

MCPL ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

March 12, 2024

ATTENDEES

Francie Gilman, Chair

Debbie Brown, Secretary; National Federation of the Blind

Tim Lighter, Chair, Library Board

Elizabeth Lang, Assistant Facilities Coordinator and ADA Program Manager

Jill Lewis, Consultant

Betty Thompson, Consultant

Nadia Aboureyah

Cindy Buddington, Independence Now

Jane Carona, American Council of the Blind

Wendalyn Hovendick

Barbara King

Joyce Plaxen, We Achieve

Yasmin Reyazuddin

Guests: Councilmember Kristin Mink, Director Anita Vassallo.

WELCOME

Francie Gilman welcomed everyone and read TEAMS tips.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the December meeting were approved as distributed.

UPDATES SINCE DECEMBER MEETING: Francie

The Louis Braille birthday party took place on January 7 at the Rockville Memorial Library. Councilmember Kristin Mink was there.

There was a Project Enable session on January 24 at which Elizabeth presented on creating an accessible library.

Elizabeth sent a list of action items, including a list of disability-related staff trainings.

There was a joint Board meeting at which Anita spoke about the new outreach position and her retirement. Councilmember Mink said she was pleased to learn about the AAC at the Louis Braille party.

Two member applications were submitted, but the individuals were not accepted because we are seeking representatives from the Deaf and hard of hearing communities to balance our representation.

At the request of Elizabeth Lang, members submitted suggestions for titles to purchase for the library collection.

We created a list of three priority areas for the new director: knowledge, experience, and a positive, constructive, and forward-thinking approach to leadership.

Tim Lighter sent us the joint letter the Board and the FOL are submitting to the Council in support of the MCPL 2024-2025 budget.

COUNCILMEMBER KRISTIN MINK, LEAD FOR LIBRARIES

Councilmember Mink represents District 5 from East County. She is the Lead for Libraries and advocates for MCPL with the Council.

There was a question about the new library in Clarksburg. It will be one floor. There was more space at another location, but accessibility by bus was a consideration. It will not be at the town center. There is space for people waiting for rides—we mentioned benches in the lobby where you can see if your ride is coming, and where drivers can see that you're waiting.

We discussed the cumbersome process of reserving Library rooms through CUPF. Councilmember Mink will discuss this with CUPF staff.

Kristin Mink's number is 240-777-7955. You may leave a message or use email: Councilmember.Mink@montgomerycountymd.gov

Betty is happy about the new emphasis on marketing.

We asked Councilmember Mink what we should say in budget testimony. She said she cannot give a lot of detail because it is still with the county executive. There is a lot that we support. Anita said they are satisfied with the budget and to emphasize that we would like the full budget that the Library has asked for. Kristin said that we could say there is a lot of crossover with health and human services, and that it's a good investment, aiming to be a place of excellence and potential. There are a lot of concerns about public safety, and we can connect the Library to safe meeting spaces. Kristin said libraries are a place of unlimited potential.

Francie mentioned Gabe Albornoz as someone who is listening to the concerns of people with disabilities. Kristin agreed.

We noted that we support programming for all ages. We are interested in the discovery kits and want to know if they are appropriate for blind people.

Betty brought up the accessibility of facilities. A lot of money has been invested in refresh projects. Is there any value in saying build on this with accessibility of programming? Councilmember Mink is supportive of this.

We were asked to provide some information to the Board for the next director search. Is that something we can send to Councilmember Mink? She would like to know for background, but this is a decision for the County Executive. We can provide information about what our priorities are. Our requests should come through the Library Board. Tim could send it through an addendum. All of that is being gathered for the initial panel that talks to the first round of candidates.

We thanked Councilmember Mink for coming.

REPORT FROM ANITA VASSALLO

The county executive's office is conducting the search for Library Director. Anita does not have any involvement in this. It is an appointment by the county executive.

The county has hired a firm that exclusively does library executive searches, called Bradbury Miller. They are working on the Maryland State librarian search and have also worked with Prince George's County.

They will go through a first round of interviews with the deputy county CEO and Ari Brooks and the vice chair of the Library Board. There will be two or three candidates. The candidate needs to be confirmed by the Council and they hope to have someone in place by August. There are many steps to this.

Anita began working with the library 50 years ago. April 24, 1974 was her first day with MCPL. She is confident that the new person will bring the library forward.

We thanked Anita for coming and for her service.

Francie will send out Councilmember Mink's email and phone number.

DISABILITY AWARENESS DAY—Joyce Plaxen

We discussed plans for a disability awareness day. Joyce gave an example: in the morning special ed students can come to the library. In the early afternoon directors, managers and coordinators from day programs and agencies would have a program and a tour to learn about the Library. In the evening there could be a program introducing the MCPL website and tours around the library for the public. We need to think about how we would do a tour and what our expectations are of the library. We would try this first with one library, do an assessment, and make plans for future disability days.

Elizabeth said she can be the liaison with the new marketing and communication person. Unlike the MoComCon, we don't have a budget, we have to be realistic. The more specific information we can bring (date, time, location) the easier it will be. It is best to come with a plan and exactly what we need.

It would also be an opportunity for the AAC members and other organizations to do outreach. County HHS Aging and Disability has many contacts if we ask them to help market this program. We decided that holding it in March 2025, will give us time plan and to have the marketing person in place.

Nadia mentioned that April 7 is the Transition Resource fair at Montgomery College.

Joyce will lead this initiative and invited AAC members to participate. Francie will join, and Betty said she would help out as she is able.

[LIBRARY REPORT – Elizabeth Lang, Assistant Facilities and Accessibility Program Manager](#)

Elizabeth said that some adult day program and transitioning youth groups come to the Marilyn Praisner library and just hang out. One in particular is there every day and the caregivers just let the people sit in chairs or use the computers. Staff at Praisner would like to find some activities for the individuals, and Elizabeth is thinking of a book group or movies or documentaries, and will be working with staff to address this issue. It won't be a public program, but something that's once a week for this group. Also, Elizabeth is working with a Praisner staff member to begin American Sign Language classes. Joyce suggested audiobooks for a book group, and said she would email a list to Elizabeth. These are people between the ages of 18 and 26. Elizabeth does not know the range of disabilities. Monica may have some insights as well, and Nadia said she and her mother may be able to help.

The service animal tip sheet was sent to staff in January. People have been bringing animals that are not service animals into library branches – this is not new. Someone brought in a cat as an emotional support animal and was feeding it. Elizabeth will keep sending the tipsheets to staff every six months as a reminder.

Elizabeth spoke about giving the presentation on creating accessible libraries for the statewide Project Enable initiative. She later gave the same presentation to the MCPL Board.

Staff are making lists of disability- and DEI-related books in conjunction with the DEI coordinator for the City of Rockville. The lists will be sent to the MCPL book selectors and to the branches. She thanked everyone who offered contributions to the lists.

Elizabeth had sent us a list of staff trainings. There were perhaps 24 trainings that staff can take at any time that were disability-specific. Francie asked on behalf of Richard about the possibility of a quiz to measure if staff know what to say when interacting with a person who has a disability. It would be a way to measure whether the tip sheets are effective. Elizabeth mentioned a quiz that was given 5-7 years ago after the first training. She could look for the results, and remembers that most people did very well at recalling the training. But if you don't use it right away you lose it. The difficulty is defining what a base level of skill is, how to measure whether a person is knowledgeable. It's best done immediately after the training. All staff receive training on basic customer service. Francie said the concern is how to help people gain and maintain a level of knowledge, and she will get back to Richard about this, and asked members who have specific staff training suggestions to get in touch with her.

The Damascus Library is in the middle of the design phase for its refresh, and work is projected to begin in the fall. With the co-located Senior Center, it will take about 18 months for both. Brigadier General Charles E. McGee (Silver Spring) is moving into the design phase. She would like to schedule a date for a two-hour meeting and tour so we can make recommendations. Elizabeth will talk to Angelisa Hawes and branch staff to arrange this. Once we do the tour, Francie will compile a report. The refresh is likely to be focused on building structure issues and furnishings because it is heavily used.

Francie mentioned that before the Louis Braille program in January, there was a tour of the Rockville Library and the cheat sheets were not at the Accessible Technology Workstation, and the staff did not know anything about them. Elizabeth said every time we have a new person, they do not know about the last time they were sent out. Originally, the announcement

went to all Library staff that the Tip Sheets were coming. She said it just falls through the cracks due to change in personnel. Taping the instructions beside the keyboard wouldn't work because people will just peel them and use the paper. It's frustrating, and if any members have a suggestion, please let her know.

BOARD REPORT: Tim Lighter, Chair, MCPL Board

Tim said the Board is down three members and the openings have been advertised.

A national headhunter, Bradbury Miller, is doing recruitment for the new director. This is a 4-month process and is run out of the County Executive's office.

The budget will be out after Friday, so there's no information on specifics until after then. Francie asked Tim to let us know about budget testimony options, and he said he would.

The Board is supposed to provide its volunteer hours to show the support that is provided to the library system by volunteers. We should also provide volunteer hours, and Francie can contact Regina Holyfield to find out about doing that.

Tim has asked us to support the joint Board/Friends letter about the budget that he sent to AAC members.

He will include our input on the new Director (the three items) as an addendum. Francie said she will be sending the three items to Kristin Mink.

About the budget: Jill had a question about Tim's email, saying that disability has already been funded, it is not a separate line item. Tim said it was written in haste, and that MCPL definitely supports accessibility, and he may have been referring to the CIP budget. Jill will talk to Tim about what was done during the time when she was chair of the Board and the talking points she used that were quite successful.

Betty asked if Tim will continue in the Board. Tim has one more year as chair and has applied for a second term for three years and will be chair for another year. We are happy to hear that he intends to continue.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Send email and phone number for Councilmember Mink to members (Francie) DONE
2. Bring APH's catalog to Rockville Library for Elizabeth to pick up and use for programming and toys for children who are blind. (Yasmin) DONE
3. Plan for budget support and advocacy: letter, testimony, visits (Francie, Jill)
4. Lead the Disability Day Planning Committee (Joyce)
5. Send a list of audiobooks to Elizabeth (Joyce) and provide feedback and suggestions to plans (Joyce, Nadia, Karen Leggett)
6. Collect ideas for staff training and send to Elizabeth to pass along to Staff Development (Francie and Richard)
7. Send dates for a refresh tour of the Brigadier Charles E. McGee Library (Silver Spring) (Elizabeth to Francie) DONE
8. Collect ideas for how to make sure the Accessible Workstation cheat sheets stay where they're needed, send them to Elizabeth (Francie)
9. Send volunteer hours spent on AAC activities to Francie (Everyone)
10. Send approved minutes to MCPL Admin for posting. (Francie) DONE
11. Send the three priority items for the new Director to CM Mink and to Tim (Francie) DONE