

**Communications Committee Meeting
Minutes
January 24, 2022**

Attendees

CoA Members

Jean Dinwiddie
Beverly Rollins
Virginia Cain
David Engel
Eddie Rivas
Barbara Selter

CoA Alumni

Chuck Kauffman
Marcia Pruzan
Revatha Vikram

Staff

Jennifer Long, Montgomery County
Joelle Modderman, Montgomery County Public Information Office

Guests

Stuart Rosenthal, *Beacon Newspapers*

Speaker

Anita Vassallo, Director of Montgomery County Public Libraries

Roll Call

The minutes of the December 2021 meeting were approved.

Discussion of Older Adult Materials Located in Montgomery County Public Libraries

Jean introduced Anita Vassallo, Director of the Montgomery County Public Libraries. Ms. Vassallo discussed services that the County's public libraries offer to older adults. At one time there was a direction to each branch to carve out a section of the library for materials for older adults. Generally, the sections were in different places in the different branches. What was placed in these sections were flyers and other materials, depending on how much room was

available. But COVID has caused some changes. The libraries no longer provide paper handouts. Also, older adults tend not linger or stay in the libraries as long as they used to.

Before this meeting Anita and her staff reached out to the libraries and asked what types of questions the librarians are getting from older adults. Staff learned that they are asking for things such as recommendations for reading, suggestions for book clubs, questions about how to download books, and questions on how to use electronic resources. There are lots of questions about how to use downloadable resources, things like streaming. Older adults are using library computers to play games to help with memory. They also want information about such things as home services and where senior centers are located, and about health, legal, and financial programs. In addition, older adults are interested in classes on how to use iPhones, iPads, and other electronic devices.

Anita stated that a lot of the services that the libraries provided prior to the Pandemic have been suspended. But libraries are important to older adults who have no family; they help ameliorate social isolation. A library program called Needles and Crafts brings older adults together where they share information on interests, hobbies, and books. The program allows them the opportunity to socialize. Socialization is a critical role for the libraries, a place where individuals can gather and interact. Sometimes, the interaction between the older adults and the library staff is about the only interaction the older adults have with other folks.

Anita noted that the libraries offer intergenerational programs in partnership with the Jewish Council for the Aging. In these programs older adults work with younger individuals to do things like discuss events that happened during the older adult's lifetime, events such as the Vietnam War.

Anita stated that the libraries also offer a program called Gather. It is a bit difficult to find out about it online and staff are working to make it more accessible. Also, on the libraries' website there is a Senior link discussing events that older adults can access. The events are all virtual now. There are links to resources and online classes and e-books and other electronic articles have links. Also, older adults can fill out a form and get librarian-recommended books. And there are genealogy resources.

Anita responded to a question about how the CoA can connect with libraries to ensure materials are in the proper place. She noted that, unfortunately, the libraries are under a lot of stress right now because of COVID; they are involved in mask and COVID test distribution, and also, there are a lot of staff absences because of COVID. In addition, currently there are staff vacancies in the libraries and it might be difficult to implement the CoA's suggestions. Anita noted that, hopefully, things will soon start to get back to normal, but right now may not be the time to embark on a project between the libraries and the CoA. She stated that possibly by the beginning of the summer the libraries will be in a better place.

Anita commented that the libraries have suspended the use of volunteers, and older adults helped a lot with that. She is hoping that soon the libraries will be able to have volunteers again.

David Engel stated that he has found the staffs of the libraries that he asked about older adult materials to be very helpful. Any time a particular library would like to volunteer to work with the CoA, please let us know. The CoA could use that as a launching pad. Until then, we could gather materials to put in the libraries. That would include brochures and pamphlets of what older adults are eligible for, and also brochures on elder care and caregiver help. He stated that there is a tremendous amount of printed material that is available, including flyers and brochures.

Rev Vikram asked Anita whether the libraries could add the CoA website link to its homepage. She also asked whether Anita knows which libraries get the most non-English speaking people and how the CoA could focus on those libraries. Anita responded that it should be possible to add the CoA link to the library website. However, the libraries do not track information on ethnicity or gender. They only use Census and demographic data.

Rev asked about how the number of non-English speakers visiting the libraries could be increased and how the libraries could get information in their languages. Anita responded that the libraries do support a number of languages but purchasing materials in world languages can be very expensive. They are not published in the U.S. The libraries have requested an increase in their budget to help with this expense. The Office of Community Engagement helps the libraries determine which languages they need. If there isn't a large population of one language then the libraries probably will not buy materials in those languages, it's too expensive. Jean stated that maybe that's something the CoA could focus on; it could make sure that materials in those languages are supplied.

Eddie Rivas thanked Anita for all of the library staff support given to Villages across the County. He asked, for the future, is there any way to avoid rental fees for rooms used for libraries? Is there a way to encourage the Villages to make relationships with the libraries? Anita responded that the Villages will need to go through one of the County offices to discuss the rent question for the meeting rooms. Renting those rooms is a revenue source for the County. If the County enters into a partnership with the Villages for various events then maybe they can get around the rent question. Eddie continued, saying that in the Potomac Community Village one of the things they are dreaming of is to use one of the rooms for a movie day. Could that be considered a partnership with the County if it is made available to the public? Anita responded that things like whether the movie has public performing rights have to be considered. The County has to be very careful that things are licensed for that use.

Chuck Kauffman stated that a problem the Vital Living Network faced in getting older adult material into the libraries was actually gathering the older adult materials. He then asked whether the libraries are burdened with distributing the COVID test kits? Anita responded that yes, the libraries are burdened with that and now they also distribute face masks. They are running the program with volunteers to help with the distribution. It is held separately from regular library work and there is a logistical impact to make sure the materials are on hand. It's part of the libraries' mission to provide service to the community. Chuck commented that with regard to distribution of foreign language publications, the recreation centers may be a good distribution point for these.

Anita added that the libraries do disperse a lot of publications from their central office. If the CoA wants to distribute to the libraries then it can bundle the materials and take it to the central office and it will be distributed. Staff place things at the libraries where the different foreign language populations live. But these populations move throughout the County; their movement is not static, it's very fluid.

Jean stated that there are currently Senior sections in the library, and the CoA is happy to hear that the libraries would be open to a partnership with it. She noted that the CoA will revisit this idea in the late Spring and summer. Also, it is informative to hear that the CoA can ask the libraries to distribute materials from its central office.

Anita closed by stating that the libraries have a resource called Press Reader. It is a compendium of newspapers and magazines from around the world in different languages. It is available with the library card and features 7,000 of the world's publications. Rev commented that older adults do not mind if the sources are a few days old, just as long as they are in their language. Maybe this fact and a link could be placed on the CoA website.

50+ in Montgomery County Update

Jean stated that there have been a few changes to the schedule of the upcoming shows. In February, Pazit Aviv, Montgomery County's Village Coordinator, will talk for a few minutes about the anniversary of the Village Movement. In March, the entire show will be about Villages. The February show will be totally about Black History and will feature guests who will discuss the Underground Railroad in Montgomery County and the Josiah Henson House. Hopefully, the February show will also feature a public service announcement regarding the lynchings that occurred in Montgomery County.

Jean noted that an ad was sent to the NextDoor website to discuss the next episode of *50+ in Montgomery County*. In addition, emails were sent to retirement communities in the County asking them to broadcast the show. Unfortunately, no responses were received to those emails. Possibly a next step would be to actually call the organizations. Marcia Pruzan suggested that the point be made on these calls that the CoA is actually offering services on *50+ in Montgomery County* and not just promoting the CoA.

In wrapping up this discussion Jean reminded everyone that the *50+ in Montgomery County* Planning Committee meets the first Friday of each month at 1p.

Montgomery County Website Update

David Engel has been reviewing the County's websites with regard to information for older adults. He finds a lot of problems that need to be corrected. For one thing, the websites are not up-to-date. He is sending notes to the website staff to correct things.

David is also asking the website staff to make the CoA's meeting minutes, agendas, and presentations more user-friendly. However, he has not received a response to his request.

David commented that when CoA members see bad links to various websites that they should report them. And the CoA's website should be more organized. It should look more like the website for the Commission on People with Disabilities. There are 27 links on the CoA's website and the information should be better organized. The search function does not work well. He suggested that possibly the CoA website could be reorganized by headings.

David noted that the good news is that the CoA does have a website. But the Commission on People with Disabilities, in addition to its website, also has a Facebook page. The CoA was told that it could not have one. The Commission on People with Disabilities uses its Facebook page to post information. If the CoA could have its own Facebook page it could post information about *50+ in Montgomery County*.

David stated that the process for getting things posted or corrected on the CoA's website should be: CoA members send thoughts and information to the Communications Committee and then the Communications Committee will send them to Jennifer Long to see whose responsibility it is to make the changes (Tremayne Jones or Kyung in the Office of Public Information). David is not sure what the process is for either Tremayne or Kyung to make revisions to the website.

Marcia Weber asked whether it would be worth adding links on the CoA's online resource guide to other relevant organizations' websites; e.g., the Veterans' Administration and the Social Security Administration. David agreed that there should be cross-linking on the CoA's website.

Jean stated that if the CoA could get its website to look more like the Commission on People with Disabilities website that would be great. Also, the County's Senior Newsletter should have a link on the CoA website. David stated that he will ask staffer, Shawn Brennan, about the request he made a few weeks ago to reorganize the CoA's meeting minutes, agendas, and presentations on its website. He noted that he will contact her before the 2021 meeting information is taken from the website.

New Projects Discussion

50+ in Montgomery County: Rev suggested that for a future edition of *50+ in Montgomery County* interviewees could discuss ideas of re-entry into society post-COVID. Eddie noted that the Committee may want to touch base with Pazit Aviv about that because the Villages are also considering the issue. Rev stated that the County's recreation centers could also be approached. Marcia Pruzan commented that the Age-Friendly committees are considering this issue, too, so if the CoA develops a strategy for this they should include the Age-Friendly group.

As for publicity for the show, David noted that he has lots of connections in GROWS that could help get the word out. He suggested having other individual Commissioners send notes to contacts they may have, and also developing a form letter to send to County Councilmembers with a link to the program in their newsletters. Barbara noted that these suggestions should be brought to the attention of the Executive Committee.

CoA liaisons with other organizations: Eddie recommended that the Executive Committee should discuss the possibility of instituting this; it is not really under the purview of the

Communications Committee. Barbara said that she will include it on the next Executive Committee meeting agenda and will ask whether anyone currently acts as liaisons.

Communications Committee mission statement and goals: Beverly stated that these should be reviewed and updated.

Adjourn