



**Commission on People with Disabilities
Meeting Summary Minutes
September 11, 2024**

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

Welcome and Approval of June 2024 Meeting Minutes

Karen Morgret, Acting Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the June 2024 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the June 2024 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd.

Design for Life Incentive Program Update – Gail M. Lucas, Division Chief, Customer Support and Outreach, Department of Permitting Services, Montgomery County Government

Website: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/design/

Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (DPS) administers the Design for Life (DFL) Incentive Program, which is intended to increase the stock of VISITable and LIVEable housing in Montgomery County through tax incentives, promotion of DFL principles, and engage businesses to provide housing that meets DFL standards. The original goal of DFL was to create a market for accessible homes and for the program to incentivize homeowners to build homes with accessible features. [Bill 5-13 – Property Tax Credit – Accessibility Features](#) was enacted by the County Council July 1, 2014.

This year so far, DPS has certified six DFL credits with several more credits in progress. DPS is working with the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) to modify and update the DFL to improve the visibility and useability of the program. DFL is allotted \$500,000 annually and has never reached that amount. Gail will send Betsy a spreadsheet that provides details on the tax credits provided since the bill's enactment.

DHCA administers the [Home Accessibility Rehabilitation Program \(HARP\)](#) program which is a free program designed to assist people with renovating their homes to make them more accessible to those with disabilities and to older adults with or without a demonstrated disability. HARP received \$1.5 million from the Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). While there are income limits to the program, older adults and individuals with disabilities of any age can qualify. Work is performed by local non-profit groups Habitat for Humanity of Metro Maryland or Rebuilding Together. There is no repayment for HARP participants. Betsy Luecking, Staff, noted that DPS recently had a meeting with the County Council to discuss how to improve both of these programs including how customers can access each program. DPS and DHCA will be having more discussions in the coming weeks and have been tasked with providing the Council suggestions and ideas. DPS has considered proposing legislative changes and having the Council rewrite the law to make it easier for the public to use.

The floor was opened to questions.

Gail asked the Commission for input on the program and how to reach out to certain disabled communities for feedback on the program. It was suggested reaching out to The Village in Silver Spring which targets older adults and focuses on aging in place as well as Leisure World. Gail noted that DPS has done some outreach to The Village through the County's service centers in those areas and has attended symposiums and conferences to talk about DFL. DPS also did outreach at Leisure World earlier this year and spoke with residents. There are certainly other areas that could be targeted for outreach.

There was a suggestion to change the income eligibility criteria for DFL as that could increase the number of applicants. Gail reported there is no income or age threshold for the DFL program, but there is an income and

age threshold for the HARP program. One of the biggest complaints is that construction is very expensive currently and applicants do not have the funds to do the work. DFL is predicated on the homeowner doing the work on the home and then applying for the tax credit whereas HARP provides the funding to complete the work. DPS is meeting with DHCA on Friday to discuss extending the eligibility criteria to anyone at any age who needs accessibility in their home as well as determining how to make DFL available as either a grant program or through HARP.

It was noted that some individuals with disabilities may appear wealthier on paper but spend 50% of their income on medical funds. It would be hard for these individuals to meet a low-income threshold despite having a need for the program.

DFL was designed for homeowners who want to age in place and want to make modifications to stay in their homes. There is no disability requirement. The concept of visit-ability was to make homes more inclusive for everyone. Betsy noted that accessible and affordable housing has been a top priorities of this Commission for years. This Commission has worked on DFL since 2003.

Gail reported the Council is reviewing making HARP and DFL applicable for renters as not everyone can afford to own or wants to own a home. Rebecca Grayson, Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC), reported HOC had been using Independence Now (INNOW) to provide home modifications for low-income individuals, but INNOW has stopped providing these modifications for renters as it became too costly. She noted that landlords would notify renters to vacate when they wanted to increase the rent, but now that the County has recently enacted a rent stabilization law and executive regulation, renters may have a better chance at longevity. She added that part of the issue with landlords is they want the renter to remove any accessibility modifications when they leave the rental. Any changes to the tax credit program should include language that the landlord has to keep the accessibility modifications in place.

It was asked how a landlord that rents their home would be able to take advantage of a tax credit program or if the landlord would receive the tax credit if the renter installs accessible features. Gail said there is nothing in the legislation that prohibits that landlord from using the program as the property tax credit goes to the property owner.

It was suggested that DPS do outreach to realtors, landlords, and apartment buildings about the program. Gail noted that the original legislation includes a requirement that realtors tell their clients about DFL, but there is no way of enforcing this requirement. DPS has conducted educational classes with Weichert Realty several times. Betsy reported that she met with Greater Capital Area Association of REALTORS (GCAAR) 15 years ago to ask them to add fields of accessibility to their realty listings, such as no-step entry. She will contact GCAAR to follow-up on this request and will also inquire about having DFL added to the local fair housing training that is required for realtors as part of their continuing education credits.

It was asked what languages the DFL brochure is available in. Gail reported the DFL brochure is currently available in English and Spanish. Montgomery County Government recently instituted a language policy whereby information given out to residents and customers must be translated into seven top languages spoken throughout the County: English, Spanish, Amharic, Chinese, French, Korean and Vietnamese. DPS is currently working to translate its documents. All County websites offer a Google translation option, although the County does recognize that it cannot guarantee the accuracy or a dialect that is commonly spoken.

It was asked if leasing managers are required to inform their renters of DFL. Gail noted that this would require a legislative change.

Felicia Brannon, Commissioner, said the County of Los Angeles, California allows for a transfer of property tax base for severely disabled owners. [Proposition 19](#) allows persons over 55 or severely disabled persons to transfer the taxable value of their existing home to their new replacement home of any value, anywhere within the state, up to three times (rather than once as provided under current law). She suggested the County create

similar legislation and offered to provide the County more research on this topic and other jurisdictions throughout the country that may offer similar programs. Gail said everything is on the table legislatively.

It was suggested doing outreach to the corporations behind the leasing agents at apartment rentals. It was also asked if these management companies could take advantage of federal tax breaks on top of the DFL program. Gail noted that there are existing federal ADA requirements in the building code for apartments and condominiums that are considered commercial construction.

CPWD Establishment of FY26 Operating Budget Priorities

This Commission must present two policy priorities before the County Council's Health and Human Services Subcommittee on October 16. Commissioners were asked to review last year's priorities which were accessible and affordable housing and transportation issues alongside pedestrian safety.

Betsy noted that for the County budget, the Commission in the past has supported the developmental disability supplement and additional respite funding for ARC Montgomery County. These two items would be separate from the Commission's main policy recommendations. The Commission will provide testimony in April relating to the County's proposed operating budget.

Regarding pedestrian safety, it was noted that the City of Rockville requires that all streets have sidewalks. It was suggested that the County make sidewalk safety a priority especially near grade schools. Another issue is designated bike lanes which have been an issue particularly for individuals who are blind or who have low vision. Enforcement of accessible parking is another issue as police officers cannot write tickets for accessible parking spaces that are not properly marked. If individuals do not have access to transportation, then that is a barrier to participating in their community. Accessible parking could be included under transportation as well as sidewalks. Transportation needs to be accessible so people with disabilities can access services within the community.

In terms of broader affordable housing concerns, some counties throughout the country offer annual tax credits for homeowners that are 100% permanently disabled. It was suggested the County introduce similar legislation. Betsy noted the County does offer a property tax credit for veterans who are 100% disabled.

Affordable housing could include the number of fees associated with rentals including amenity fees, pet fees, electrical fees and cable fees on top of rent costs. Sometimes these fees add up to two or three times the cost of rent.

It was asked if aligning with another Commission's priorities would be an advantage and provide a positive alternative to linking multiple priorities. Betsy said similar priorities do hold much more weight. For example, this Commission supported hiring preference for veterans with disabilities along with the Commission on Veterans Affairs, which passed legislation. The Commission on Aging has also worked on accessible parking and enforcement issues in the past. Seth Morgan, former Chair, said the issue of accessible parking should be revisited and for DPS to be held to its own standards. According to regulations, when a parking lot is resurfaced or repainted, accessible parking must meet compliance, but in some instances, this is not happening. Tonya Gilchrist, Commissioner, is on a committee with the United Spinal Association that is reviewing accessible parking across the country. This committee is writing a document that has identified the number of parking placards issued by motor vehicle administrations has increased over the years versus the number of required percentage of accessible parking spaces which has not changed. She asked if there was a report identifying the issues, concerns and priorities that county residents indicated during a forum held during the spring.

The issue of respite care and the lack of personal care staffing was discussed. It was suggested the Commission promote workforce development through community colleges. Private pay is expensive and it is hard to find a trained competent workforce. Caregiving affects the entire lifespan and persons of all ages and disabilities.

It was reported the University of Maryland Urban Studies and Planning program has their students work on transportation areas and planning for different areas of the county. It was suggested that an amendment be made to the moderately priced dwelling unit program to include more accessible and affordable housing.

The Commission has made their concerns regarding bike lanes known to Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) multiple times over the years. MCDOT reported previously they would install signals that would indicate to pedestrians, particularly those who are blind or who have vision disabilities, where to cross at bike lanes. Cindy LaBon, Commissioner, reported some of the new signals have been installed but have been repeatedly turned off, especially along Muddy Branch. She noted that the American Council for the Blind has been having discussions on the inaccessibility of the bus stop app.

A motion was made for the two policy priorities to be affordable and accessible housing where a person can age in their community and also access safe and affordable transportation to move in their communities without barriers. Clarification was asked regarding other issues that could be addressed through separate letters and budget testimony. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.

Chair Update

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The County Council will be issuing a proclamation on October 1. The Commission will invite someone from DORS and WorkSource to discuss employment issues at the October Commission meeting.

In July, the County Council presented a proclamation with the Commission to celebrate the 34th anniversary of the ADA.

Beginning October 1, 2024, EveryMind will cease to provide rep payee services. Montgomery County has decided to award the contract for this service to First Maryland Disability Trust (FMDT). Social Security will contact each of the rep payees to do the transfer of the beneficiary's bank accounts to the Trust. FMDT will provide organizational rep payee services which is different than what EveryMind's volunteer rep payees provided. FMDT will not be "available" to the beneficiaries. They will set up [True Link debit cards](#) and will deposit the monthly benefits to the card. Beneficiaries have the option to stagger when the funds are loaded onto the card, it can be once a month, twice a month or weekly. The True Link card allows for up to \$75 cash withdrawal one time each month. If the True Link card is lost or stolen it will be replaced. There will be one assigned point person for the 50+ EveryMind beneficiaries. The beneficiaries will have that person's contact information but will have to be aware that it may take a few days for their message to be answered. Case Management will not be provided. FMDT will review each beneficiary's account each month and transfer overage to their existing ABLE account to ensure that they remain under the \$2,000 limit. FMDT will assist with Recertification and HOC forms by providing necessary information, but they will not fill out the forms. In some cases, Montgomery County will provide a case manager to assist the beneficiary. To be considered for this service an email should be sent to Eldora.Taylor@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Karen attended a monthly National Trends in Disability Employment (nTIDE) meeting hosted by the Kessler Foundation and University of New Hampshire. This month's meeting focused on Gains in Employment for People with Disabilities Appear to Level Off After Reducing Gaps with Non-Disabled Workers. For more information, visit <https://www.researchondisability.org/season-9-episode-9-962024>.

Presentation of Slate of Officers/Election – Karen Morgret and Sam Korper

Karen Morgret, Acting Chair, and Sam Korper, Commissioner, placed into nomination the slate of Tonya Gilchrist for Chair. No other nomination was set forth. A motion was made to approve the nomination. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the nomination was unanimously approved.

Karen and Sam placed into the nomination the slate of Jamila Michael-Sobratti as Vice-Chair. No other nomination was set forth. A motion was made to approve the nomination. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the nomination for Vice-Chair was unanimously approved.

Update – Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission (IDDC) – John Whittle, Commissioner and Liaison to IDDC

The IDDC issued its first annual report: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/IDDC/Reports/IDDC2024AnnualReport.pdf>

An officer election was held and as of September 1, 2024, the new slate of officers is Steve Riley, Chair, Jamie Doyle, Vice-Chair, and Natori Green, Secretary.

The next meeting will be held Thursday October 19 from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. The IDDC will be discussing policy priorities. The IDDC currently has six ad hoc subcommittees and Commissioners are invited to join those meetings as well. The Special Education subcommittee will be restructured as IDDC does not have the authority to advise Montgomery County Public Schools. Their legislation does allow them to advocate to the state and federal government.

John can share with IDDC any issues this Commission would like to partner on such as personal supports.

Ex-Officio Member Updates

Due to time constraints, the following updates were emailed to Commissioners after the meeting.

Denise Isreal, MCDOT:

- **Great Seneca Transit Network Launch:** On Monday, September 9, Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich, County Council President Andrew Friedson and other State and local officials and the MCDOT celebrated the launch of Phase 1 of the [Great Seneca Transit Network](#) (GSTN) at the Traville Gateway Transit Center in Rockville. The GSTN, which began service on September 8, offers commuters and residents faster, more frequent transit through two new [Ride On extRa bus lines](#), designated as “Pink” and “Lime.” The routes operate from 5 a.m. - 7:45 p.m. on weekdays and from 6:15 a.m. - 7:30 p.m. on weekends, with service every 10 - 15 minutes during peak periods on weekdays. The new bus lines run east-west connections between the Shady Grove Metro and the Traville Gateway Transit Center, adjacent to the Universities at Shady Grove in Rockville. The Pink Line links the busy Shady Grove corridor with the Life Sciences Center via Medical Center Drive. The Lime Line uses I-370 to provide an express route to RIO, Crown Farm and the heart of the Life Sciences Center at Adventist HealthCare Shady Grove Medical Center. Both bus routes will operate with sections of dedicated bus lanes and signal priority, which involves the controlling of traffic lights to prioritize buses so they can reach their destination faster. We designed the Great Seneca Transit Network around the needs of the community it serves. The express routes will significantly reduce commute times for key destinations. Transportation from the Shady Grove Metro station to Adventist Medical Center via the Pink line will take 21 minutes, less than half of the current 43-minute commute on the existing route. The buses offer fast, frequent service and accommodate shift changes and student schedules.” Maryland is one of the partners working with Montgomery County to expand its transportation options.
- **Ride On Service changes began on Sunday, Sept. 8, 2024:** MCDOT adjusted 23 Ride On bus route service schedules and add two new high-frequency limited stop extRa bus routes starting Sunday, September 8. Although service levels are staying relatively the same, the changes reflect a shift of resources to allow for more reliable service where there is higher demand. The new schedules will be available at rideonbus.com and in print.

Commissioner Updates

Shameen Anthanio-Williams, Commissioner, asked for resources to assist a resident who is deaf, speaks Spanish and is on a work visa.

Public Comments

No member of the public signed up to speak.

Meeting Adjourned – 7:45 p.m.

Attendees

Commissioners Present: Karen Morgret, Acting Chair; Azeb Adere; Shameen Anthanio-Williams; Jennifer Berzok; Felicia Brannon; Tonya Gilchrist; Karen Goss; Tria Gray; Samuel Korper; Cindy LaBon; Ricardo Lopez; Jamila Michael-Sobratti; Rebecca Murphy; Deborah Rozell; Richard Shermanski; Mary Simons; Christopher Sinsheimer; Jeneva Stone; Teresa Villani; John Whittle

Commissioners Absent: Leslie Green Lyles; Christian Navarro; Lisa Quinn; Nina Russell

Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Present: Matthew Barkley, ADA Compliance Team; Patricia Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools; Amanda Espinoza (Alternate), Montgomery Parks; Rebecca Grayson, Housing Opportunities Commission; Angelisa Hawes, Montgomery County Public Libraries; Denise Isreal, Department of Transportation; Angela Luskey, Department of Recreation

Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Absent: Candace Groudine, Human Rights Commission; Karen Hochberg, Office of Human Resources

County Staff Present: Gail Lucas, Division Chief, Customer Support and Outreach, Department of Permitting Services

Commission Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

Public: Laura Crespo (sign language interpreter), Jill Lamoreaux (sign language interpreter), Sammi Hampton, Saron Tewolde, Seth Morgan

Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities October 2024 Meeting and Events Calendar

Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday October 9

6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday October 16

5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager