

Long Branch Partners Meeting Notes June 15, 2021

By zoom 3:30 pm

Attendees and introductions

Kelly Umaña, CHEER

Randi Drewry with Clifton Park Baptist Church/Silver Spring Hub

Sarah Bluestein - YMCA Youth and Family Services

Agar Mbianda, Community Engagement Manager at Manna Food Center.

Lisa Büttner, CHEER

Lynn Sobolov, Consultant, LBCAY initiative

Annie Tulkin, Long Branch community member

Luis Martinez, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Outreach

Maureen Larenas, HHS/CAA/TESS Center

Lauren Goldberg, Crossroads Community Food Network

Vanesa Pinto - Empowerment and Leadership Development Program Director (CHEER)

Febe Huevo with Montgomery County Public Libraries

Bruce Baker, CHEER (facilitator)

Hallelujah Ketema, CHEER (note taker)

Discussion of the Long Branch Community Center Closing Compensation Proposal

Many County facilities and services are reopening after the pandemic. The Long Branch Library opened yesterday. The Long Branch Community Center remains closed. We have been informed that it will continue to be a homeless shelter throughout the spring 2022. This place was a host for many programs for the health and well being of our community members. This community has been through a whole lot through the year and it desperately needs our resources and programming to come back. Waiting another year for another community center is not an option. As cooperative as the government is, they are not able to provide us with what we need so we have appealed to the County Executive to help the community recover from the pandemic. We have identified eight program areas. Our agenda today is to see what we as a community can do to fill these needs in each area so that we can ask the County to support us with funding and other services to compensate for the missing services and help the community recover from the pandemic.

· **After school programs for children and youth:** We need youth serving organizations and programs to expand their offerings to fill the gap with the loss of the community center for the coming school year.

Sarah Bluestein Described the Long Branch Collective Action for Youth program (LBCAY). This program supports youth programming which is used to see where improvements can be made in the long branch community. The closure of the community center has led to children not having access to the sporting services and activities. Funding can be used to fill this need. The LBCAY program is well into the second year and they have engaged teen leaders that allows them to get their opinions and their feedback. There are only a few low cost things to do. There is a cost attached to expanding programs. We have to be efficient with the resources that we have. LBCAY will prepare a report on the current resources available and youth programming and social needs that must be met to fulfill the dreams of the community. This report is expected to be completed in September.

Youth activities should not be limited to just after school therefore it should be inclusive of all programming for school. It includes art classes, weekend classes and such. There also needs to be follow up for safety purposes for the community center

Request from Bruce: what kinds of programming can we do to expand over the course of next year to fill in the gap to make sure our children have activities and programs.. We need to create as many mini grant proposals as possible to present to the County.

· **Community Festivals and Block Parties:** Every summer the Community center sponsors the Unity Festival and hosts many others. We need community organizations to expand their festivals and celebrations.

Two people who have been participating are Paul Grenier (Long Branch Business League) and Ameer Bearn (with Montgomery Housing Partnership and also lives in the community)- they led the long branch festival. They may be able to expand their activities. There are also various things we can do to bring back recreation to the community. We can extend this opportunity to civic associations such as New Hampshire Estates Civic Association and Sligo Branview.

· **Sports Programs:** We need sports programs and leagues of many types, especially soccer and basketball, but also other sports to sports leagues for Long Branch youth and adults.

We need soccer league, basketball teams and other sports programming that draw both youth and adults and provide for a place to do it.

The pool is open however it is hard to send children across from where there is a men's homeless shelter. Every man who stays at the shelter is given a background check to make sure they are not on the sex registry. MCPS is independent as far as deciding on space designation

Solutions

YFS- these are specific to certain schools and populations. This would not be able to fit most likely into the long branch but it can be duplicated as a framework. Some barriers for participation were cost and GPA required to qualify for the sporting programs as well as the availability of space. We need to investigate what spaces are available and how it can be funded or subsidized.

Takoma park youth soccer league- we can reach out to them to organize a few more teams in the long branch area. Impact Silver Spring has sports for Silver Spring so we can reach out to them to restore programs and help facilitate the creation of new teams.

Agar said that Manna is working with a community partner in Montgomery County who is promoting youth soccer. Elite Soccer Youth Development. They may be able to expand programming in Long Branch.

A park can be repurposed for this. Bicycling workshops can be set up to repair, learn to ride and establish a group. Outreach to find fixable bikes and teach children how to fix them. Police used to conduct a bike workshop, they were able to give instructions on how to ride a bike safely and do repairs. They also checked for safety points.

Make sure that we listen to the needs of the community and introduce diversity to allow the children to pick activities that they want to do as alternatives to soccer such as basketball, cooking classes, music, art, yoga, health and wellness etc.

Grayce Wiggins from the City of Takoma Park spoke about possible spaces in Takoma Park our city. There is a brand new city manager august 1st. They

may have spaces that might accommodate Long Branch. She also suggested doing things that the City has done, such as bike repair stations within the community.

Related to biking Annie suggested reaching out to Washington Area Bicyclists Association <https://waba.org/youth-education/> maybe connect with WABA and Peter Gray

Grayce received Questions of affordability for the program. She said the City has scholarships that are available for parents who are questioning affordability. There is a scholarship link for summer camps.

RecAssist- is it available for these camps and programs? Montgomery County provides : <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rec/howto/recassist.html>

Grayce replied saying that there is a low bar for entrance. For folks who have children there is a pre program to drop off their children before 7 and ends at 6pm.

There is a similar program with scholarship applications; by contacting the department of immigration and other resources there are subsidies that exist for families even with the low cost opportunities that already exist.

· **Sports Facilities:** We need gyms with basketball courts and other spaces in or near Long Branch. to conduct winter basketball leagues and other sports and fitness activities. Can the County provide private gym memberships to people who would otherwise be using the community center gym facilities?

Facilities and fields as well as gyms are needed; make use of existing facilities. Clifton park baptist church has a gym for a community basketball league, takoma academy has a full court basketball court. Is it possible to conduct programming at these locations?

Maureen suggested St. Camillus but that is a little far Also, Sligo Adventist or the Adventist college.

· **Senior Programs:** We need space for our Senior Center. Can we use the TESS Center and/or another facility, such as a local Church or a vacant store front?

· **Activation of Parks.** We need expanded and extended support for programs that can be held in parks around fitness, arts, education and recreation.

Maureen suggested activating a "Red Shirts program to do some clean up, landscaping and even provide extra "eyes" on the neighborhood.
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/silverspring/redshirts.html>

· **Public Safety:** We need expanded police support and police community outreach to help the community maintain safety in priority community spaces that are being used in lieu of the community center.

· **Expanded Services to Homeless:** We need expanded mental health, substance abuse programs, and employment and case management supports to draw homeless out of our parks and streets and into supported housing to make the community space safe and welcoming. Amanda Harris of the Department of Health and Human Services Homeless Services has been responding to security needs and how services are offered to the homeless to protect the community.

A lot of the emergency services on June 30th are ending, evictions are occurring, to keep our eyes open for this occurrence. The existing support services might be gone and the homeless services will need to be reinforced.

There is a Montgomery county housing rental assistance program that can assist families with upto 12,000 dollars that can be accessed by dialing 311. There are also pro bono legal services. There are about 2500 cases on the dockets each day.