



MEETING MINUTES / 20 April 2021

****MEETING WAS CONDUCTED HYBRID VIA ZOOM DUE TO COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS****

ATTENDANCE:

Present: Baldwin, Lopez, Sarg, Sutton, Lardizzone, Magner, Lewis, Farley, McMullen, Bradley, Miller, Phillips

Excused: Camarillo, Seppala

Guests: Vince Kane (Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center), Jacob Dillon (Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center), Carol Erhart (DVH), Dave Skocik (Friends of Delaware Veterans), Pat Cerchio (First State Military Women)

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS:

(Baldwin) The nationwide issue with DD-214's at the National Archives is a fiasco. I called Senator Carper's office the other day. The fire at National Archives was 50 years ago. They have not figured out a better way to identify a veteran. Spouses are struggling to gather information for veterans after they die. This needs to be corrected as soon as possible.

MEETING MINUTES:

Prior minutes motioned to approve by Sarg seconded by Sutton.

ADMINISTRATIVE REMARKS:

Nothing to report

Wilmington VAMC – Vince Kane, Director

(Kane) The vaccine remains front and center. The Wilmington VA has 62% of veterans vaccinated, which is higher than state and national levels. We have vaccine available for all veterans in need. The Wilmington VA is in the top 5 in the country regarding vaccinations. Our prevalence rate is over 10%, which is concerning, and we need to continue to get the word out. In March the President passed a bill allowing us to vaccinate all veterans, dependents, and spouses. The garage will open on Monday, 26 April, ahead of schedule and on budget which will afford an extra 370 parking spaces will be available to mitigate the wait for parking. Construction is underway for the new clinical support building that will allow service consolidation. The issues related to the VBA building is delayed due to staff, construction, and Covid-19. Space has been provided to VSO's on the first floor to allow private in-person meetings. Dover CBOC is open. We continue to search for providers for Dover and grow our services. We are working on some Townhalls to get the word out as much as possible. We did have veterans impacted by the J&J vaccine, however no severe reactions. Please continue to get the word out on the VA vaccinations. I am slotted to speak with the Governor next month regarding veteran suicide prevention and awareness.

(Baldwin) Who oversees the incarcerated veterans with the VA?

(Kane) That falls under social work, best point of contact is Cecilia Gonzalez.

(Farley) The Dover Mayor and the Crisis Awareness Challenge is designed to combat veteran's suicide. It is refreshing to hear the VA is stepping up as well.

(Kane) It's good news. It's more than time.

(Lewis) When will the office for the VSO's open?

(Kane) We opened 3 offices already. VBA is coordinating who is available to come back. New building renovations is delayed until August.

(Lopez) We have Ted Johnson and Matt Jacobs as active parts of our committee for Crisis Awareness and want to continue collaboration with the VA.

(Kane) Absolutely, we will continue to collaborate to create a safety net so needed.

(Sarg) What's the status on the imaging in Dover CBOC?

(Kane) All requests have been made for funding and authorization. You will be notified as I find out more. We received no push back yet.

(McMullen) Is there a listing of what will be at the Dover CBOC?

(Kane) There is a listing. We are anticipating growth and are recruiting physical therapy at this time. We can be sure to delineate what services are there in our webpage. We are pushing hard to get more services there.

(Baldwin) Is there a 3 month back up at the optometry, have you heard about that?

(Kane) I have not, Which clinic is that?

(Baldwin) Dover.

(Kane) I would not be surprised due to individuals moving from Wilmington VAMC to Dover CBOC. There will be a back up as we shift. I will get back to you with an answer on the delay.

(Lardizzone) When will the VSO meetings resume?

(Kane) We are starting some outreach events. We are still at level 2 for reopening. We will look at it again in late May, early June for face-to-face. I would like assistance from you all. We are working towards providing pins to Vietnam veterans to recognize the sacrifice of these great men and women.

(Baldwin) Thank you, we will relay that information to the Vietnam Veterans of America. Jacob, do you have anything to add?

(Dillon) We are doing a Covid-19 vaccine clinic in Dover CBOC on Friday for all veterans, veteran's spouses, and caregivers. It has really opened up to who can get vaccines from the VA.

(Skocik) I would like to thank you for sending your releases of information. That information is providing that information to the masses.

(Dillon) Yes sir, thank you.

Delaware Veterans Home (DVH) – Carole Erhart, Director

(Erhart) We have no active Covid-19 cases in the building. Kent county is up to 6%, and we have 0%. We test our staff 3 times a week. We are open to admissions with 5 admissions so far. 98.2% of our residents are vaccinated and 62% of our staff are vaccinated. We recently had 3 false positives of Covid-19, so we have been able to maintain visitations. Families are adjusting well to new regulations on visitations. The RFP for bid is out on the dental clinic. We received \$316K of the \$1B veterans funding. We will be changing electronic medical records, that contract should be resolved in the next 2-3 weeks. The generator project has been delayed to June due to shipping.

(Lardizzone) What is the status of the property?

(Erhart) We have a meeting on Thursday to discuss the project. The foodbank is planning to purchase the property, which is concerning to us at this time.

(Baldwin) The Foodbank is open to talks with us on how we can make it work.

(Erhart) Do you know how much has been spent?

(Baldwin) No figures have been provided. How many residents are at the home?

(Erhart) 53 with 1 admission tomorrow.

(Baldwin) How many are being admitted per week?

(Erhart) 3-5 per week is the goal. We should be at capacity by mid to late June.

(Baldwin) What is your staffing level?

(Erhart) We are overstaffed at this time. We are having a job fair on Friday to prepare for the upcoming increase.

(Farley) Where and when is the job fair going to be?

(Erhart) The job fair will be held this Friday at the Veterans Home under the pavilion.

(Sarg) Will wages be competitive with the civilian sector?

(Erhart) Not completely, but staff will be receiving a \$1k bonus based on the governor's budget.

(Baldwin) Thank you for your time.

Home of the Brave, Director Jessica Finan:

Not present

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

(Baldwin) Introduces Dave Skocik, president, Friends of Delaware Veterans.

(Skocik) Thank you, The Delaware Veterans Coalition and Trust Fund website has been revised. We are planning to have the dinner in November at the Modern Maturity Center. We are monitoring legislation. The Coalition is working on better assistance to incarcerated veterans. We had a phone conference with Sussex Correctional and found 60 veterans are set to be released statewide in 2021. Next month will be the 10th anniversary of the Veterans Coalition and the Veterans Court. We are setting up a ceremony for that.

(Baldwin) Robert Hill and I are working together to make a large donation to the endowment fund. Thank you. Pat Cerchio, do you have anything.

(Cerchio) Thank you for the support for the World War II veteran drive by. The flowers were wonderful, and the veteran really enjoyed it.

(Baldwin) Thank you, Pat.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Bear Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Commissioner Magner:

Interments – 108 (+18)

(Magner) I will be taking 2 more flags to the cemetery tomorrow.

(Baldwin) Commissioner Lewis and I are anxiously waiting to get over there. We will let you know when we raise the flag at the Bear cemetery.

(Lewis) Thank you.

Millsboro Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Commissioner Bradley:

Interments – 40 (+6)

Health and Human Services, Commissioner Sarg:

(Sarg) Copies Delaware Joining Forces alert for FEMA funeral reimbursements were sent to all of you via email.

(Baldwin) Thank you.

Legislative Affairs, Commissioner McMullen:

(McMullen) There is nothing on the website as to where bills are going, but they are moving. HB12 is out of committee.

(Baldwin) We will move forward with legislation for military retirement pay tax exemption. We have a Senator willing to sponsor the bill and he is having his lawyers review the bill in its entirety. This will take some time and most likely be in the next 2-3 years. His idea is 25% over 4 years. As long as a bill is produced for legislation to produce a no vote, that's what is important. Veterans in Delaware have dropped from 78k to 68k since 2014.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS:

DVTF Previous Month: Applications 2; Granted 1 (50%); Awarded \$1,720.85; Balance - \$61,536.54

ORGANIZATIONAL REPORTS:

Commissioner McMullen (Air Force Sergeants Association - AFSA)

Dover chapter is still in in flux. New president has been elected.

Assistance is being provided to the Veterans Home.

The Division 1 Professional Airman's Conference will be virtual Saturday, 24 April 2021 from 10am-2pm.

The International Conference will be held in-person 24-29 July 2021 in Orlando, FL.

Commissioner Miller (American Legion - AL)

Plans for the Convention for the American Legion has been finalized for 9-10 July 2021. It will be held hybrid. 72 delegates and officers permitted to attend in person.

Elections have been opened for the organization.

Flag Day Ceremony is being worked on in collaboration with Millsboro Veterans Cemetery.

Commissioner Bradley (American Veterans - AMVETS)

Contact was made by Chad Brewer, Henlopen Garden Cemetery on route 1 requesting grave flag donations. We donated 144 flags. He is also searching for all branches flags if anyone is willing to donations.

Post 2 is beginning the shift to non-smoking. A smoking room is being created with gaming machines.

Post 2 Ladies Auxiliary plans to donate to the Dover Mayor's Crisis Awareness Challenge.

Commissioner Lardizzone (Disabled American Veterans - DAV)

87 claims, 7 DIC claims with 5 widows granted for DIC.

State convention will be held 14 May 2021 from 8:30am-4pm in Camden Department Headquarters.

No charge for the convention.

I will attend the Connecticut State Convention on 10-12 June 2021, and the New York State Convention on 13-15 June 2021.

Commissioner Farley (Marine Corps League - MCL)

This past weekend the MCL had its convention in Rehoboth Beach. It was held in person and I was invited to be a guest speaker at the event. While there I set up an information table regarding the Crisis Awareness Challenge. Which will be covered in our national magazine.

There is considerable interest from MD, VA, WV, NC, and Washington D.C. in raising awareness for veteran's suicide. I explained how we are doing it in Delaware and have garnered national attention. (Baldwin) Commissioner's Farley and Lopez have been leading the charge for the Crisis Awareness Challenge. They have done a magnificent job with it. Commissioner Farley is also working with Veterans Homelessness. I commend you all for the work you are doing.

Commissioner Sarg (Military Officers Association of America - MOAA)

Organization has been dormant and have had no physical meetings. Held consecutive virtual meetings for policy and programs coordination.

MOAA scholarship program for \$7k is usually presented at a banquet. However, the scholarships will be awarded through school programs.

April is the time for MOAA to storm the hill. However, due to Covid-19 a program called Advocacy-in-Action will be in effect. Virtual meetings will be held in May rather than storming offices. Topics to include comprehensive toxic exposure programs, young adults in Tricare, and basic needs for junior

enlisted military. Junior enlisted live below the poverty line until they reach E4-E5 and families are beginning to use the Foodbank for assistance.

Commissioner Magner (Military Order of the Purple Heart - MOPH)

Organization is still operating virtually.

No meeting will be held this month.

Department will hold their Convention 6 May 2021 at 7-9pm.

JROTC program is wrapping up in New Castle. Medals are being mailed due to Covid-19 this year in hopes we can resume next year.

The Purple Heart City Project is underway. Newark is completed and Dover is underway.

Contacted the Mayor of Wilmington for a proclamation. Requested for 6 August 2021, which is

Purple Heart Day. Will contact Georgetown in Sussex County regarding being a Purple Heart City.

Working with the Mayor of Newark for signs as a Purple Heart City.

(Farley) You may want to consider speaking with the Mayor of Rehoboth Beach.

(Magner) we have considered speaking with the National Guard base in Sussex County and will consider speaking with the Mayor of Rehoboth Beach as well.

Commissioner Phillips (Veterans of Foreign Wars - VFW)

Organization is finalizing elections.

Preparing for state convention 18-19 June 2021 at the Crown Plaza in Wilmington, DE. It will be limited due to Covid-19.

Publicly thanks the Commission for the information provided.

Commissioner Lopez (At Large, affiliated with Delaware Veterans)

The veteran's response team briefings have started up again. The next one is 13 May 2021 in Dover. I will be speaking with Miguel Marcos and Mike Schute. Will brief the Crisis Awareness Challenge while there.

DelVets is holding Hybrid meetings. Officers are installed. New Commander is doing well getting up to speed.

DelVets sponsored 2 \$1k sponsorships.

Bear Cemetery Memorial Day event is under way and I will be in communication with her.

Crisis Awareness held it's reading of the proclamation. The presentation went well.

Crisis awareness is planning a walk at Leg Hall 22 May 2021 at 9-9:30am. This leads up to proclamation week.

Next Crisis Awareness meeting will be 5 May 2021. The information will be sent via email. Latest suicide rates will be sent to all Commissioner's. 2018 is the latest official report.

Will brief Crisis Awareness at the next DJF meeting 20 May 2021 at 8:30am.

(Farley) DJF is mentioned often. We should invite Kristine Kubic to the meeting.

(Baldwin) Certainly, that is possible.

Commissioner Sutton (At Large)

Senator Trey Paradee, head of the Joint Finance Commission would like to express his support of the DCVA and our legislative concerns.

Publicly thanks Chair Baldwin and Vice Chair Lopez for the scheduled orientation.

Commissioner Lewis (At Large)

5 claims through VA.

Greater Oaks Charter School National Honors Society delivered care packages on Friday to Delaware Center for Homeless Veterans, the Pearl Center, and the CLC in Wilmington.

NABVETS is having a Medal of Honor recognition ceremony at Brandywine State Park 8 May 2021 at 1-3pm.

Concerns are rising regarding the VSO offices in the Wilmington VAMC.

Commissioner Baldwin (Vietnam Veterans of America – VVA)

Nothing to report

Commissioner Seppala (At Large, affiliated with Military Order of World Wars - MOWW)

Not present

Commissioner Camarillo (At Large)

Not present

TERM COMPLETION:

(Baldwin) Laurie James has taken over the position for assignments and appointments for the DCVA.

EVENTS:

Bridge Memorial Day Ceremony 30 May 2021 at 10:30am. In-person approved for 250 people.

Bear Cemetery Memorial Day Ceremony 29 May 2021 at 10:30am. In-person Approved for 250 People.

Flag Day will be conducted by the American Legion at the Millsboro Cemetery 14 June 2021 at 10:00am.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Nothing to report

NEW BUSINESS:

Nothing to report

ITEMS FOR THE GOOD AND WELFARE OF THE ORGANIZATION:

(Baldwin) Moving forward Commission meetings will be held Hybrid via Zoom.

SPECIAL SESSION:

Nothing to report

EXECUTIVE MEETING:

**Thursday, 13 May 2021 at 1000
Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs**

NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday, 18 May 2021 at 1000

LOCATION:

Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs