

**Communications Committee Meeting
Minutes
September 16, 2024**

Attendees

CoA

Jean Dinwiddie, Co-chair
Beverly Rollins, Co-chair
Linda Bergofsky
Kathleen McGuinness
Marie Sloan
Katie Smith

Alumni

Marcia Pruzan
Marsha Weber

Staff

Jennifer Garfinkel, PIO
Barry Hudson, Director, Montgomery County Public Information Office
Kimberly Johnson, Chief, Montgomery County Area Agency on Aging
Jennifer Long, Aging and Disability Staff
Patrice McGhee, Chief, Montgomery County Aging and Disability Services

Guests

Marie Brodsky, WISE Cities

Roll Call

Jean Dinwiddie opened the meeting and requested approval of the July 2024 minutes. The minutes were approved.

Meeting with Kim Johnson, Patrice McGhee, and the PIO

Dr. McGhee opened by saying that there is a desire and need to have better marketing for Aging and Disability (A&D) services. Staff are working with the Public Information Office (PIO) to do some branding and develop a slogan. The department is not reaching pockets of the community that need to be reached. To address that issue, A&D staff have been meeting with the PIO weekly to come up with a plan. They have come up with various options. A&D and PIO staff are

now meeting with the Communications Committee to obtain feedback. Dr. Kimberly Johnson reiterated that she is also interested in getting ideas from the Committee.

Barry Hudson said his office has been working with A&D on a marketing initiative. They are looking at things that could be done differently concerning a branding campaign, including developing a new slogan. They have a slogan in mind and want to run it by the Communications Committee. They are also looking at using a grant program and how to get it out to the public. They are testing ideas. The PIO and A&D staffs want to find the best marketing strategies for reaching the public. A couple of ideas for doing that could be making better use of the *Beacon* newspaper and the CoA's cable program, *50+ in Montgomery County*. Both departments' staff want to work with the Communications Committee to get this information out to the public.

Barry said that, initially, his office asked A&D what they wanted to do differently. A&D staff said that they want to increase awareness of their available programs and activities. And they want a consistent look in the information they put out. Ideally, they also want to have a household slogan that the public will know and recognize. One thing that the staff did over the summer was to test a few different messages. For one, they ran radio commercials for a short period of time. They worked closely with those public members who called in after hearing the commercials to see whether the processes being used were making a difference. Unfortunately, the staff did not get conclusive evidence of how well the radio ads worked.

Barry noted that after testing the radio ads, the next thing staff did was to work on slogans for the branding effort. PIO staff held a session with the A&D team to develop slogans and then presented some results to them a few weeks ago. A&D provided good feedback on the draft slogans.

Kimberly said that during the commercials' run on the radio, the radio staff ran another initiative: electric fans were given away to the public to try to get the word out about A&D's services. But that initiative did not help so much. Beverly Rollins asked whether the callers to the 3000 number were asked how they found out about that line. Jennifer Long said that the callers were asked that question, but many of them did not remember.

Barry then shared some slogan ideas that PIO staff had developed. The slogan, "Aging Well, Together" or "Aging Well Together," was the slogan that A&D staff liked best. He stated that, for various reasons, words like "support" and "gracefully" did not seem to work. And "Aging Well Together" translates easily into other languages. Kim commented that the staff identified that we all age, and they wanted to be inclusive. The slogan is a lifespan approach.

Jean said that "Together" does not really convey all of the county's services. Patrice McGhee responded that staff are not looking for brand awareness; they are trying to get folks to think about A&D, not so much all of the services it offers. Staff want the public to know that their department is there to help. Barry noted that the slogan cannot convey everything that A&D offers, but it can get folks thinking about A&D.

Beverly commented that "Aging Well Together" sounds like it is pushing initiatives on how to age in good health. However, in her work with the Jewish Council for the Aging's Senior

HelpLine, she hears things like “How do I help my wife who has dementia?” and “How do I help my mother who is failing?” Patrice stated that the County gets many calls regarding how to live healthily. Barry commented that using the word “well” can have several meanings; it does imply health initiatives but it also connotes other forms of services that A&D offers. He noted that the perception of what the word means is important.

Linda Bergofsky stated that she is a marketing person, and “Aging Well Together” comes across as glib. She asked whether staff have engaged any focus groups to review the slogan. The groups could be conducted at senior centers, which might help. She also asked whether there has been any thrust to tie in the State’s “Longevity Ready” initiative. Barry responded that the staff did not look at tying the slogan to the State’s initiative. He also said, however, that the idea of a focus group is good. Staff have not done that, but it is the right way to go. Patrice agreed that it was a good idea. As for looking at the State’s initiative, she noted that staff are only looking at a local push and have not considered the State’s initiative. Kim added that other Counties use slogans outside the State’s initiative.

Marcia Pruzan commented that using focus groups is a good idea and that she used to host them. She noted that for many years, the CoA has had the “community for a lifetime” and wondered what happened to that slogan. Patrice responded that “community for a lifetime” has been used a lot and that several slogans play on the word “life.” Staff are trying to find something fresh and new.

Katie Smith agreed that a focus group is needed. She stated that when she hears the phrase “Aging Well Together,” it sounds good. Wellness is an all-inclusive term. That slogan stands out as one of the top suggestions. Focus groups will help get a consensus.

Barry commented that using senior centers to conduct focus groups is 100 percent on the money. Staff can get some good reactions to many things that can help them. They will work with the CoA to put together the groups to ensure they have a diverse make up.

Marie Sloan stated that guiding the path to “Aging Well Together,” staff will need to say some things that indicate what services A&D offers. She asked whether there are ways we can fold these efforts into the Ambassador Program. Jean responded that we have been asked to put a hold on the Ambassador presentations for now.

Barry commented that we are listening to words to best serve the public on what A&D offers. The words represent how individuals feel about things. Staff will walk away with the common words that people are using. Marie noted that A&D can be like Nike and “just do it.” The public eventually caught on to that phrase. Marcia suggested that when staff do the focus groups, they ask the group members whether the slogan will lead them to go to A&D to look for support.

Patrice closed the session by stating that the next step would be to hold focus groups. She said that she and Kimberly could come back and discuss the strategic plan. Beverly and Marcia said that the slogan has to show people where they can go for help.

Ambassador Program

Kimberly opened by noting that she and departing staffer Peter Flandrau met with Jean and Beverly in April and agreed that the Ambassador Program would take a break over the summer while the office searched for Peter's replacement. Although his replacement has not yet been hired, hopefully, one will be soon. Kimberly asked the Committee to send her and the staff an updated version of the slides to review. After seeing them, they could better move forward. She also asked for an updated version of the spreadsheet venues and presentation dates.

Jean noted that the Committee does not vet the venues where the presentations are conducted; Committee members just go where folks request them. Kimberly stated that she would like us not to give any presentations at new places until a new staffer is hired.

Jean asked whether we could develop an online form for folks to request a presentation. The form should be clear that it is only for an Ambassador presentation. Beverly commented that we received a request for a presentation at Holiday Park. Jean noted that we will need a translator to attend that presentation. Maybe we could ask Eddie Rivas to join in the presentation.

Jean asked Committee members for their opinions of the draft report and the slides. Did they want anything added? Marcia stated that she created a "cheat sheet" of the different County departments' email addresses and phone numbers, as well as the different senior centers. She suggested that we hand them out at the presentations.

Jean stated that we should add an Executive Summary to the report. Beverly volunteered to write one and to do a final proofreading of the report. Marie noted that we need to ensure that what is on the spreadsheet is reflected in the report. Jean suggested that Marie, Beverly, and she put their heads together before the end of the week to get the report out. Jean confirmed that everyone agreed with the slides.

Marcia said we should push to place the Ambassador presentation request form on the Senior Website.

Library Liaison Program

Jean reported that quarterly emails are now being sent to the regional library managers asking them to contact their libraries, ask what CoA documents they need, and then let the Committee know. She asked the Committee members whether we should continue asking volunteers to visit their local library and submit a quarterly report. The members agreed we should let things stand as they are currently.

50+ in Montgomery County Update

Jean reported the following programs have been taped or are in the planning stages:

September – Latino Health Initiative

October – Jim Resnick (Fire Prevention Month) and someone from the League of Women voters

November – Ruth Kershner from Montgomery County staff to discuss caregiving

Jean noted that having only one guest in September worked so well that after October only one guest will be scheduled for each show. She reminded everyone that the Planning Committee meets the 1st Friday of each month.

Next Meeting

Jean closed the meeting by stating that at the October meeting the Committee will discuss possibly revamping the CoA brochure.

Adjourn

Action Items

1. Send an updated version of the Ambassador Program slides to Kimberly Johnson and her staff to review.
2. Send an updated version of the spreadsheet that provides information regarding the Ambassador Program presentations that have been held.
3. Contact Marco D'Ottavi, Recreation Coordinator at Holiday Park, and schedule an Ambassador presentation there. Arrange for a translator to participate, possibly former CoA member Eddie Rivas.