



MEETING MINUTES / 18 May 2021

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

ATTENDANCE:

Present: Lopez, Sarg, Lardizzone, McMullen, Magner, Camarillo, Seppala, Sutton, Miller, Lewis, Phillips

Excused: Baldwin, Bradley, Farley

Guests: Jacob Dillon (Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center), Carol Erhart (DVH), Jessica Finan (Home of the Brave), Dave Skocik (Friends of Delaware Veterans), Pat Cerchio (First State Military Women)

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS:

(Lopez) I will be heading this meeting as Commissioner Baldwin will not be with us today.

MEETING MINUTES:

Prior minutes motioned to approve by Lardizzone seconded by McMullen.

ADMINISTRATIVE REMARKS:

Nothing to report

Wilmington VAMC – Jacob Dillon, Public Affairs

(Dillon) Of those that utilize the VA for primary care, 66% are vaccinated in Delaware. We provided almost 31,000 vaccines to veterans. Last week we sent out 6,300 letters to veterans that have not been vaccinated offering the vaccine or to let us know if they are already vaccinated. We continue to provide vaccines in each of our clinics. We are also vaccinating all veterans, spouses, and caregivers under the Saves Lives Act. To date over 1,000 have been vaccinated. Are there any questions regarding vaccines?

(Lopez) Are there plans to do more mobile unit events for veterans that have transportation issues?

(Dillon) Due to the availability of the vaccine our large-scale events will be scaled back.

(Lopez) Has anything changed in operations due to Covid-19?

(Dillon) There are plans for increased foot traffic. We are preparing as the community opens up.

(Lopez) Thank you.

(Camarillo) Is the VA taking new applications for the CLC?

(Dillon) I encourage all applications but will have to follow up with a reply.

(Camarillo) Thank you.

(Dillon) We are working toward veteran's homelessness and affordable housing through HUD to increase available housing. We are offering free HUD education to landlords on why and how to accept vouchers. We will publicize and highlight this further the 2nd week of June. Our parking garage opened April 26, 2021. It was finished ahead of schedule and on budget. It is 4 stories over 300 spots, with veterans parking prioritized on the first level. The garage has direct access to the hospital. Also, we are beginning construction on a 32,000 square foot clinical support building, anticipated completion in Fall of 2022. The VBA building is about 40% complete. Rehabilitation fell behind due to Covid-19. We are working towards adding imaging services to the Dover CBOC as it is a hot topic in the community.

(McMullen) Are you still working on getting specialists to the Dover CBOC?

(Dillon) We are working on staffing to ensure reduced travel for our veterans.

(Sarg) Have there been any significant adverse reactions to the Vaccinations?

(Dillon) Outside of the normal side effects, we have not seen any adverse reactions to the vaccine.

(Sarg) There may be reluctance due to possible adverse reactions.

(Dillon) We are doing a fabulous job getting the vaccine to the community and want to continue, so let your respective veterans know we are here to help.

(Sarg) When does your next Fiscal Year begin?

(Dillon) October 1.

(Sarg) Are you on a yearly recurring budget?

(Dillon) I cannot speak to that. I will follow up on that.

(Skocik) Thank you for forwarding last week's webinar.

(Dillon) Absolutely, there is so much information out there and we want all veterans know what is available to them.

(Lopez) Thank you for always keeping us informed.

(Dillon) Absolutely, thank you.

Delaware Veterans Home (DVH) – Carole Erhart, Director

(Lopez) Carole is not in the meeting currently. However, I know Commissioner's Sarg and Lardizzone have gone to meetings regarding the additional property there. Chair Baldwin wanted me to inform the Commission for the Veterans Home to receive additional money from the VA they would need a "shovel ready" project. Did either Sarg or Lardizzone want to speak on behalf of the Veterans Home?

(Lardizzone) A generator that can operate the entire building is on order. There was a special meeting held with the Foodbank CEO regarding the property next to the Veterans Home. The meeting went very well as the Foodbank CEO, Milford Mayor, and Milford City Manager worked to make changes that benefit the Veterans Home. As far as admissions, Commissioner Sarg and myself attended the last meeting which worked through upcoming admissions. This meeting went well as Carole is eager to increase the admissions rate for Delaware's veterans. To be noted, Delaware's Veterans Home is the only one in the nation to have Zero Covid-19 related deaths.

(Lopez) Thank you. There is a planning community meeting tonight for the Foodbanks upcoming building.

(Camarillo) I have a veteran with rapidly deteriorating health and in need of full-time medical care. Is there a way to expediate the process to see the cost and to get him in?

(Lardizzone) It is dependent upon his service connection, and health insurance.

(Camarillo) He is not service connected.

(Lardizzone) His cost will most likely be split down the middle. He will need skilled care as this is not a retirement home per say.

(Camarillo) Thank you.

(Erhart) Our census is up to 56. We will have another Commissioners meeting in 1 to 2 weeks. We are in the process of getting ready to open the Blue Unit. We will have an approved dentist position July 1. The manager of the dental suite project has been selected; I do not have the name with me at this time. We have had our meetings with the Foodbank and believe will be good neighbors.

(Lopez) For the VA monies to be provided to the Veterans Home, a shovel ready project needs to be made to receive funding. Commissioner Baldwin asked me to relay the message.

(Erhart) I will follow up with Chuck.

(Sarg) Do you have a zoom meeting with the planning commission?

(Erhart) Yes.

(Sarg) Can you send me an invite please?

(Erhart) Yes.

(Lopez) Could you send me the link as well?

(Erhart) Yes.

Home of the Brave, Director Jessica Finan:

(Finan) We have 15 individuals at our male facilities, with 6 on the waitlist. We are utilizing all our resources to house them while they wait. Our female facility has 3 veterans and 2 children, a 2-year-old boy and a 2-year-old girl. We have 3 beds open there. We are looking to restart our RV outreach program in September that was halted due to Covid-19. Once I have more information, I will send that out to everyone.

(Lopez) Maybe we can have you at the Stand Down?

(Finan) We plan to be at the Stand Down with the RV as well.

(Lopez) You should receive a packet in the mail with Crisis Awareness information. Let me know if you need any more.

(Finan) Thank you.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

(Lopez) Introduces Dave Skocik, President, Friends of Delaware Veterans.

(Skocik) There are many events coming up in the month of May. The Veterans Coalition and the Delaware Veterans Court will be holding a press conference to commemorate 10 years of the Veterans Court with Judge Witham as speaker at 12pm on May 26 on the steps of the “old state house” in Dover. On May 31 at 2pm Chapter 850 VVA will host a Memorial Day event. We will have a combat veteran from Vietnam as speaker. The Coalition is also reaching out to incarcerated veterans with about 70 incarcerated veterans to be released this year. This Friday the Veterans Watchmaker School will graduate 3 students.

(Lopez) Thank you. Introduces Pat Cerchio, First State Military Women.

(Cerchio) One of our WWII veterans, Polly Wilson pass away at 102 years of age. She was very active in the organization.

(Lopez) Thank you, I appreciate you signing on to the Warrior Scholar Project meeting as I was unable to attend.

(Cerchio) I’m not sure how much this will affect Delaware as a large portion of women veterans have degrees and they only focus on enlisted and undergraduate degrees.

(Lopez) Thank you. Christine Kubic has an open invite to speak at this meeting as she operates the Delaware Joining Forces program. The next DJF meeting is this Thursday at 8:30am. I will publicly thank her for all from the Commission for all she does for the state.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Bear Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Commissioner Magner:

Interments – 88 (-20)

(Magner) I attended a funeral for my best friend, an enlisted Navy corpsman, at Bear Cemetery last Wednesday. The veteran’s family was very impressed with the service. I passed their remarks on to Barbara.

Millsboro Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Commissioner Bradley:

Comments made by Magner

Interments – 36 (-4)

Health and Human Services, Commissioner Sarg:

(Sarg) About 2 years ago the state of Delaware authorized \$1,000 per year for dental coverage for individuals on Medicaid which was not fully implemented due to Covid-19. Last month, myself and Liz Byers-Jiron got together with the State Dental Society and are organizing a list of referrals in the state who are willing to accept veterans and developing a payment process. Right now, we have 130 dentists signed up and willing to participate in the program. The State Dental Society is on board and we meet again in July.

Legislative Affairs, Commissioner McMullen:

(McMullen) Legislation hasn't moved and it looks like it's not going to. The Bond Committee and Budget Committee must meet before they can look at our bills. Our bills are out to be voted on now, but it looks like they won't until June. That's all I have at this time.

(Sarg) A bill for military retirement tax exemption is going to be written for the next legislative session.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS:

DVTF Previous Month: Applications 4; Granted 4 (100%); Awarded \$9,745.25; Balance - \$54,878.49 (Matticks) We are no longer pulling from the donations line for the Trust Fund as we prioritize the state appropriated funds. The headquarters will be back in the office full time beginning June 1, 2021.

ORGANIZATIONAL REPORTS:

Commissioner McMullen (Air Force Sergeants Association - AFSA)

April 7, Dover AFB Chapter visited the Delaware Veterans Home.

April 24, Division 1 held a professional conference and convention.

May 7, Dover AFB Chapter held virtual general membership meeting.

May 7, Dover AFB Chapter hosted a military spouse appreciate luncheon.

May 15, Dover AFB Chapter supported 15th Annual "Race for Warriors" held on Dover AFB.

International Professional Airman's Conference to be held July 24-29 in Orlando, FL.

Commissioner Miller (American Legion - AL)

June 14, at 10:00am Flag Day Ceremony is being hosted by the American Legion at the Millsboro Veterans Cemetery.

Commissioner Bradley (American Veterans - AMVETS)

Not Present

Commissioner Lardizzone (Disabled American Veterans - DAV)

May 14, DAV held state convention.

Voted in 2nd female commander for 2021-2022.

After talks with Director Kane, DAV will have a VSO at the Dover CBOC on Thursdays by appointment only.

67 regular claims and 7 DIC claims filed for April.

I will attend the Connecticut State Convention June 10-12.

I will attend the New York State Convention June 13-16.

National Convention to be held in Tampa, FL July 29-August 4

Commissioner Farley (Marine Corps League - MCL)

Not Present

Commissioner Sarg (Military Officers Association of America - MOAA)

MOAA National replaced the yearly April "storming of the hill" with a series of virtual sessions called "Advocacy in Action".

Items covered is legislative reform for toxic exposure from burn pits, Tricare coverage for dependents age 21-26, and temporary financial assistance for lower ranking enlisted as the salary is at or below the poverty line for ranks E1-E4.

(McMullen) AFSA lobbyists are advocating for lower ranking enlisted financial assistance as well.

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

May 6, MOPH Department of Delaware held their convention.

The Officer slate for 2021-2022 will remain the same.

MOPH National Convention will be held in Charleston, WV August 2-4, possibly hybrid.

I still host Friday veterans Zoom meeting for group at Vets Center.

I attend a Thursday group at the Elkton Vets Center, which never closed during the pandemic.

Commissioner Phillips (Veterans of Foreign Wars - VFW)

VFW State Convention is coming up and will be a 2-day event.

I will be at the Wilmington Memorial Day Parade playing Taps.

Will the Commissioners be invited to the Memorial Day Bridge Event?

(Lopez) Yes. Commissioners are welcome to attend.

Commissioner Baldwin (Vietnam Veterans of America – VVA)

Not Present

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

April 20, MOWW held a hybrid Chapter meeting.

April 20, MOWW held a hybrid Regional meeting.

New Chapter Commander is Joel Effinger.

Delaware Military Museum 2021 Lecture Program is well underway, held every 2nd Saturday of the month.

Delaware Military Museum June 12 lecture will be hosted by William Manthorpe, Delaware Naval Heroes.

Delaware Military Museum July 10 lecture will be hosted by General Frank Ianni, Two Tours in Vietnam.

Delaware Military Museum WWII room is close to completion.

Delaware Military Museum Civil War room is close to completion.

I attended a funeral at the Bear Cemetery for a Korean War Veteran. The Family was impressed with the service.

Commissioner Lopez (At Large, affiliated with Delaware Veterans)

Delvets Post 2 will place flags on veterans' graves at Holy Cross Cemetery in Dover.

Crisis Awareness Walk is this Saturday @ 9:00am at City Hall in Dover.

I briefed at the Veterans Response Team Briefing at Dover Police Department with Cecilia Gonzalez.

Commissioner Sutton (At Large)

I had an inquiry regarding laptop donations to veterans.

Can a phone appointment be made at the OVS headquarters for those that cannot make it in physically?

(Matticks) That can be arranged, unless it is a first-time meeting for VA claims with one of our VSO's. That would require an in-person visit. Additionally, the Trust Fund may be used for a laptop donation depending on how the application is completed.

(Sarg) One of the issues of donating laptops is having a cleared hard drive.

(Camarillo) If a veteran is below a certain income limit the VA will provide them with a new iPad.

There is an income requirement?

(Camarillo) Yes, always apply though.

Commissioner Camarillo (At Large, affiliated with National Guard)

April 8, I cohosted the first virtual Women's Health Summit.

April 20, I attended Sexual Assault Response Coordinator recertification training. I would like to bring to the Commissions attention the income threshold for VA healthcare combining household income with spouse. Is there a way we move forward with removing that barrier?

(Lopez) Is that a National regulation?

Yes.

(Lardizzone) Applying with a service connection is the best option at this time.

“Tackle it Tuesday” has resumed in-person once a month with the National Guard.

I brief in-person once a month on Dover AFB for transitioning service members informing them of their healthcare options.

National Guard completed a weeklong training exercise.

This month is mental health awareness month.

May 22, at 11:00am I am cohosting a veteran’s resource drive-through at the Route 13 Moose Lodge.

Commissioner Lewis (At Large, affiliated with NABVETS)

May 4, NABVETS flag was raised at the Bear Veterans Memorial Cemetery.

NABVETS held 2 food drives on May 7, and May 14 in Wilmington.

17 clients aided, 8 with POA’s, 9 with advocacy issues.

28 May, at 1:00pm NABVETS will be honoring all veterans at Brandywine Park.

I would like to offer NABVETS assistance to any veterans with VA claims needs as we just set up in the Wilmington VA Hospital.

TERM COMPLETION:

Nothing to report

EVENTS:

May 29, Bear Veterans Cemetery Memorial Day Ceremony

May 30, Delaware Memorial Bridge Memorial Day Ceremony

June 14, Millsboro Veterans Cemetery Flag Day Ceremony

June 26, Freedom 5k to be held at Buffalo Wild Wings in Dover

September 17, Veterans Stand Down to be held at Schutte Park in Dover

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Health and Human Services Committee, Legislative affairs Committee, and Bylaws Committee needs additional members.

(Lewis) I volunteer for Legislative Committee.

NEW BUSINESS:

Hybrid meetings to continue motioned to approve by Lardizzone seconded by McMullen.

ITEMS FOR THE GOOD AND WELFARE OF THE ORGANIZATION:

(Lardizzone) DAV is looking for volunteer driver’s for veterans to the Wilmington VA Hospital from Dover and Seaford.

SPECIAL SESSION:

Nothing to report

EXECUTIVE MEETING:

**Thursday, 10 June 2021 at 1000
Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs**

NEXT MEETING:
LOCATION:

Tuesday, 15 June 2021 at 1000
Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs