

Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting

December 7, 2016

6:30-8:00 pm

Rockville Memorial Library

Notes

Attendees

Debbie Brown, Cindy Buddington, Steven Frank, Rita Gale, Francie Gilman, Parker Hamilton, Mary Ellen Icaza, Barbara King, Elizabeth Lang, Jill Lewis, Monica Martinez, Kathleen Reedy

Because of time constraints Rita Gale and Elizabeth Lang did not provide a library update. Discussions of the Strategic Plan and programming took up the entire meeting time and will continue at the March 1, 2017 meeting.

Strategic Plan

Library Director Parker Hamilton led a discussion of the FY2017-2020 Strategic Plan. Parker explained that the plan was developed from information gathered at the second Library of the Future Summit hosted by County Executive Isiah Leggett. There were several ways for County residents and stakeholders to participate in the Summit: attending a day-long meeting at the Silver Spring Civic Center, taking part in an online chat with Mr. Leggett on a separate date, viewing the Summit at a virtual viewing site at the Gaithersburg Library, and sending input via Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Information for the Strategic Plan also was obtained through branch and focus group meetings. To understand library users' needs, Montgomery County residents/stakeholders were asked to share the major issues facing them in public libraries and what they would like libraries to provide. The responses were given to a Strategic Planning Committee. The resulting plan, based on all the gathered information, has four focus areas: literacy, inclusive connected communities, strong and vibrant workforce, and exceptional public service (rough descriptions of the four areas).

A first action resulting from the Plan was the hire of an ADA Coordinator for the library system, Elizabeth Lang. The hiring was, in large part, the result of feedback from the AAC. An important next step is for the ADA Coordinator to create a Work Plan for library services to individuals with disabilities. Elizabeth and Rita Gale are visiting branch libraries to gather information for the Work Plan to determine what is or is not being done for individuals with disabilities. They are gathering information from various groups such as the AAC and the County Commission on People with Disabilities. The final Work Plan will be presented to Parker for her to sign off on. The completed Work Plan will be available in about one month but Elizabeth will make the draft plan available now to AAC members for feedback and comments. The completed plan will be what the library staff will work on during the first year which will be approximately six months since FY2017 ends on June 30, 2017. Uncompleted work will carry over to FY2018. Parker reiterated that feedback should include any burning issues that brought AAC members to the committee, and issues should be prioritized. Rita emphasized that the committee members should think of one or two priorities that they would like to see the library system work on first and accomplish successfully. Elizabeth asked the committee members to consider what an ideal visit to a library should look like. Committee members were asked to take the draft plan to their organizations to obtain the organization perspective. After the work plan is finalized, decisions will be made on the best means of informing the public about what the library system is doing in terms of services, programs, facilities, and adaptive technologies.

Several committee members offered feedback on services. Cindy Buddington thanked Parker and Rita for installing the ramp at the Beall Street entrance to the library. Cindy said that a library orientation is important for low vision/blind individuals or individuals with cognitive disabilities so that they can navigate a library independently. Cindy asked if volunteers (possibly from the Red Cross) could be used to help with orientation. She also recommended aisles wide enough to accommodate various sized wheelchairs and Braille/large print signage (if the signage is too high the reflected light causes glare).

Marcie Povitsky brought up the need to expand free software. Francie talked about the importance of the feedback corresponding to specific objectives of the Work Plan.

Programming

Mary Ellen Icaza, responsible for system-wide library programming, led this discussion. She explained that there will be a strong future emphasis on system-wide programming and an integration of all programs and services. Currently there are regular programs at local branch libraries as well as system-wide programs held at different libraries in different county locations. More system-wide programs will insure consistency with the same program model being used in different libraries. Mary Ellen also said there is interest in working with community partners.

Mary Ellen asked the committee members to let her know what their program priorities are and said that many of the program suggestions from the September AAC meeting are already being done in branch libraries. The next step would be to insure that these programs are inclusive and accessible to all members of the community.

Steven recommended suggestion boxes in branch libraries to give the community members a chance to talk about their needs. Mary Ellen said this has already been favorably discussed.

Cindy recommended that program publicity include information about transportation to the branch library holding the program. The information could be added to program flyers or to the branch phone and website messages. Committee members agreed on the importance of communicating detailed information on a library's location and the exact location of a library's entrances.

Betty said accessibility at all programs was important. For example, at a program on ES are all materials accessible to the low vision/blind community if written information is used?

Francie suggested creation of a checklist to insure accessibility in programs. Mary Ellen said that a checklist is being drawn up and that she and Elizabeth will work together on this project.

Steve asked how many branches are in the library system (21) and whether the program focus is on all the branches. Mary Ellen said it is.

Parker brought up programs for autistic children held at some libraries. The programs are held when the libraries are closed and offer a quiet time for the children to learn about the libraries and feel comfortable in the library environment. Monica Martinez agreed that this would be a good way to introduce children with autism to the libraries. Sensory story times would also be useful. Parker asked how to respond to criticism that such programs are not inclusive. Monica recommended explaining that this is a good way to prepare future users to feel more confident and to be integrated into the community. Elizabeth noted that these programs would not be closed to the public and therefore would be inclusive.

When Cindy brought up a possible program on HOC housing Mary Ellen said that outreach is already underway at some housing projects.

Debbie asked for a program on devices and technologies for individuals with disabilities. She discussed holding a program during which individuals could receive detailed individual attention on how to use specific equipment brought to the program. She will contact Mary Ellen and Elizabeth to discuss this idea. Discussion followed on how to recruit individuals to assist with such a program. Monica mentioned students in need of community service hours and said it would be a good opportunity for youth with autism to gain hours.

Action Items

Strategic Plan

- Elizabeth will send the Work Plan to Jill to distribute to committee members.
- Comments on the Work Plan and input from committee members' organizations should be sent to Jill by Friday, December 23. Committee members also should send comments on major issues they or their organization members face in using public libraries and recommend what the library system can do to alleviate the issues. Issues should be prioritized.
- Jill will compile AAC comments and send them to Elizabeth and Rita.

Programming

- Debbie will contact Mary Ellen and Elizabeth to discuss programming focused on learning about adaptive equipment and devices.
- Committee members will look at the list of recommended programs generated at the September AAC meeting. Using the perspective of their organizations, members should prioritize program topics and suggest how programs can be made accessible to their communities. The lists should be sent to Jill by Friday, December 23.
- Jill will compile one list of the comments and send it to Mary Ellen, Rita, and Elizabeth.

Recommendations:

- A library orientation for individuals with disabilities. Possible use of volunteers to lead the orientation.
- Library aisles wide enough to accommodate various sized wheelchairs.
- Braille/large print signage in all branch libraries.
- More availability of free software.
- Suggestion boxes in branches to give the community members a chance to talk about their needs.
- Program publicity should include information about transportation to the branch holding the program as well as detailed library location information.
- Insure that current programs are inclusive and accessible to all members of the community. If written material is used at a program provide an accessible alternative for the blind/low vision community.
- Create a checklist to insure accessibility at programs.
- Explore programs for autistic children held after the libraries close.
- A program on HOC housing.

- A program on devices and technologies for individuals with disabilities with the possibility of community service hours for youth who volunteer to assist with the program.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held at the Rockville Memorial Library on Wednesday, March 1, 6:30-8:00 pm. Rita recommended that the FY2018 refresh libraries, Praisner and Long Branch, be toured in the spring and will look at dates.