

Minutes

Sandy Spring Civic Association
Ross Body Community Center*, Sandy Spring, MD 20860
(Meeting Virtually During Covid-19 Pandemic) *

January 11, 2021

Attendance: Board Members – Dr. Daryl Thorne, President; Basile “Whit” Whitaker, Vice President; Christine Wilson, Treasurer; Audrey Dutton, Parliamentarian (Absent); Douglas Farquhar, Recording and Correspondence Secretary

Attendance: General body – Approximately 15

Guest(s): TJ Senker, President, Medstar Montgomery Medical Center (MMMC), Claire Piccirillo, VP, Patient Care Services, MMMC; Fred Finelli, Medical Director, MMMC

Attendance Total (approximate): 23

Meeting called to order: 6:32 p.m. by Daryl

Agenda

Old Business:

December 2020 Minutes approved without amendments

Ongoing Business/Committee Reports (Standing items):

Treasurer's Report – (Report provided by Christine Wilson*, moved to be accepted by D. Farquhar)

- Membership Checking - \$203.60
- Scholarship Checking - \$189.29
- Scholarship Savings - \$2,281.17
- Scholarship CD - \$2,576.38

Transportation – (Christine relayed report provided by Marie Slater)

- Bike pathway/sidewalks along Route 108: An update on design progress is expected in mid-January.

Scholarship – (Christine provided report)

- The Scholarship Committee completed the application for students to apply for college scholarships, and will be disseminating information about the scholarship to churches, schools, and other community groups.

New Business

Daryl reported on her goals for the upcoming year, as discussed and accepted by the Executive Committee:

- We would like to create and send out to members of the SSCA, and other neighbors and organizations, a survey designed to solicit ideas about what respondents would like SSCA to do
- We would like to see the SSCA place a higher priority on providing or participating in community services
- We would like to try to get more young people in our community involved in the activities and membership of the SSCA. Daryl mentioned that she has spoken with the Student Council President at Sherwood High School who would like to get involved, and to get others involved. There was a consensus that the student body president should be invited to the next SSCA meeting.
- We aim to revise the bylaws. The Executive Committee will review proposed revisions and share them with the membership.
- Daryl wants to revitalize the Committees, which now exist in the bylaws in name only, but a lot of the work that is being planned fits squarely within the portfolio of these committees.
- We want to redesign and reinvigorate the SSCA website (an effort that has already made substantial improvements).

Asked for suggestions, one member said that they would like to see an effort on the part of SSCA to encourage residents to register to vote, and to cast ballots, inasmuch as Sandy Spring is now classified as a “voting desert.”

MedStar Montgomery Medical Center report on COVID

The regular agenda was then interrupted, as prearranged, so that representatives of MedStar Montgomery Medical Center (MMMC), formerly Montgomery General Hospital, could report on COVID (for readers in the future, COVID is a worldwide novel coronavirus that has killed more than 360,000 residents of the United States and millions worldwide).

T.J. Senker, MMMC President, provided most of the report. He recalled that Montgomery General Hospital was founded during the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic, so there was some overlap in mission in the 2020 COVID pandemic. He said that MMMC admitted its first COVID patient on March 6, 2020, and, by early May, had more than 60 inpatients with COVID, expanding beyond the 12-bed Intensive Care Unit to other negative-pressure isolation patient rooms in the hospital. The Intensive Care population increased from a normal load of four to six patients to 28 last spring. The COVID population decreased in the summer, but since then increased to a peak of 52 patients in December, and is now averaging about 35 patients on any given day. Last spring, the hospital had discontinued providing elective procedures, but was able to resume accommodating elective procedures over the summer and is still doing so. The reason for doing so, he said, was that when people were not coming to the hospital in a timely fashion, they would arrive later than they should have, and sicker than they were.

As to vaccinations, “front-line workers” at MMMC (emergency room personnel, COVID care personnel) have received their first vaccination, and other health care providers are now receiving the vaccine. He said that the State is in the process of finalizing priorities for vaccination after health care workers, and seems to be headed toward vaccinating people at least 75 years old soon. He added that hospitals in Montgomery County are working closely together.

TJ added that there is a lot more testing available now, and every patient is tested as they are admitted and before surgical procedures. Wellness testing is required daily for “all of our associates.” He said that the significant problem for the hospital now is the exhaustion of front-line providers, and the difficulty in securing assistance from traveling nurses because COVID is now rampaging through Western Maryland and the Eastern Shore, pre-empting the availability of travelling personnel.

Questions:

Is it safe to come to the hospital and neighboring physician offices for routine care? Yes, said TJ, he feels safer coming to the hospital than being in the community, because of the extraordinary testing measures and vigilance about wearing masks and social distancing. He and Claire added that the “worst thing you can do is to delay your care,” because you may get sicker than necessary. TJ added that because almost all health care workers have now received at least their first vaccine, they are probably the safest people to be around.

Have any MMMC personnel contracted COVID at the hospital? Some have tested positive, and it is not certain how they were exposed. However, good evidence that it was acquired in the community outside the hospital is that no emergency room personnel have contracted COVID, and every COVID patient admitted to the hospital was first seen in the emergency room.

Have you seen more cases after the holidays, due to family gatherings? Yes. He said many cases are acquired through family gatherings, and “we have seen entire families test positive” because patients were so comfortable with their family members that they relaxed precautions. Weddings, funerals, and other family events are huge sources of contagion.

Is the hospital dangerously close to capacity? Not in terms of space (MMMC is now at about 75% of capacity), but, yes, in terms of staffing, because of the unavailability of qualified temporary workers and the sheer exhaustion of full-time staff.

Should people with allergies get the vaccination? Yes, extraordinary precautions are being taken to ensure that, should a vaccination cause a serious side effect, appropriate care is nearby (epinephrine is at hand, “Crash Carts” are located where vaccinations are administered, in the hospital). All people who are vaccinated are required to be observed in the clinic for 15 minutes after receiving the shot, in order to address potential serious adverse side effects. However, Claire said that she had administered about 1,650 vaccines over the prior three and one half weeks, and had seen no serious side effects. One employee exhibited scratchiness in her throat upon receiving the second dose of the vaccination, but that resolved without intervention. Nearly all the side effects were soreness at the site of the injection, with occasionally weakness or fatigue, more frequently with the second vaccination dose than the first.

Should those who have been vaccinated continue to wear masks? Yes, definitely, until herd immunity is achieved (meaning, 80% of the population has been vaccinated). It is unclear whether those who have been vaccinated may still carry the disease.

How accurate is the rapid test for COVID? The antigen test is effective for those who are asymptomatic, the PCR test is accurate for those who are symptomatic.

Should we try to get on the list for vaccinations, even if we do not fit into the priority group now being vaccinated, so that we can be called to come in promptly because vaccines will otherwise go to waste? It couldn't hurt, and even some hospital personnel were able to be vaccinated early because they had indicated a willingness to come in on short notice. The issue is that the vaccines, once removed from extremely cold storage conditions, must be administered within five hours, and the vials contain more than one dose, generally, so the remainder can be pooled to create additional doses.

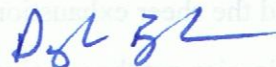
The MMMC representatives were thanked for their thorough and helpful report. The regular meeting agenda was resumed.

Nadine Mort agreed to work with a committee to encourage voter registration and participation among our neighbors. John Salzberg said that Friends House had huge success in registering new residents to vote.

We then had a long discussion about an effort being made by a developer to transform the Stabler and Moore Buildings in Sandy Spring (originally built to house Montgomery Mutual Insurance Company, now being used for rental offices and studios) into an independent-living senior center. Several members had been in contact with the developer proposing to convert the facility into studio or one-bedroom condominium units for seniors who are capable of living independently. Daryl will contact the local representative to see if she can attend the March SSCA meeting and provide a report, and answer questions.

The meeting was adjourned on Motion of Daryl, seconded by Kathleen Wheeler, at 7:57.

Respectfully submitted,



Doug Farquhar
Recording Secretary

Accepted on Feb 8, 2021.