

# AGE FRIENDLY OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS WORKGROUP MINUTES



Date: 08/19/2020

Time: 09:00 AM

Facilitator: Marian Vessels and Nicola Morgal

## In Attendance

Margaret Pittman

Marian Vessel

Matt Madera

Jenna Crawley

Mary Pat Donelan

Nicola Morgal

Terri Hansen

Alice Lewis

Special Guests: County Executive Calvin Ball  
Carl Delorenzo

Kathleen Krintz – Recording Secretary

## Minutes Approved

### Announcements:

Terri welcomed Dr. Calvin Ball to the meeting.

### New Business:

Dr. Ball stated, “It is always a pleasure and I am very honored to be here with this small but mighty work group doing important work. I would like to thank Jenna and Terri for their leadership and partnership and consistently demonstrating their dedication to our older adults and ensuring that we have the very best quality services for all. Your work group is an incredibly important one and I think the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that importance even more.” Dr. Ball noted that it is important to look at the county’s outdoors spaces and buildings and how they can be Age-Friendly not only in the traditional sense but that in addition to ADA accessibility there be a focus on Universal Design, or design for everyone. He further noted that when it comes to health and wellness this group is thinking about people being more physically distant or socially isolated, about the mental health challenges related to access to sunlight or greenery and the effect that design has on people. All of this is very important now and in the future. “I just wanted to stop by at the beginning to share my appreciation, my undying commitment to your work and to listen to some of the amazing things that this group is working on to this point, knowing that there is still some work to be done.”

Marian thanked Dr. Ball and each member spoke briefly about why they chose to be on this work group.

- Marian Vessels introduced herself as one of the co-chairs. She stated she is coming to this as a person with a disability and serves on the Commission of Disabilities. As a wheel chair user she is really interested in making sure our Outdoor Spaces and Buildings are accessible to those with disabilities and those aging as well.

- Nicola Morgal with Recreation and Parks stated the Division she oversees has elementary and middle school child care, programs for teens and therapy recreation programs for individuals with disabilities as well as active aging programs. The Division starts from elementary all the way to later in life so this committee was just a great fit. She has worked with Terri and Jenna many times on different projects in the past and talked a lot about how we can make the outdoor spaces and buildings age-friendly. Recreation and Parks has been looking at all aspects of age and ability to be able to use buildings.
- Dr, Margaret Pittman earned her degree at Morgan State University in the Community College Leadership Program. She is a faculty member at Morgan State University in the School of Social Work where she is the chairperson for Gerontology concentration for graduate level social work students. Her reason for volunteering in this committee is she wants to make sure the experiences she holds near and dear and thinks are important to healthy, successful, active aging are heard from her perspective and included when and where appropriate.
- Matt Madera is with Recreation and Parks and manages the North Laurel Community and Park. His experience and background are in Facility Management and that is one of the things that brought him to this committee. Grew up in Howard County, his parents still live in Howard County. Looking at the fact that he wants to design things that he will be able to use also.
- Alice Lewis is a retired teacher and was really interested in the 50+ Center that was to break ground this year. Very interested in being active and engaged and being a part of helping the quality for other seniors like myself. The open spaces domain rallied me in. I am part of the community and active and love to do things that will invest in the quality of life for our community.
- Mary Pat Donelan is the Director of Operations for the Village in Howard whose mission is to enable residents 55+ to actively age in place by providing mutual support, services, activities and coordination with public and private resources. The outdoor spaces are very important to all of our members and Howard County is doing so well. That is why I volunteered to lend a hand to this important area.

Marian read vision statement and explained the group is looking at where we are and looked broadly at what is currently out there. Also, looked at a variety of other resources.

- Reviewed the Age-Friendly Survey – distributed county-wide
- Reviewed the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks Website
- Reviewed the Columbia Association Website
- Reviewed AARP Website – Looked at other Counties near and far
- Downloaded and reviewed All Trails app
- Reviewed the map: Vulnerable Population Index – Had additional overlays.
  - ✓ Where seniors are living
  - ✓ Where the parks are
  - ✓ Transportation to the parks
  - ✓ Housing Areas – low income population

All of these will be very instructional for the group as we want to make sure our Outdoor Spaces and Buildings are being used effectively.

- Nicola shared a look at the research from this group
  - Age-Friendly worldwide gave us a lot of insight to different communities.
  - The County has many amenities, not all residents are aware of them
  - What are simple changes to make a community more Age-Friendly
    - ✓ Location of Benches
  - What are major changes to make a community more Age-Friendly

- ✓ What are the big things and gaps?
- ✓ How do those changes get made?

As the group looks at all the research the goal is to organize it into what changes can be made and whether they are on the simple or major end. The next steps this group will be working on until the end of the year are:

- Finalize goals in line with committee vision statement
- Create objectives on how our committee plans to complete the goals
- List the resources and potential leads to obtain these objectives
- Invite speakers to future committee meetings.
  - ✓ September Meeting – Jason Thompson, Howard County Recreation and Parks

As a group there was a lot of talk about trails in Howard County. Recreation and Parks did a trail management training. Very interesting and there is a lot that goes into basic trail management. It is important for the group to educate ourselves by talking with people who do this for a living. Need to dissect the goals and objectives and also reach out to other Jurisdictions what they are doing for Age-Friendly. Reached out to the Park Superintendent and her vision is aligned with what are vision is. Come up with a one-stop shop so people can find this information.

- Dr. Ball was very excited about the things that he heard. And very impressed with the level of research and thoughtfulness. “And what I would call big thinking. Believe this group is going in the right direction and exceeded my hopes and working on many things. This group we will be able to make Howard County not just more Age-Friendly but an Age-Friendly model that future generations will be looking back. Thank you for this hard and important work.”

New business after Dr. Ball left the meeting:

Nicola stated that the goal for this meeting is to solidify what our goals will be. Based on our vision statement the group will need 3 to 5 goals. For every goal, 2-3 objectives. The group should decide together what the top goals are. And then how to go about reaching those goals. Start with brainstorming now and share our individual goals. Then will send out an email and choose the top 3 goals. At the next meeting the group will narrow the list down to move forward with the top 3 goals.

Marian suggested a round robin and see what everyone's goals are.

Nicola

- Education Educate people about what this County has
- getting the word out
- And create what the County doesn't have.

Alice

- putting all the information into one space to make people aware
- show them how to use the information
- take an inventory of what is available and look at whether they meet the qualifications of being;
  - Accessible, available
  - Quality of Upkeep
  - Quality of resources
- Make a checklist for all facilities. The objective would be if there is a need for changes, repair, upkeep this could be followed up by using checklist.
- Have an initiative for a Healthy Howard that would encourage people to get out and get healthy. And have partnerships with others throughout the County.

## Margaret

- Develop educational awareness campaign that informs the community
- Diverse experiences available in outdoor spaces and buildings.
- Maintain safe, clean, inclusive and accessible outdoor spaces
- Better lighting of paths and neighborhoods

## Mary Pat

- along with the education piece, need complete information on the trails about access, lighting and are they paved.
- doing an inventory of benches. Are they positioned correctly? A cost saving is to have benches donated in someone's honor.

## Matt

- include an app to just integrate all the useful information to be used by everyone.
- Develop strategies with local law enforcement regarding safety by having law enforcement and fire rescue at community events.
- Establish what is an Age-Friendly park by creating criteria and spread this seal of approval around. Have a seal on the sign that states this is an Age-Friendly park.
- Do not have enough outdoor physical exercise equipment. Columbia Association has a couple of fitness trails.
  - How do we have an Age-Friendly outdoor work out space. Goal would be to;
    - Initiate
    - Monitor
    - Document
    - Pilot for outdoor exercise equipment
    - Where do seniors walk and exercise the most? Would they like having a playground of exercise equipment.
    - Need to build partnerships with everyone across the board. Take the approach that this committee becomes the "GO TO" for outdoor spaces and this group helps build future programming.

## Marian

- definitely education
- Age-Friendly venues. How do we encourage people to get out walking? Working with the Medical Community, the health community recommending that people get out?
- Piggy back off of All Trails using its designations so that on the county website and physically at trails entrances people will know what type of trail it is and the conditions of the trail. ,
- Looking beyond what the ADA requires for buildings and using Universal Design in making County buildings and outdoor spaces usable and accessible for everyone.

Nicola stated all the ideas were fantastic and to please email them to Marian, Terri and Nicola.

- Nicola stated it will important to tie in everything whether it is a goal or an objective. To look at barriers and why people are not using the outdoor spaces and buildings and to use partnerships.
- Alice added that it would make sense to have a feedback space on the app/website. This way the community can let us know what is working and not working.
- Margaret stated that feedback could be under the Education campaign, like having a survey/feedback after they visit the facility/outdoor space.
- Matt stated the feedback piece will need to be developed under the objectives.

- Nicola said she would categorize the notes and see how many goals we have and organize the goals and objectives and see what still needs work and how to make them measurable.
- Terri suggested sending out what Marian and Nicola put together a few days before the meeting. So, everyone gets a chance to look at and be able to comment at the meeting.

Margaret reminded the group about what Dr. Ball said– to think innovatively and to think really big. We have the opportunity to create and enhance something special.

- Terri stated that one of things we need to remember is that everything we do today generations from now on get to enjoy. We have said from the beginning Age-Friendly serves all the generations now and in the future.
- Margaret stated that the bench idea in terms of purchasing a bench in someone's honor really speaks to that and is a fantastic idea.
- Mary Pat stated there are so many parks out there and trails. How is our group going to be able to evaluate them all?
  - Terri stated this is the work of many and we will need to expand the excitement about Age-Friendly and get more people invested. Whether it be a short or long term investment of time; for example, someone may join on to do a one-time walkthrough of 3 parks, take inventory and give their feedback.
- Alice believes some things need to be physically done and not virtually.
- Terri asked the group to look at the AARP Booklet about outdoor spaces– Creating Parks and Outdoor Spaces for all ages.
  - Marian stated it has a field study worksheet for outdoor spaces. There is also a walkability study to observe what is available or not.
- Terri stated that one of the things this group can think about is writing an action step to develop groups to go out and do assessments or the group can determine whether the assessment is something that needs to be done prior to the action plan. The action plan is a blue print that sets the stage for what is going to be done over the next 5-years to make the county more age-friendly. We need to get more of a grassroots effort together to have more individuals involved in our action steps. (Perhaps to do walkability and assessments.) Those individuals could be Age-Friendly ambassadors across the County. This group can do a lot of planning, but we need to have people strategically placed to share the work.
- Mary Pat stated we could have a certification and decide what the criteria is and use the checklist to send the ambassadors out.
- Terri mentioned that Age-Friendly Seattle Washington has a program that certifies businesses. Businesses have to meet certain criteria to get that seal of approval.
- Matt stated that this would be an objective that would be done over the next year.
- Marian stated that she agrees with Matt and thinks our objective should be in this process to lay out steps and look at the big picture. And as a group set the most critical aspects that are lacking or needs to be enhanced in the County to help promote us to the Age-Friendly status. Our goal is to have the brain power and the resources to pull this together. If our group gets caught up in the ground work we will not get to the next steps.
- Alice said there needs to develop the criteria for whoever is going to do the ground work.
- Terri suggested this group will develop or utilize existing criteria. And that within a certain time frame there will be an inventory done.
- Marian stated that the next meeting needs to be moved to a new date as Nicola and Matt can not make September 16, 2020.

## Homework Assignments:

Send goals and objectives to co-chairs  
Go through the booklet from AARP

**Next Meeting:** 09/24/2020 - 09:00 am