



**Commission on People with Disabilities
Meeting Minutes
October 13, 2021**

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

Welcome and Approval of September 2021 Meeting Minutes

Seth Morgan, Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the September 2021 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the September 2021 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd.

Outgoing Commissioner: Charlie Butler

Charlie Butler has represented the Department of Recreation since 1995. He has attended the Commission for 26 years and has been an incredible advocate for people with disabilities. Charlie noted Therapeutic Recreation staff have been assigned to various centers throughout the County to assist people with disabilities in registering for services. Charlie has been reassigned to the White Oak Community Center. Seth wished Charlie all the best in his next steps in his professional career.

Welcome to New Commissioner Jeneva Stone, Parent Representative

Jeneva is a lifetime resident of Montgomery County. She hopes to bring the perspective of being a parent of a son who has complex medical needs.

Employment Initiatives to Promote Hiring of People with Disabilities – Cynthia Grissom, Director, Business Solutions, WorkSource Montgomery, Inc., and Karen Hochberg, SPHR Targeted Recruitment Job Specialist, Office of Human Resources, Montgomery County Government

The American Job Center has been open virtually during the pandemic. In-person services became available again at the Wheaton location during the summer. At first, the Center was seeing a great influx of visitors but that has lessened due to the Delta variant. Cynthia noted that the resource room is well-regulated in regard to how many individuals are allowed in the room at one time. Individuals also must wear masks and have their temperature taken. Training rooms may open again after the new year as well as the start of in-person events. Virtual events will also continue. Cynthia would like to begin holding in-person events but understands the hesitancy. She will be holding an event for Montgomery County Public Schools transitioning youth in November.

The GROW (Grant Relief for On-Boarding Workers) program provides financial assistance to businesses currently hiring, that have been negatively impacted by COVID -19. The grant is intended to provide long-term employment for up to 8 new hires/positions. Only W-2 workers are eligible – not 1099 (contractors).

For more information about the program visit <https://worksourcemontgomery.com/business-solutions/grow-program/>.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) includes funding for apprenticeships and employment training programs. This will provide an opportunity for different populations including persons with disabilities to take advantage of training to lead into employment and career paths. WorkSource Montgomery will be sending out information about available funding to various organizations and agencies. Cynthia would like to use this funding to offer online training programs. Many job seekers want remote positions, but not all employment lends itself to being remote. Remote does work well for people with disabilities who may not be able to or have difficulty leaving their home.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, said the majority of DORS funding is prioritized to provide services to transitioning youth. At one time, the DORS waiting list was up to 700 people. She asked if DORS is able to serve individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic and if there are waiting lists of people with disabilities who are seeking employment.

Cynthia said a very small percent of persons with disabilities are receiving services at WorkSource Montgomery. Traffic coming into the center has also diminished so the data in general is low. Individuals do have to self-disclose so the percentage could be higher. Individuals are encouraged to disclose so that staff can assist in connecting them to various partners or available funding.

WorkSource Montgomery provides "Priority of Service" to veterans and their eligible spouses in accordance with the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 and the Veterans' Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006. Cynthia will be working with staff to determine how many veterans with disabilities are served.

WorkSource Montgomery is also working with Senior Plant and their broadband program to provide Chromebooks to residents who may not have a computer or tablet and have to use their phone for job searching.

Seth said there are individuals who are immune compromised that have received their vaccination and booster shot but may still be hesitant to seek employment due to their health issues. These individuals may be more comfortable with remote employment. Cynthia said there are also job seekers who cannot stand for long periods of time. They could be employed as a cashier if the employer would consider allowing the employee a stool to sit on. She said this is an example of a simple accommodation that can be made that would help a lot of the population and not just persons with disabilities. She had approached Home Depot about this but was told it is not an option. Betsy said she saw a cashier at the Home Depot in Germantown that was sitting in a chair so it may be a store by store policy versus a corporate policy. Eric Salzano, Commissioner, said he spent time years ago in a union environment and served as a shop steward. Policies such as a no chair policy for cashiers is a cultural issue. Most European countries have it in their employee contracts that a cashier has the right to sit on a stool. In American business cultural it is perceived as being lazy for a person to sit down while working. It is a mindset that needs to be changed.

Tom Liniak, Commissioner, is the Director of Specialized Employment Services at Jewish Social Service Agency (JSSA). He is finding that the number of training opportunities as well as the reception for innovative and creative ways to employ persons is at an all time high. Some of the largest companies in the world are finding modifications in their standard operating procedure can help them to increase their applicant pool. Tom said 20% of individuals receiving employment services from JSSA are still not ready in terms of safety while 80% are either now employed or actively seeking employment.

Karen Morgret, Commissioner, is the Director of Vocational Services at the Treatment & Learning Centers (TLC). She noted that TLC is also seeing more employers open to training opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Some individuals that were anxious to work several months ago due to the Delta variant are now not as hesitant. In some cases, the hesitancy is more from the family members than the individual themselves. Karen added that in terms of stores like Home Depot, they have found policies can be very different from store to store. She suggested Cynthia contact her if she runs into any more barriers with a particular employer or location as they may be able to assist.

Cynthia said the Workforce Development Board of Montgomery County is currently accepting applications. She encouraged agencies and organizations that support persons with disabilities to apply. Additional questions can be sent to Cynthia at cgrissom@worksourcemontergomy.com.

Karen Hochberg announced the County's latest initiative for hiring persons with disabilities.

LEAP4MCG Flyer: https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HR/Resources/Files/Staffing/LEAP4MCG_Flyer_.pdf

Disability Employment Initiatives of Montgomery County Government:
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HR/Recruitment/DisabilityInitiative.html#1>

Montgomery County Government Careers:
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HR/Recruitment/MCGCareers.html>

LEAP4MCG (Leveraging Employment Abilities Program) is a collaborative hiring initiative between the Office of Human Resources and the Department of Health and Human Services that replaces the Montgomery County Customized Intern Program. The program offers two-year term positions with Montgomery County Government (MCG) that can only be filled by a person with a disability who is not a current or past MCG merit employee and meets the eligibility criteria for certification by the Maryland Department of Rehabilitation or equivalent out-of-state agency.

The purpose of this program is to provide applicants with disabilities who have limited work experience and have not held merit positions with MCG, employment opportunities with the County with the intent of developing skills and gaining experience that may lead to employment post LEAP4MCG participation.

LEAP4MCG positions may be full-time or part-time and include benefits and eligibility to participate in MCG's retirement plan. Generally, LEAP4MCG positions will be available at the beginning of every other fiscal year (i.e., July 2021, July 2023, etc.).

Applicants must be certified by the Maryland Department of Education Division of Rehabilitation Services or by an equivalent out-of-state vocational rehabilitation agency as meeting the definition of persons with severe disabilities document based upon medical evidence (Schedule A Letter); and applicants must meet the minimum requirements for the position and be able to perform the essential functions of the job with or without reasonable accommodation. Karen noted that individuals need to read the job postings in their entirety prior to submitting their application to make sure they meet all the requirements. There is no hiring preference for these positions as everyone who applies qualifies for the hiring preference.

Persons in the program are eligible for full benefits including health and dental insurance, annual leave, sick leave, and retirement. Persons in the program are eligible to apply for other positions during the term. However, prior to the conclusion of the term, the employee will need to begin looking for another position within MCG (if continued employment with MCG is desired), or the private sector. Note that there are often MCG positions available only to employees, as well as MCG positions that are open to all candidates. At the end of the two years, employment with MCG will end unless the person has been hired for another MCG position.

Over the course of 15 years, the Customized Intern Program had a less than 10% employment rate and no one had been hired since 2013. The goal is to provide individuals with disabilities real opportunities to build skills and become grounded in full-time employment. The County hopes to have outcomes at the end of the two year program to demonstrate that this program can be sustained and provide individuals meaningful opportunities as well as real skills that can be applied in the private or public sector. Program participants are encouraged to apply for positions within or outside of County government during their two years if a position becomes available that they qualify for. Participants do not need to stay the full two years and are encouraged to seek out opportunities for growth and to compete.

Two positions are currently available. One is an entry-level administrative full-time position with OHR. The other position is a full-time higher level administrative position with the Department of General Services (DGS). The application deadlines for these two positions have been extended. Karen asked that agency representatives send out the information to their clients. A third full-time position within the County Executive's Office as part of the innovation team will tentatively be posted in December.

The floor was opened to questions.

David Rice, Commissioner, asked if these are newly created positions or existing vacancies. He also asked if the individual is hired after the two years, will that time count towards their career. Karen said these are newly created positions. OHR worked with departments that had been supporting the Customized Intern Program if they wanted to participate in this new program. Departments have been in agreement that there need to be measurable outcomes. Karen said with the exception of public safety positions County positions do not have pension retirement. The two years would count towards their length of service in terms of annual leave and service increments. Probationary periods are only served if an employee is promoted so if the individual is hired into the same position and grade there would be no probationary period. If the individual qualifies and is hired into a higher grade position then they would serve the one year probationary period.

Eric Cole, Commissioner, asked if the department will retain and hire the individual after the two years has ended. Karen said if the department has funding to create the position, then there is the opportunity for that individual to be hired. She hopes this is the start of a very long collaborative effort with more opportunities to create positions in different departments throughout the County.

Tom asked how the outcomes will be better from this program versus the Customized Employment Public Intern Project. Karen said one of the biggest challenges with the CEPIP was tasks were carved out of existing positions which resulted in lack of sustainable work. Individuals were not available to develop new skills and apply them elsewhere. Also due to re-engineering of processes and to COVID-19, much of the work was disappearing. Over the years the numbers were dramatically shrinking. This new program are full-time positions with a wide range of tasks. OHR is optimistic that end of the two years there will have been a lot of skill development as well as ample opportunity for growth and development that will lead to employment.

Chair and Vice-Chair Report

Seth reported he attended WMATA's Bus and Rail Subcommittee of the Accessibility Advisory Committee yesterday. The Committee discussed floating bus stops. Seth made comments that at this point it seems each jurisdiction is installing their own floating bus stop design. Floating bus stops installed throughout the region are slightly different to the point that a person with a vision impairment or a person who is blind could become disoriented. The floating bus stops should be uniform in design to make it as safe as possible for an individual to access bus stops.

Seth said he read a report that a company plans on selling high speed e-bikes that can reach speeds up to 35mph. There is currently a County speed restriction for e-scooters and e-bikes. He will continue to follow this issue.

Seth is attending a meeting later this week with County Council President Tom Hucker and Council Vice President Gabe Albornoz to continue discussions about the Transportation Services Improvement Fund and increasing the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles in taxi fleets. A representative from the taxicab industry will also be present at the meeting.

Trish Gallalee, Vice-Chair, reported she has been very active advocating for people with disabilities within her agency. With so few individuals working in-person in the office it can present challenges for individuals with disabilities during emergency situations. It is something that everyone should consider as offices begin to open up and as more staff go into the office in a hybrid schedule.

The date that Seth will be attending the County Council Health & Human Services Committee breakfast to discuss the Commission's FY23 operating budget priorities has not been set yet. Betsy will send out the date and link to meeting once it has been posted.

Steering Committee meeting will be held next Wednesday October 20. Betsy will send out the Zoom link via email.

Ex-Officio Member Reports

MaryBeth Dugan, Montgomery Parks, reported MP unveiled a communication board at [South Germantown Recreational Park](#) last week. The hands-on, interactive device creates a more inclusive and equitable play environment for park visitors who have autism, who are recovering from a stroke or brain injury, who are non-verbal, and who have learning disabilities and/or developmental disabilities. The boards can also facilitate communication between individuals who speak different languages and includes English, Spanish and Braille. MaryBeth noted that the communication board installed at the Wheaton Local Park this past July has been well-received. MP Program Access Office has been working with Park Police to equip officers with sensory bags. Each bag contains fidgets and other sensory-driven items designed to serve as a coping mechanism that will allow officers to connect with an individual who may have a disability or mental health issues and help de-escalate a stressful situation. More information: <https://www.montgomeryparks.org/park-police-deploy-new-tool-to-connect-with-individuals-in-need/>.

Angelisa Hawes, Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL), reported the Germantown Library will be reopening this Saturday October 16 at 10am. Renovations have been completed including ADA improvements, new sidewalks, parking lot paving, and new furniture.

Susan Smith, Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC), reported HOC is conducting a nationwide search for an Executive Director. Kayrine V. Brown is the interim Acting Executive Director. Susan reported HOC celebrated a construction milestone for Elizabeth House III – the cornerstone of Silver Spring’s Elizabeth Square which combines affordable housing with public health amenities to create a sustainable, mixed-income, multi-generational environment. HOC is renovating the Shady Grove Apartments located on Crabbs Branch Way. Renovations will include adding 8 Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS) units with roll-in showers. HOC is also renovating the Georgian Court Apartments located on Bel Pre Road. Renovations will also include adding 8 UFAS units with roll-in showers. A new property is being built off of Shady Grove Road which will be the new site for the Gaithersburg Customer Service Center. HOC was awarded 118 emergency housing vouchers. Qualifying applicants must be referred to HOC from the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, and must meet one of the criteria below: applicant is homeless; applicant is at risk of homelessness; applicant is fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking or human trafficking; or applicant is recently homeless, and, for whom, providing rental assistance will prevent the family's homelessness, or having high risk of housing stability.

Susan also reported on behalf of the Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC). MHAC is working closely with the County and the Mobile Crisis Teams. There are now teams located in Germantown (12900 Middlebrook Road) and Silver Spring (8818 Georgia Avenue). Both teams are available Monday through Friday, 9am to 5pm. The Crisis Center at 1301 Piccard Drive, Rockville is still available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. More staff is being hired including peer counselors. The County is looking at a creating a stabilization center where people in crisis can be sent for stabilizing after having a crisis episode rather than being sent to jail or an emergency room.

Matt Johnson, AICP, BiPPA, Capital Project Manager, Division of Transportation Engineering, Montgomery County Department of Transportation, reported the Designing Streets for People with Vision Disabilities Toolkit has been finalized and published: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT/Projects/TLCVision/>.

Charlie Butler, Department of Recreation, reported the new South County Regional Recreation and Aquatic Center is under construction and expected to open Spring 2023: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DGS-BDC/SS/721701.html>

Announcements

None.

Meeting adjourned – 7:20pm

**Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities
November 2021 Meeting and Events Calendar**

Developmental Disability Advisory Committee – Monday, November 8

4pm to 5:30pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday, November 10

6pm to 7:30pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday, November 17

5pm to 6pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I
Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager