



Commission on Veterans Affairs



MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, September 20, 2022

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair

Join the meeting via Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82707927852>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 827 0792 7852 followed by #. **If an attendee would like to speak during the meeting**, you can raise their hand if on video and Chair will recognize you or you can use the “hand raise” function under the reactions tab at bottom of page. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the middle of the page and the functions will be at the bottom of the page. Use the Zoom app to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press *9 to raise your hand. Those calling into the meeting can press *6 to mute or unmute their phone.

- 6:00 Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance, Approval of June 2022 Meeting Minutes – Wayne Miller, Chair**
- 6:05 Fidos for Freedom – Carolyn Knight, MSW, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Social Work, School of Social Work UMBC**
- 6:30 Pedestrian Master Plan Discussion – Eli Glazier, Transportation Planner Coordinator, Montgomery County Planning Department**
- 7:00 VA's Announcement That It Will Provide Abortion Services – Dr. Cynthia Macri, M.D., FACS, FACOG, CAPT MC USN (Ret.)**
- 7:15 Planning for any budget requests from the County – Due October 1**
- 7:20 Updates from Commissioners**
- 7:25 Commission Planning for Next Meeting – Wayne Miller**
- 7:30 Adjourn**

ADA Reasonable Accommodation: If you need a sign language interpreter or any other reasonable accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov or 240-418-4865.

****See duties on next page**

Duties of the Commission on Veterans Affairs

The Commission duties include:

1. research, assemble, analyze and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of veterans and their families;
2. institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans;
3. advise the Executive and the Council on the status of programs and services in the State and County related to the needs of veterans and their families; and
4. assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
September 20, 2022**

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

Call to Order

Wayne Miller, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Wayne asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. He recognized prisoners of war and asked for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the June 2022 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the June 2022 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

Operation Green Light

Resolution: www.naco.org/resources/operation-green-light-veterans-county-toolkit

The National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers (NACVSO) are spearheading an initiative to count down to Veterans Day and is inviting counties, parishes and boroughs to join Operation Green Light to show support for veterans by lighting government buildings green from November 7 to November 13. The green lights are a way to thank and honor those who have served and to raise awareness in any way the counties so choose. Dana Burl, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) convened a meeting of all Maryland Commissions on Veterans Affairs. Ten counties in Maryland have committed to participating in this initiative. A number of County Executives are signing proclamations, participating in press, and lighting courthouses. Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported Councilmember Craig Rice attended the MDVA meeting and asked County Executive Marc Elrich to participate in the initiative. Councilmember Rice's father is a Vietnam veteran. Betsy reported it will cost the County approximately \$10,000 to light every government building. To reduce costs, she suggested that a few core buildings be chosen to include the County Executive Office Building, the County Council Office Building, Memorial Plaza, Rockville Memorial Library, and the Silver Spring Civic Building at Veterans Plaza. The County Executive's Office has made a commitment to follow through on this initiative based on this Commission's recommendation. The Office of Public Information will send out a press release and other outreach materials. Betsy will share with Commissioners a PowerPoint presentation that was given at the MDVA meeting.

FY24 Policy Priorities – Due October 1

The draft of the Commission's FY24 policy priorities are as follows:

1. Shelter for safety at Seneca Landing Special Park accessible launch.
2. Support the establishment and funding of a Veteran Peer Support Specialist Program consisting of Veterans with lived experience in recovery from a mental health condition, substance abuse, and/or military trauma who provide support to other Veterans who are in recovery and seeking behavioral health care in Montgomery County Support for continued full funding of public safety.
3. Vouchers for homeless veterans and their families.
4. Support continued funding for County contract with ServingTogether.
5. Support community grant for Warrior Canine Connection in the amount of \$50,000.

A discussion was held regarding these items.

Anneke Vandenbroek, Commissioner, asked if the Veteran Peer Support Specialist Program could include language that if the contract is funded that the program be based at the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic.

It was asked if this Commission should comment on public safety and the school system. Betsy noted that this Commission's enabling legislation states it can advise the County government on any subject as it may impact veterans and their families.

Dr. Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair, reported that while the VA has passed the PAWS Act, which requires the VA to provide service dogs to individuals who are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress and need a psychiatric assistance animal, there is no funding and the VA relies on service animal agencies such as Warrior Canine Connection to help place service dogs.

Scott Schlesinger, Commissioner, made a motion to accept the recommended FY24 policy priorities. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.

Pedestrian Master Plan Discussion – Eli Glazier, Transportation Planner Coordinator, Montgomery County Planning Department

Website: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/transportation/pedestrian-planning/pedestrian-master-plan/>

PowerPoint: https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CPWD/DraftPolicyRecommendations_PMP_Virtual.pdf

Pedestrian Prioritization Tool: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/transportation/pedestrian-planning/pedestrian-master-plan/prioritizing-pedestrian-improvements/>

Please review PowerPoint presentation.

The floor was opened to questions.

Betsy asked if sidewalk installation to enable children to safely walk to and from school has been made a priority. Eli reported there are many recommendations within the Plan that are focused on making it easier and safer for kids to walk to school. One recommendation is to implement better school design allowing easier access to school without walking through a parking lot as well as encouraging Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to consider pedestrian access as equally important if not more important than bus access. At times, MCPS may deem it necessary to bus students to school rather than address pedestrian access issues. Eli noted that there are opportunities within the Plan that clarify pedestrian access issues should be fixed rather than busing kids to school as walking offers many benefits including health and independence.

Anneke asked for more information regarding the recommendation for assuming County control of state highways. Eli explained that transferring control of these roads would give the County flexibility in how it retrofits these roads to prioritize walking, bicycling, and transit. The state and the County have differing priorities and also different design standards. It would also ensure accountability and make it clear these roads are under the County's control so the County can more capably respond to community members who have concerns.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, said the interactive online map is only available in English. She noted that there are older residents who do not speak English who could provide valuable input. Dr. Macri also suggested that more pedestrian education be provided as those who previously lived overseas may not be aware of local pedestrian right of way and safety. Eli reported the Montgomery Planning Department has tried in recent years to increase the language offerings available. The Pedestrian Master Plan does offer language translation in Spanish and Mandarin but relies on Google translate for other languages. The Department does recognize that it is not the same experience with the interactive online map and Eli said they could do better in this regard. He noted that the Plan does include a recommendation to educate and encourage pedestrians of all ages to walk safely. This would include conducting pedestrian and bicycle safety educational programs in partnership with agencies such as Montgomery County Public Libraries, MCPS, and Montgomery County Recreation.

Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, asked how the Plan address sidewalks and safety for the population who are blind or have low vision. Eli said individuals who are blind or who have low vision navigate around the county in different ways including seeing eye dogs or other environmental cues. The Plan recommends providing additional wayfinding navigational support to provide more independence and improve quality of life. Additional supports include developing standards on the use of tactile walking surface indicators in the pedestrian and transit networks and improving upon the current truncated domes found on curb ramps to create a more directional tactile indication so an individual can follow a path on a sidewalk, get to a decision point and follow another path. Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) has worked with the community of those who are blind and visually impaired when addressing transportation access in downtown Silver Spring. Eli offered that Commissioners needing more information can contact Betsy as she is also the Staff Liaison for the Commission on People with Disabilities, which has also provided feedback on the Plan.

Betsy reported that the American Council for the Blind (ACB) has expressed their concerns regarding the safety and accessibility of floating bus stops. These bus stops are designed so that a pedestrian must cross a bike lane before walking onto a platform to wait for the bus. The design has made pedestrians who are blind or who have low vision fearful of taking public transportation as they cannot see bicyclists in the bike lanes. Betsy noted that the installation of floating bus stops in downtown Silver Spring in particular have been the reason for many complaints. Eli explained that floating bus stops were constructed so that bus users could cross the bike lane prior to the bus arrival to mitigate the risk to pedestrians. At the same time, having the bus stop separated from the sidewalk has created an additional conflict point. MCDOT has been coordinating closely with the ACB community and is trying to be responsive to their feedback about their concerns. MCDOT is exploring additional measures to ensure there is improved bus stop compliance for individuals who are biking so pedestrians can safely cross these stops.

Reggie Mitchell, Commissioner, asked if the County will be using any funding received from the recently passed infrastructure bill to implement Plan recommendations. Eli said there is the potential to use that funding, although he does not know specifically what MCDOT has requested. The funding most likely will be used for larger ticket projects like bus rapid transit. The recommendations made in the Plan are for ongoing projects such as the sidewalk installation program. Eli reported that program receives over 300 requests per year and only approximately nine requests are completed. Sidewalk installation will require more funding. Montgomery Planning Department is trying to be creative about additional ways to increase the funding. There are many grant opportunities available for projects and there may be a better way to collaborate with the state to receive funding for sidewalk installation. There are also better ways to work with existing funding such as school design to ensure schools are built for better pedestrian access and the main entrance is off of a sidewalk where pedestrians do not have to walk through a parking lot to enter the building.

VA's Announcement That It Will Provide Abortion Services – Dr. Cynthia Macri, M.D., FACS, FACOG, CAPT MC USN (Ret.)

The VA recently published a press release stating that the VA will provide abortion counseling and in certain cases abortions to pregnant veterans and VA beneficiaries. Specifically, the VA will provide access to abortions when the life or health of the pregnant Veteran would be endangered if the pregnancy were carried to term, or when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. VA beneficiaries enrolled in CHAMPVA will also have access to this care. Dr. Macri reported that the majority of women's healthcare within the VA is provided by non-gynecologists including internal medicine doctors, family physicians or nurse practitioners. Their primary role is to provide screenings for breast and cervical cancer. Actual gynecological care is referred out into the community which is an issue as many states have outlawed abortion. Maryland has codified women's rights and is training nurse practitioners and physicians assistants to build up the capacity to perform abortions to accommodate other states such as West Virginia which has issued a statewide ban on abortions. Dr. Macri asked that advocates within veteran service organizations keep in mind women's health rights when advocating on various legislation that could potentially exclude women from care.

Jameelah reported she knows of several women who have stated they no longer want to join the military due to limited or restricted access to women's healthcare.

Chair and Vice Chair Report

None.

Updates / Announcements

Betsy announced that October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. She suggested having a presentation at the next meeting on veterans employment.

Dr. Elwood Gray, Commissioner, reported the American Minority Veterans Research Project will be hosting an event on November 14 at the Silver Spring Civic Building. The keynote speaker will be Secretary George Owings, MDVA. The event is free and brunch will be provided.

Adjournment

7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting

Tuesday, October 18, 2022, via Zoom from 6pm to 7:30pm.

Respectfully submitted: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I; Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Josephine Bahn; Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Robert Koffman; Cynthia Macri; Wayne Miller, Chair; Reggie Mitchell; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Anneke Vandenbroek; Michael Wilson

Commissioners Absent: Lisa Schuster; Michael Subin; Susan Webman

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Austin Morris (Senator Chris Van Hollen); Ken Reichard (Senator Ben Cardin)

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Joseph Eyong (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes)

Commission Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I