

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING NOTES

September 11, 2024

[WELCOME, TEAMS TIPS AND INTRODUCTIONS: Francie](#)

ATTENDEES:

Francie Gilman, Chair

Richard Bell-Irving, Vice Chair (virtual)

Debbie Brown, Secretary

Elizabeth Lang, Assistant Facilities Manager and ADA Coordinator

Tim Lighter, Board representative

Matt Barkley, ADA Compliance Officer (virtual)

Jane Carona, American Council of the Blind (virtual)

Jonina Duker (virtual)

Barbara King

Betty Thompson (virtual)

Yasmin Reyazuddin

GUEST: Cathaleen Skinner (virtual)

BOARD REPORT: Tim

The Board has five new members so they have a full Board. There will be a joint meeting of the Board and Friends in October, Tim will send the information. Tim said the budget is not yet completely drafted. They will come up with some ideas in October.

APPROVAL OF JUNE MINUTES: Debbie

The minutes were approved as circulated.

UPDATES SINCE THE JUNE MEETING—Francie

All Action Items from the June meeting are completed, except the need for wayfinding information about each branch. After discussion and input from Elizabeth, the following was decided: instead of doing all the work of wayfinding, we can make recommendations to Elizabeth about a specific issue and branch and suggest solutions and why it's important. Involving an Orientation and Mobility

specialist would be a good way to check to make sure that the needs of people who are blind or have low vision are included. Yasmin mentioned that MetroAccess drivers take her to the Beall Street entrance, in spite of the GPS instructions. Jonina said wayfinding is very important and suggested that we set up a subcommittee to address it. Richard suggested starting with a couple of the libraries that seem to have the most problems, following Elizabeth's model of making recommendations, significance, etc.

Francie suggested tabling discussion of Disability Day until Joyce Plaxen returns to meetings.

Members participated in a Zoom call with a prospective new member.

Jonina and Francie will draft a welcome letter to the new director, including our priority of being included in developing the next Strategic Plan.

Discussions about the 2025-2026 Library budget will begin soon, as Tim referenced, and we need to be sure to be involved with that.

There are two upcoming events sponsored by Independence Now. One is on emergency preparedness for people with disabilities at the Wheaton Recreation Center on September 14 from 2 to 5. The other is a celebration of Independence Now's 30th anniversary, on Friday, September 27. This is a ticketed event from 7 to 10 at the Veterans Center in Silver Spring.

The Sligo Creek Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind has a book group and would like to invite the public to a discussion of one of the books. We would like the library to sponsor the event. Elizabeth has heard from the programming group. The book is "The Imprisoned Guest," about Laura Bridgman.

LIBRARY POLICIES AFFECTING PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES - Richard

Richard summarized the Library's policies on inclusiveness. We may want to come up with some suggestions. The Library has two policies:

1. A person who has mental, physical, or emotional disabilities who is served by an attendant or caregiver must be accompanied by that attendant or caregiver at all times.
2. Virtual and in person library programs designated for a specific age group must be attended only by that age group. Children under the age of 8 must be accompanied by an adult. At a children's program, any adult must be accompanied by a child.

This means that adults who have mental disabilities may be excluded from programs that they would enjoy and benefit from. There was discussion of mental or developmental age vs. chronological age.

Cathaleen Skinner said her adult daughter likes music programs for children, and asked Elizabeth if an age exception could be made. There was an age exception policy laid out by the Department of Parks and Recreation. She would like a similar process at MCPL to create an age exception, rather than change the policy. There are some programs, such as a magic show, where the age really does not matter as much. She suggested that there be an evaluation process to allow for exceptions to be made.

Discussion points included: Each branch could decide whether to use the age restriction or not. We should check what is working for the Parks and Recreation Department, as a precedent. We would like some recommendations about wording changes to the policy. When we have a recommendation, it could be taken to the library administration.

Elizabeth said she would like to have some written recommendation from us for wording changes and process, and whatever else would be useful. Historically there are several pieces to the policy. The Parks Department are at state level; the Rec Centers are County. Historically programs for young children are specifically to support literacy and preschool readiness. There are some limitations such as what books are read and toys used that are designed for little children. They have trained Children's staff systemwide for sensory and family storytimes, aiming at children. They provided every library with a sensory storytime kit. They provide family storytimes for children who are neurodivergent. MCPL has now filled the position of the person who leads children's services, but she may not know anything about adults with developmental disabilities. There have been instances where adults with mental health issues come to storytimes and some have required police intervention. MCPL is attempting to prevent adults being in children's areas unless they are with a child or picking up materials for their child. Staff will ask the person to leave, according to policy. Staff will not ask if they have a disability. In answer to a question, Elizabeth did not know if the people involved were accompanied by a caregiver, but even if they were, it would have been two adults coming into a children's program. The policies are in place to protect young children.

Elizabeth is working on a Decision Memo for the new director, researching how to implement programs and policies that are welcoming to people with cognitive disabilities, including staff training in this. She recognizes that there is a gap and asked the AAC for recommendations on policies, programs, events, etc. on serving adults who have intellectual disabilities.

Cathaleen suggested having the policy checked by a County attorney, regarding legal requirements, and the appropriateness of now allowing age exceptions. Elizabeth clarified that she thought we should have an exceptions process in

addition to programs geared toward adults with intellectual disabilities, and that our recommendations should include both.

There was a discussion about adults with disabilities who have been abandoned at a branch. This has been discussed by the AAC in past meetings. Adults may have a court-appointed legal guardian or state-sponsored caregivers. Some children may look older than they are, and they have no ID. Cathaleen said if you are concerned about the safety of children, the library could have a registration process for programs for children.

Elizabeth said that some children's programs do have registration. There is no lawyer employed by the library; it is the county's general counsel. We want to trust people as much as possible. The cutoff for many programs is age 8, and they cannot be in the library alone if they are younger than 8. MCPL will not ask about their age or police anything, including disabilities.

Francie asked members to send recommendations to her for compilation. An example of another kind of inaccessible program might be people holding up their knitted items and not being able to describe them. Some of these matters should go to Matt Barkley and the county attorney.

Are there any ALA recommendations? Elizabeth checked six or eight libraries by size—urban, suburban, rural. The only reference to a policy was San Francisco Public Library. Generally, there is no policy or mention of a policy. Elizabeth asked Cathaleen to send names of people in the Parks and the Recs departments she worked with.

We will work together to come up with recommendations. Elizabeth will work on how to implement.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS -- Francie

AAC officer elections will occur in December. We need to have a nominating committee of 3 people. According to the bylaws, the nominating committee takes names of people running for chair, vice chair and secretary and manages the election at the December meeting. They submit names 3 weeks ahead of the meeting.

Jane and Barbara volunteered to be on the committee. Richard can provide a Zoom link. Betty will chair the nominating committee.

FACILITIES AND ADA REPORT—Elizabeth

They are working on issues of policy and programming for intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Montgomery County participated virtually in the Inclusion Showcase that was presented by the Maryland Library for the Blind and Print Disabled.

Renovations:

They are finishing the design for the Damascus library renovation. They expect that to close early next year.

They will be starting design for the Brigadier General McGee library next year. She thanked us for our input on that refresh. That will take about a year. The branches only close when the actual process of renovation begins.

The Noyes library has been in line for renovation. The cost is high. It is back out for bids.

Elizabeth will send a report if there is more information.

COUNTY ADA REPORT—Matt

Matt had been at the meeting of the County Commission on People with Disabilities. Francie had asked him to talk about digital accessibility.

He does not have an update on what is going on with digital accessibility. He sent the Powerpoint that he did for the Commission to every member of the County Council. There have been no significant developments.

They had a meeting in the Department of General Services, which handles MCPL projects. The design stage of Brigadier Charles E. Magee Library will be completed April 2026. Clarksburg will be a new library building completed in July 2028. The Long Branch elevator modernization will begin in November and be completed in March 2025. They are putting a canopy on Long Branch. Noyes is under review.

ACTION ITEMS SUMMARY

1. Francie will send approved minutes to administration.
2. Wayfinding recommendations: Francie will draft ideas and send to members.
3. Francie will draft an email to new library director and work with Jonina.
4. Everyone: send recommendations for policies, programs, training, and age exceptions for library users who have intellectual disabilities to Francie so she can draft recommendations. Francie said she'd like to work with Elizabeth on the draft.
5. Francie will send Betty, Barbara and Jane information from the bylaws for the nominating committee.

NEXT MEETING:

Possibly we should meet virtually in December and March. December 10 is the next meeting via Teams. Elizabeth will send Teams information.