



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
May 20th, 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

Mike Subin, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the April, 2014 Meeting Summary Minutes. Wayne Miller, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the April, 2014 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Rebuilding Together and its Role in Assisting Veterans in Renovation in Montgomery County – Lee Berkeley-Shaw, Director of Development, Rebuilding Together Montgomery County

Rebuilding Together Montgomery County (RTMC) provides small and large-scale home repairs, accessibility modifications, and energy efficiency upgrades at no cost to low-income homeowners in Montgomery County. These services help the County's most vulnerable residents live safely, securely and independently in their homes. RTMC tries to identify other issues that a homeowner may be experiencing and when possible refer them to other agencies that can provide transportation, food or financial assistance.

Typical repairs include: plumbing and electrical repairs, HVAC replacement, kitchen and bathroom repairs, home safety modifications (locks, windows, doors, drywall, flooring), energy-efficiency upgrades, and debris removal (exterior and interior). All work is subject to funding availability.

To be eligible for the program, applicants must own a home in Montgomery County and have a household income at or below 46% of the median. For a family of two the median is \$39,376, although the average income for a RTMC applicant is \$25,000. RTMC can be a little more flexible with incomes for veterans and military families when the funding comes from a private donor who has specific criteria for their donation.

Rebuilding Together's programs include:

- National Rebuilding Day Weekend & Corporate Give-Back Days (volunteer engagement projects): On the last weekend in April, these volunteers will join them to repair and restore roughly twenty houses across the county – repairing homes, revitalizing neighborhoods and uplifting entire communities.
- Corporate Engagement Projects are held throughout the year to engage the business community in service. These service projects support the businesses in a variety of ways, including: team building, strengthening the corporate brand, and aligning philanthropic investments with strategic business goals. Led by RTMC staff, Corporate Give-Back Days provide businesses and their employees a meaningful way to connect to their communities.
- Energy Efficiency Initiative: This program serves applicants with an energy-related need, such as insulation, weatherization or furnace/heat pump repairs and replacements. All work is based on the results of home energy audits. Through this program, RTMC is actually reducing the cost and consumption of energy of our recipients, which helps them financially as well as improves our environment.

- Critical Needs Program: partners RTMC with skilled trade professionals to serve applicants with a critical home repair need that cannot be addressed by volunteers. Examples include HVAC work, sewer line repairs, and roof replacements.

The bulk of RTMC's work is done through the Critical Needs Program. RTMC's cumulative impact has been 1,910 families served in Montgomery County with 45,995 volunteers mobilized and \$17.2 million invested in our neighborhoods. In 2013 RTMC provided repairs to over 100 houses and served non-profit facilities. The number of houses served each year varies based on funding.

RTMC accepts applications from veterans year-round. Applications are available online, at senior centers, libraries, Department of Health and Human Services offices, Department of Housing and Community Affairs offices, County Executive Isiah Leggett's office, and Congressman Chris Van Hollen's office.

Occasionally RTMC will receive a request from potential private funders that specifically want to work with veterans. These requests will sometimes have specific criteria attached that must be met in order to receive the funding. For example: a veteran under the age of 40 who has a service animal. RTMC will always try to fill the request to take advantage of the funding opportunity. A few examples of veteran and military family projects:

- In 2007, Sears donated \$30 million to the entire Rebuilding Together (RT) network and launched the Heroes at Home program, which strives to improve the lives of military families in need across America by making necessary repairs, improvements or modifications to their homes. The first beneficiary of the program was Army Specialist Ryan C. Major, son of Commissioner Lorrie Knight-Major. Specialist Major was recovering from severe wounds he received when an improvised explosive device detonated while he was on patrol in Iraq. Volunteers worked to install an elevator, built a ramp, an accessible bathroom, widened doorways, and created an accessible path into the home via the deck. RT assisted Specialist Major with this project so that he could use his VA Home Modification Loan when he was ready to purchase his own house, which he has since done.
- In 2009, RTMC assisted a WWII veteran and his family by helping to construct an accessible bathroom, making modifications to the kitchen, and replacing a wall that was slipping from the foundation.
- In 2012, RT teamed with Sears for a significant repair project in Arlington for an Army Captain who was injured in Iraq. Home modifications included installation of an elevator and a ramp, doorway widening, and exterior repairs.
- Also in 2012 RTMC hosted Playhouse Project which donated an accessible playhouse to the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.
- For Veterans Day 2013 volunteers from Congressional Bank provided new appliances, kitchen cabinets, and flooring for a disabled female Army veteran.
- In April, 2014, RTMC made significant exterior repairs for a widow of a veteran, including extensive excavation, landscaping, and gutter work to redirect drainage from foundation, reframed front windows, and replaced a walkway.

Ms. Shaw asked the Commission to assist with getting the word out for when RTMC receives specific veteran funding requests and encourage Commissioners to volunteer their time for projects. RTMC has a project on June 26th and they are seeking veteran volunteers as the funding received from Home Depot requires that veteran volunteers participate.

The floor was then opened to questions.

It was asked how many service member volunteers RTMC has had. Ms. Shaw stated that RTMC has only started to track volunteers two years ago. It is estimated that approximately 500 service members have provided volunteer services in the last five years, and 100 service members have volunteered in the last two years. The application form does ask if the person has served in the military. It is estimated that RTMC has served 40 military families. It is estimated that RTMC will serve ten military families this year.

It was asked if there has been an increased need from veterans. Ms. Shaw stated that there is an increased need as people are coming back from war injured and need modifications to their homes made so they can live in them. She also noted that military service members do not have to serve in active combat to receive services.

It was asked if RTMC has accepted projects based on matching funds raised by the homeowner. Ms. Shaw noted that some homeowners have paid for additional work to be completed that was outside of the original scope of the project. RTMC projects focus on safety concerns.

IV. Ideas for How the Veterans Affairs Medical Center Could Be Doing More in the County - Ann Humphrey, Office of Congressman Chris Van Hollen

Ann Humphrey reported that she has been having discussions with Fernando Rivera, Director, VISN 5 – Capital Health Care Network, about installing a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Montgomery County. Mr. Rivera asked Ann to recommend how the VA could provide more services to veterans in Montgomery County. Ann asked the Commission what services would be needed most by veterans.

It was suggested that the VA contract services to other providers, such as hospitals, within Montgomery County to provide direct services that would be reimbursed by the VA.

Sharon Hodge, Commissioner, suggested that the VA host a Veterans Outreach Day in Montgomery County. They have never held one in this county before. A Veterans Outreach Day allows veterans to enroll in the VA health care system, receive health information, and learn more about various services available to them through the Veterans Health Administration.

It was suggested that the VA use a mobile van to provide services to Montgomery County residents. West Virginia uses this method to provide services to rural veterans. Services provided include primary care and mental health care. There is concern that if the service is greatly used then it would negate the possibility of a CBOC facility in Montgomery County.

Jerry Godwin, Chair, suggested that the Commission raise awareness of a need for a CBOC through bus cards and public service announcements.

Ann noted that she had a conference call scheduled with Mr. Rivera today, but it has been postponed.

V. Recognition Planning Workgroup Discussion

Michael Walsh, Public Member and Vietnam Veteran, spoke to the Commission about his ideas for a Vietnam memorial to be placed in the Germantown Square Urban Park located at the intersection of MD 118 and Middlebrook Road. Mike Subin, Commissioner, noted that he is still in discussions with Catherine Matthews, Director, Upcounty Regional Services Center, about potentially placing a Vietnam veterans memorial in the Germantown area. Mike also reported that in late Spring or early Summer the County will dedicate the perpetual flame, which will be installed at the Rockville Courthouse. There may be an opportunity for a Vietnam veterans memorial plaque to be placed there as well. It was noted that a Vietnam veterans memorial may be better suited to be placed in Rockville as it is the County's seat. Betsy Luecking, Staff, asked Mike if he could look into having a POW/MIA flag placed at the Germantown Square Urban Park. There are flag poles and lighting already installed.

Jane McCarthy, Commissioner, noted that she recently read an article about a town that made its own Vietnam memorial and listed a step-by-step list of how they accomplished the task. Jane will e-mail Betsy Luecking, Staff, the article.

Betsy reported that the County Cable Office will work with the Commission to develop a monthly cable series if Commissioners are willing and able to work on it. The host of the series must be available to tape the show the 3rd Wednesday of the month. The Commission was asked for volunteers to host the series. We would also need a three to five person planning committee to plan monthly programs.

Betsy also reported that the Rockville Memorial Library is running the names of Montgomery County soldiers who have been killed in action from WWII to present in the lobby on a flat screen television. The Commission is also working to have a flat screen installed at the Silver Spring Civic Building that would run the names. Michael Higgs, Public, loaned

his copy of the Montgomery County Sentinel from 1970 that listed the names and pictures of those killed in action in Vietnam from Montgomery County from 1963 to 1970. We used this document to update our records. The next Recognition Planning Workgroup meeting is this Wednesday, May 28th from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the Silver Spring Civic Building.

VI. Chair and Vice-Chair Report:

VII. Unfinished Business

None.

VIII. New Business

None.

IX. Roundtable

Bill Gray, Commissioner, reported that he and Commissioner Jane McCarthy will be speaking at The Siena School.

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, June 17th, 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