. It will be on October 15th at the Silver Spring Civic Center, and the focus will be on developing a referral website designed to help organizations refer clients to appropriate services.

Computer Distribution Program: The state previously had a program to provide free computers to low-income households, with eligibility requirements including enrollment in Medicaid, SNAP, or an income below 200% of federal poverty guidelines. Howard County currently has around 1,000 unallocated computers, and Misti is collaborating with Howard County to obtain these computers for distribution in Montgomery County.

Longevity Ready Maryland

The Longevity Ready Maryland Plan was released on July 30. The Commission on Aging invited the Maryland Department of Aging to the October 23rd COA meeting to discuss it.

Question: *What does the statewide program entail?*

Shawn described the LRM process as similar to the Age-Friendly initiative, which involves collaboration among businesses, community organizations, nonprofits, and government to ensure

everyone can thrive. For instance, many older Maryland residents face confusion when applying for multiple programs like food assistance and healthcare, each with its own separate application portal. To streamline this, a centralized application system could be developed, allowing individuals who qualify for one program to qualify for others, improving integration and communication automatically.

Kimberly Johnson added:

Maryland Department of Aging Secretary Roques said that Maryland is the first state to integrate the Longevity Ready plan with the State Plan, a four-year plan mandated by the federal government.

Age-Friendly Table Talk Session

Shawn and Lindsay co-hosted an Age-Friendly tabletop discussion on July 16th at the Volunteer Center. Participants talked about the importance of in-person events and opportunities for collaboration.

Updates

Area Agency on Aging

Work is being done to put in place an Acting Manager for the Long-term Care Ombudsman program.

November is National Caregiver Month. An event will be held, and the flyer will be sent out. The Longevity Ready Maryland plan addresses caregivers in the paid workforce and those who are informal.

Leaders attended the USAging Conference, which provided an excellent opportunity to meet the new ACL leadership and hear about some of the challenges they are still facing.

Nursing Home Oversight: During the FY25 legislative session, Senate Bill 376 was passed, which requires the Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ) to provide local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) with reports of surveys conducted in each respective county. Our AAA has received the first report, demonstrating compliance with the statute by the OHCQ.

Montgomery County has secured a contract to develop a survey to understand residents' experiences living in 34 nursing homes. The kickoff meeting will be soon.

Recreation:

Adrian discussed how leisure time defines identity after a career. Among other benefits, leisure provides social connections and helps one live their purpose.

500 Maryland athletes participated in the Senior Olympics. The Senior Program Registration starts on Tuesday, August 12th.

She is open to partner input on improving recreation services, wants recommendations for community partners, and wants to know what age-friendly recreation looks like.

Beverly:

Attended the US Senate hearing with AARP on the Older Americans Act (OAA). Senators were adamant about reauthorizing the OAA, and it was a hopeful hearing.

Bradley Cooper produced a documentary about Caregiving on PBS that highlights problems in our country.

There are efforts underway to reintroduce the Wish Act in Congress.

Reflecting on Successes Since the County Joined the Age-Friendly Network:

Mario Wawrzusin: Getting together and working together is truly impactful. Example: last week's intervention with the Ombudsman program and law enforcement to keep people safe. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is an excellent example of cross-departmental cooperation.

Ruth Kershner: We're making YouTube videos, teaching seniors how to care for caregivers, and posting on social media. The program will soon have a computer program specifically for caregivers.

Denise Isreal: RideOn is free as of June 29th.

Arts for the Aging: We had a senior prom in July, the first event that helped introduce us to many older adults living in affordable housing communities.

"A Place at the Table" will be a community connections event. It will also include arts engagement activities, which aim to promote to Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) residents the value of engaging with the arts.

Beacon

The Beacon newspaper features a page dedicated to Age Friendly initiatives each month. If you want to celebrate your efforts, you can request a page in the Beacon.

County Executive Elrich will hold a listening session during the upcoming 50+ Expo on September 28th.

Age Friendly

Age Friendly will be celebrating 10 years with the County Council on Nov. 4th

