



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
June 17th, 2014**

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Jerry Godwin, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Jerry asked for all present to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and to remain standing for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged. A POW/MIA Empty Chair is placed at all official meetings of the Commission as a physical symbol of the thousands of American POW/MIAs still unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States of America.

II. Approval of Minutes

Due to time restraints, the approval of the May, 2014 Meeting Summary Minutes was deferred until the next Commission meeting.

III. Progress on Ending Veteran Homelessness – John Mendez, Director of Outreach and Special Projects, Bethesda Cares

John Mendez's role at Bethesda Cares is to engage persons experiencing homelessness and help move them off of the street into a higher level of care. Bethesda Cares has adopted the Housing First model. First, homeless individuals are identified in Bethesda and a file is created on each person's housing needs and then the individuals who are the most vulnerable and chronically homeless are prioritized for housing. These individuals are placed into housing and then any other issues are addressed such as employment, drug treatment, health care and mental health needs. The Housing First approach is considered a "best practice" model. This model is a cost-effective approach compared to the old model of treating individuals first before placing them into housing.

In 2012, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded a Pathways Grant to DC to move 50 chronically homeless veterans off of the streets of Washington, D.C. Several veterans in Montgomery County have received housing vouchers through this grant program.

Bethesda Cares has partnered with the VA to move a significant number of homeless veterans off the streets in downtown Bethesda into their own one bedroom and efficiency apartments. As a result, the numbers of homeless veterans in downtown Bethesda has been reduced significantly. In addition, the overall downtown chronic homeless population in Bethesda has been reduced by 65%. The Housing & Urban Development (HUD) Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) voucher program helped to initiate this successful outcome. John noted that Ken Barnum, VA Homeless Outreach Worker, has done an excellent job partnering with agencies and local landlords to get dozens of homeless and chronic homeless veterans off of the street and into permanent supportive housing through the HUD-VASH program. Since Congressman Van Hollen and the Commission began advocating with HUD and the VA five years ago, in 2010 and 2011 the County received each year 25 vouchers; in 2012 and 2013 the County each year received 15 vouchers totaling 80.

John said it is very difficult for the long-term homeless population to get housing through the normal process channels as well as the lack of affordable housing stock in the County. He noted that the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC), which manages the Housing Choice Vouchers for Montgomery County, typically has 1,000 vouchers available per year to distribute to low-income individuals and families, people with disabilities, and the elderly. Vouchers are awarded at random through a lottery system. In the last four years, not one of the 800 homeless individuals that he has worked with has received one of these vouchers. One reason may be that an individual who is homeless does not have a phone number or an address to receive notifications from HOC nor do they have anyone assisting them with how to access the program. John suggested that a portion of these vouchers be given to individuals that are chronically homeless.

John thanked the Commission for their leadership to end veteran homelessness and their ongoing support for our homeless population.

The floor was then opened for questions.

- How many homeless individuals are currently in Montgomery County? John reported that during the point-in-time count a little over 1,000 were experiencing homelessness. That number includes individuals living in shelters and transitional housing. There are approximately 30 to 35 homeless veterans living on the street or in emergency shelters. There are two homeless veterans currently living in Bethesda.
- How many homeless veteran families have been identified? John has not identified many veteran families as Montgomery County works to ensure that no family is left out on the street. They are either in a family shelter or placed in a hotel until transitional housing is available.
- What other homeless outreach organizations were located in Montgomery County and do they meet on a regular basis to discuss issues and outreach initiatives? There are outreach programs in Gaithersburg, Rockville and Silver Spring.
- Do Bethesda Cares outreach workers go into the woods to find veterans? While staff do go into the wood encampments homeless persons often do not stay in the same place and continue to move different areas. John noted that sometimes it can take months to build a personal relationship with a homeless individual before they will even tell you their name. Some veterans do not have an honorable discharge and thus are not eligible for VA services.
- How long will it be before veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan start needing these services? John said Bethesda Cares is keeping an eye on this population as they believe it may happen when these veterans start to age into their late 30s and early 40s, which will be in the next five to ten years. They do not want a repeat of what happened to the Vietnam veterans 40 years ago.

IV. VA Healthcare Initiative – Jerry Godwin, Chair

Jerry shared a [video on Senators reaching a bipartisan deal on VA health care](#) that would authorize the construction of 26 medical facilities in 18 states. There was a discussion about if Montgomery County could be included as part of the 18 states. Since the legislation has already been drafted and voted on, Montgomery County cannot be included. It was suggested that the Commission write a letter to Senator Barbara Mikulski addressing the need for a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Montgomery County to gain her support.

Ann Humphrey noted that when Southern Maryland approached the VA about having a CBOC installed in their area they presented a report of data that showed that there was a need for a CBOC to serve their veteran population. Mike Subin, Commissioner, made a motion to form a subcommittee to address the need for a CBOC in Montgomery County and work to gather data to support this need. Wayne Miller, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously passed. Ann volunteered to be part of the subcommittee. It was suggested contacting the DC VA Medical Center, the Baltimore VA Medical Center, Ft. Detrick CBOC, and the Greenbelt CBOC to see how many veterans from Montgomery County are visiting these facilities for services. Wayne said that not every veteran qualifies for healthcare from the VA. Betsy noted that the Commission had been tasked by the VA in the past to encourage veterans to enroll in the VA health care system.

Ann noted that the VA Baltimore Medical Center has instituted Saturday hours to help reduce the waiting list. The VA has also discussed allowing veterans to seek care outside of the VA due to extraordinary geographical conditions, extraordinary technical needs, or extraordinary demand.

V. Recognition Planning Workgroup Updates – Commissioners Dan Bullis and Mike Subin

Commissioner Mike Subin and Betsy Luecking, Staff, have been working together with the County Cable Office and the Silver Spring Civic Building to install a 55" flat screen TV in the SSCB that would run the names of those who have been killed in action from Montgomery County. The TV would also feature veteran announcements such as concerts, events, and resources. The TV would have the ability to play video clips. Betsy and Carly Clem, Staff, would create the site, be in control of the content and turn it on and off from 401 Hungerford Drive.

VI. Chair and Vice-Chair Report:

Dan Bullis, Vice Chair, reported that he and Commissioners Jane McCarthy and Bill Gray, and Mike Walsh, Vietnam veteran, convened a meeting to discuss the design and construction of a Vietnam veterans memorial in Montgomery County. The goal is to raise the funds needed – approximately \$500,000. American Legion Post 41 has offered to be the sponsor of this initiative. The dedication of such a memorial would be a nice signature event for the proposed Year of the Veteran and Military Family in 2015. The Vietnam Veteran Memorial Project is a workgroup of the Commission on Veterans Affairs.

VII. Unfinished Business

None.

VIII. New Business

None.

VIII. Roundtable

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, noted that Michael Walsh will be a speaker at the Silver Spring Vet Center Ribbon Cutting ceremony on Friday, June 28th. They are working on logistics to show Mr. Walsh's photo slideshow of Vietnam memorials from across the country. Photographs can be viewed via his blog: <http://michaelfwalsh.blogspot.com/>.

Adjournment: 7:30 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting:

Tuesday, September 16th, 2014, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at HHS – 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor Tan Conference Room, Rockville, Maryland 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Program Manager II