



AGE-FRIENDLY MONTGOMERY ADVISORY WORKGROUP
“BUILDING A COMMUNITY FOR A LIFETIME”
VIRTUAL ZOOM MEETING
THURSDAY, APRIL 21 2021 | 3-5PM

Co-Chairs

Robin Riley, Director, Department of Recreation
Dr. Raymond L. Crowel, Director, Department of Health and Human Services

Guest Speakers

Mitsuko R. Herrera, Ultra-Montgomery, Director, Policy, Planning, and Special Projects Office of Broadband Programs, Montgomery County, MD

Attending:

Members	Domain Co-Chairs	Guests	DHHS Staff
Odile Brunetto	Austin Heyman	Sandra Kauffman	Pazit Aviv
Raymond Crowel	Mara Mayor	Betty Romero	Marcia Pruzan
Vivien Hsueh	Jim Resnick	Monica Shaeffer	Zhao Zhang
James McClelland	Sarah Swarr	Mitsuko Herrera	
Robin Riley	Kathleen Stobie	Dina Rivera	
Stuart Rosenthal	Cynthia Grissom	Betty Ring	
Shane Rock	Lorraine Driscoll	Shivali Haribhakti	
Tracy Rezvani		Howard Gleckman	
Sam Oji			
Patrice McGhee			
Mario Wawrzusin			

MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome, Introductions, and Announcements - Dr. Odile Brunetto

Dr. Brunetto welcomed attendees and guest speakers Mitsuko Herrera and Shivali Haribhakti.

Presentation

Bridging the Digital Divide: Access, Affordability, and Digital Inclusion.

Mitsuko Herrera, Director, Office of Broadband Services, and Shivali Haribhakti, Director, Senior Planet Montgomery

Shivali Haribhakti presented information about Senior Planet Montgomery:

- Senior Planet is currently operated under a contract with Older Adults Technology Services (OATS), which OATS is powered by AARP and operates in seven states.
- Senior Planet is in its 10-week spring quarter, with 815 ongoing programs in English, Spanish, and Mandarin totaling 3,000 virtual participants.
- Senior Planet expects to continue both virtual and in-person programming going forward,

- In regard a question about refurbishing disposed computers, the County replaces computers every 4-5 years, but does not refurbish older computers due to outdated operating and security systems.

Misti Herrera presented essential information about Digital Equity:

- **Digital Equity** is a state in which all families have access to broadband and devices, and the skills to use them, for daily living, to participate in civic life, and to fully participate in the digital economy.
- **Digital Literacy** is the skills training to reach Digital Equity
- **Digital Divide** is the gap to Digital Equity – the percentage and number of families who have not reach a state of digital equity
- **Montgomery County Office of Broadband Programs Digital Equity Goal** is a three-prong approach to help all families (1) get home access to the Internet, (2) have a device to use the Internet, and (3) have the skills to use the Internet and the device.

Misti described the effects of digital inequity on Montgomery County residents by race, ethnicity, income, and age, a range of reasons for the inequity, and a range of opportunities for accessing devices and broadband services for low-income families.

Montgomery County's has a Digital Equity goal called "10 By10":

- 10,000 more families with broadband services; and
- 10,000 more families with computers.

The County expects to focus on families that want and need broadband and computers by partnering with nonprofits, commercial providers, and state and federal government, and by sharing personal stories about how access improves lives.

Responses to questions following presentation:

- In regard to 5-G cell towers, although the County Council allowed streetlights in commercial areas to be replaced with 5G towers, it has not yet decided on placing 5G towers in residential areas.
- Digital inclusion is a priority. OATS recently collaborated with Humana to develop a report on how digital inclusion affects older adults. It found that older adults were adversely affected by a lack of inclusion and how the pandemic has affected that population. Geography (rural vs urban) race, and income levels all affect accessibility. Senior planet wants to resolve these issues and make accessibility more equitable.
- The County is partnering with the Chinese American Cultural Center for about six months in an effort to improve accessibility for a large percentage of Asian American who are not connected.
- Connectivity in the area of workforce development also presents issues for many job seekers: the Office of Broadband Services will work with WorkSource Montgomery and the 50+ Volunteer Network on related issues. (See accompanying slides for additional information and detail.)

Update: Montgomery County Recreation Department – Robin Riley

Recreation is continuing to operate its programs under COVID-19 guidance.

- Staff continue to work virtually while planning to bring back in-person programming.
- Currently, eight recreations centers are open for fitness activities only; they have expanded capacity, and many programs are going well.
- Planning is underway for Senior Olympics to have games and sports in late summer and early fall.
- Three or four outdoor pools will open early on May 1st with more opening as we work to expand capacity.

- The target date for opening all senior centers is September 1. At this time, we await reopening guidance from the County Executive and Dr. Gayle. Currently, two senior centers are being used as vaccine sites; four of six recreation centers are restricted to telework, and summer camps are scheduled at two sites. The centers have no access to use of public-school facilities this year, but we are looking for opportunities to add other space.

Director's Update -- Dr. Odile Brunetto - Dr. Raymond Crowel

Dr. Raymond Crowell:

- Vaccinations:
 - The County is making good progress in helping residents get vaccinated and is working hard to vaccinate those still unvaccinated. The County have provided more first doses than any other county by more than 100,000.
 - Current statistics show that only 18% of the 65+ age group are unvaccinated, The County will be working hard on vaccinating the rest, including the approximately 600 residents who are homebound and cannot reach vaccination sites.
 - The County will be focusing more on tighter spots such as housing sites, neighborhoods, and other areas where people are under-vaccinated.
 - With vaccinations having been completed in senior independent living communities, the new focus is on naturally occurring retirement communities (known as NORCs).
- Reopening:
 - Discussions about how to reopen currently are underway with Council. A gradual reopening will rely on data related to percentage of residents vaccinated.
 - It will be important to consider the mental health consequences for older residents who have been isolated for a year; the expected reopening of senior centers in September (with vaccinated staff) should help address those issues.

Dr. Odile Brunetto:

- Budget: We currently are in discussions about the FY22 budget, which Council will have to approve. In addition to the two categories of our budget, operating and general, funds are coming in from the Relief Act that add to our budget and that are helping the community recover.

Area Agency on Aging - Dr. Patrice McGhee

Work is underway to conduct a telehealth survey with County residents to gain insight on how they use telehealth, their experiences, issues, and preferences-- this will help determine programming needs. The survey will be translated into other languages; focus groups with older residents also will be conducted.

Work Group Reports

Civic and Social Involvement – Kathleen Meaney Stobie, Vivien Hseuh

- Special thanks to the Senior Team at the Recreation Department who were able to help continue the County's AARP's tax aid program for existing clients through the extended IRS tax deadline.
- Because Senior Centers remain closed, other activities are still on hold.
- Older residents in Vivien Hsueh's programs have learned to use ZOOM for a variety of online sessions, including exercising classes, and chorus groups

Communications and Outreach – Stuart Rosenthal

- The Beacon is publishing Age Friendly Montgomery ads on a monthly basis, with the next 4 months of ads already prepared.
- Expo will take place virtually this fall, but may also include in-person components.

Elder Abuse Prevention – Mario Wawrzusin and Dina Rivera

Mario Wawrzusin:

- Adult Protective Services (APS) investigation cases have been about 8% lower than pre-pandemic, Moving forward, the APS will continue to be a resource for vulnerable adults.
- APS have been making joint presentations across the country about Montgomery County's multidisciplinary approach, most recently with the Guilford NC Family Justice Center.
- APS investigators will conduct a workshop in Maryland on how to work with the criminal justice system; the State's Attorney's Office will present on how law enforcement can improve investigation in APS-related cases.
- Planning is underway for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in June with a music therapy component and capability to hold some classes in Spanish.

Dina Rivera:

- The States Attorney's office is actively prosecuting cases involving senior communities and vulnerable adults. Courts are reopening, with jury trials starting again next week.

Employment - Cynthia Grissom

The Job Center is operating virtually, with a focus on helping people improve their ability to conduct job searches. We also are hosting workshop education sessions for the community. We also work to educate the 50+ and those with disabilities about available tools for smartphones that assist with communication technologies.

Health and Wellness – Sara Swarr

- At the last Health and Wellness work group meeting, Kathy Richards presented on all prevention programs and the benefits of movement in nontraditional classes.
- We are beginning to plan for September's Fall Prevention Month.
- Summer camps for youth will take place at some senior centers.
- At the request of the Commission on Aging, we are preparing a one-page overview of Recreation Department's activities during COVID.

Housing - Lorraine Driscoll

The Department of Housing and Community Affairs is:

- Working with HHS and the social service community to get information to the public about rent relief opportunities and other available services to help them avoid eviction
- Continuing work to keep and expand affordable housing units.
- Preparing to introduce a new Rental Marketplace website to help renters find relevant information about available units that best suit their personal needs, such as rentals for the 55+ age group and

those that are income-related. For more information:
<https://ex12.montgomerycountymd.gov/ojn3/ijn12/marketplace>.

Senior Public Safety – Jim Resnick, Tracy Rezvani, Jim McClelland

Jim Resnick (Fire and Rescue)

- Have been conducting safety presentations within the condominium community (via Zoom);
- Have partnered on education outreach with nearly 500 area realtors, providing fire safety education as well as carbon monoxide and fire alarms;
- Continue making a limited number of homes safety checks;
- Works with other jurisdictions to help provide vaccinations.

Tracy Rezvani (Office of Consumer Protection)

- With HHS, has made senior safety presentations during National Consumer Protection Safety Week;
- Has been focusing on digital outreach and education;
- Will participate in the June World Elder Abuse Awareness Day events;
- Promoted interview with Director Friedman on Montgomery Cable television. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts8WpkwP6z4&list=PLPnHl40rEhrKLjzuORc9N_M4oN1TWPreN&index=2&t=1s
- Developed an article on Public Safety for *Washington Parent Magazine*.

Jim McClelland (Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security):

- Conducted a senior safety webinar with the National Consumer Protection League.
- Assisted the County at its mass vaccination sites.
- Continuing work with the eight County hubs to distribute food for those in need who cannot otherwise access it.
- Is developing accurate public information messages to address vaccine hesitancy, urging all residents to get vaccinated.

Transpiration and Mobility – Sam Oji and Shawn Brennan

Sam Oji:

- The County has received a 6-month extension to the enhanced mobility grant that was set to expire this month; this supports Call N Ride and includes rides to vaccination sites and an essential food delivery component using taxis for home delivery of food ordered from food banks and grocery stores.
- Ride On has shuttle services running every 30 minutes from the Shady Grove Metro to the Germantown Mass Vaccine Site from 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday.
- Ride On is back to 50% of pre-pandemic capacity.
- All 80 bus routes are now in operation with free bus fare; people can now board at front or rear; mask requirements remain in place and are provided for those who may not have them.
- High-level cleaning with anti-viral agents continues twice each day,
- Bus drivers receive daily temperature checks and are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated.
- FLEX (small bus operations) has not yet restarted operation.

Shawn Brennan

- Congratulations to Connect-A-Ride and the Jewish Council for the Aging, which have continued to be effective in getting people to vaccination sites.

- We continue to promote messages about pedestrian safety and work on the Vision Zero plan. All are encouraged to view and comments on a draft version of the plan: at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/visionzero/2030plan.html>

Age-Friendly Montgomery County -- Marcia Pruzan

- The County is working with the George Washington University Center on Aging, Health, and Humanities to hold a first annual regional Age-Friendly Ecosummit on May 4 and 6 with five other areas Age-Friendly Jurisdictions. Regional leaders will participate, along with five other local age-friendly jurisdictions. Mr. Elrich will provide an opening greeting, and Montgomery County will present workshops on its Home Sharing and the Crimes Against Seniors and Vulnerable Adults initiatives. It is expected that this event will recur annually.
- Jim Stowe, Director of the Office of Human Rights, and the Employment Work Group are planning a June workshop for area employers that focuses on the value of the new hybrid workplace and encourages intergenerational and flexible approaches to employment as the County emerges from the pandemic.

Closing Remarks- Dr. Raymond Crowel

In closing, Dr. Crowell addressed the challenge of vaccine deniers. Working with residents who belief in false rumors about the vaccines has been difficult. DHHS has all of the available facts and data online for people to view, and the County continually works on strategies to combat these false narratives. Information not yet available from a recent survey on vaccine hesitancy may help us further address this problem.

Research has shown local voices and peer-to-peer voices of encouragement does encourage vaccination. Dr. Crowell expressed interest in a suggestion that HHS and the COA Communication Committee team up to frame a strong, persuasive message (and its delivery) that is powerful and that uses the power of personal persuasion around vaccination. He suggested creating a short video message to include ideas such as “Why I got vaccinated, and therefore you should too” using a mosaic of County residents. Mitsi Herrera volunteered to help with production and upload of the video to the internet. All interested in participating were invited to contact Odile Brunetto. **POSTSCRIPT:** Subsequent to this meeting the Commission on Aging developed a video promoting vaccination, available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c70HoE3sKEY>

Closing: The meeting was adjourned at 05:06 PM

Upcoming Meetings:

- September 22, 2021, work group meeting,
- October 20, 2021, AFMAG meeting
- December 16, 2021, AF work group meeting
- January 20, 2022, AFMAG meeting