



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Satellite Meeting at Leisure World  
Meeting Summary Minutes – November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**I. Call to Order & Introductions:**

Randy Stone, Vice-Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA) which was held at Leisure World. Dan Bullis, Chair, 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. Presentation of the Commission and Review of Accomplishments**

The Commission on Veterans Affairs was established by County legislation in 2008 with the goal of the Commission to provide advice to the Executive and Council on the status of programs and services related to the needs of Veterans. Veterans have made an important contribution to the community by their service in the Armed Forces of this Nation, and Montgomery County is committed to showing its commitment and support for all Veterans and their families.

The Commission is composed of sixteen voting members and one non-voting member who serve in a volunteer capacity. Members are appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council. The Commission includes:

- Eight (8) Veterans who are a member of a veterans group
- Four (4) General Public
- Four (4) Ex-Officio Members (Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Economic Development, The Office of the County Executive, and Montgomery College)
- One (1) Non-Voting Congressional Representative

The purpose of the Commission is to research, assemble, analyze and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of veterans and their families; institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans; advise the County Executive and the County Council on the status of programs and services in the State and County related to the needs of Veterans and their families; and assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by Veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by Veterans.

Accomplishments of the Commission include:

- Joined with the County Executive and the County Council on November 10, 2014 in declaring “2015: The Year of Montgomery County’s Veterans and their Families”. This declaration acknowledges the service and sacrifice of our veterans and their families while shedding light on their needs such as employment assistance.
- The County Executive was notified on August 18, 2015 by the Department of Veterans Affairs of their intention to lease space for a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Montgomery County by the end of FY17 meaning 2018.
- The Commission continues our fight against Veteran homelessness through our support of Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers and the Zero 16 Campaign to End Veteran homelessness. As part of Montgomery County’s Fiscal Year 2016 budget, an appropriation by the County Council in the amount of

\$500,000 was approved to provide housing and supportive services to functionally end Veteran homelessness in the County. The funding is reoccurring every year and is available to Veterans who have received less than an honorable discharge and are therefore not eligible for VA programs. The County has received 86 VASH vouchers over the last five years, each worth \$13,122 or \$1.1 M per year in housing subsidies.

- The Commission supports the good work of the Silver Spring Vet Center. Operated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Vet Centers provide free readjustment counseling to combat veterans and their families to help with the transition from military to civilian life. Counseling can help with issues such as employment assessment, PTSD, sexual trauma, substance abuse, and screening and referral for medical issues such as traumatic brain injuries and depression. The Silver Spring Vet Center is located at 2900 Linden Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20910.
- The Honor & Gratitude Salute to Vietnam Veterans was held on October 24, 2015 at the Universities at Shady Grove. Over 200 Vietnam Veterans and a crowd of over 800 attended this event that was planned to honor the service of Vietnam Veterans and Vietnam Era veterans. The event is viewable on YouTube at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=z8qYy7nXksY>.

### **III. VA Benefits for You and Your Spouse – Phil Munley, Director, Veterans Service, Program, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs.**

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) was created by the State Legislature in 1999 as an executive agency with the mission of assisting Veterans, active duty service members, their families and dependents. The Service and Benefits Program provides assistance to the men and women who served in the Uniformed Services of the United States, their dependents, and survivors in obtaining benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense, State of Maryland and other programs for veterans and their families. There are ten Veterans Benefits Specialists located throughout the State. MDVA has advertised for a full-time Veterans Benefits Specialist position in Montgomery County. In the meantime a VBS will be available Wednesdays and Fridays from 9:00am to 3:00pm at the Montgomery College Rockville Campus (240-567-5405) or they can contact Phil Munley directly at 410-230-4444 x 6457 (V), e-mail [phillip.munley@va.gov](mailto:phillip.munley@va.gov).

During your initial visit with MDVA staff, they will review military separation discharge documents, DD-214's and individual circumstances of service in order to provide the best possible assistance. Staff will review the three elements of the VA system: the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and the National Cemeteries Administration (NCA). A review of MDVA programs will also be completed to include the Maryland Cemetery Program, Charlotte Hall Veterans Home, as well as other Maryland programs designed to assist veterans. A typical visit can also generate a disability compensation/pension claim for submission to VBA. MDVA Service Officers assist with developing, preparing and submitting compensation/pension claim to VBA. For Veterans and dependents who receive MDVA services, staff will track processing claims and assist with additional development requests made by the VBA. Once the claims process has been completed, MDVA staff review the VBA decision and, if successful, review all applicable ancillary benefits. It pays to seek representation when filing claims for federal VA disability benefits.

MDVA operates five Veteran cemeteries within the State – Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery in Prince George's County; Crownsville Veterans Cemetery in Anne Arundel County; Eastern Shore Veterans Cemetery in Dorchester County; Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery in Baltimore County; and Rocky Gap Veterans Cemetery in Allegany County. The cemeteries are open to Veterans and their eligible dependents.

Charlotte Hall Veterans Home is situated in St. Mary's County and offers a continuum of care from the 168-bed assisted living program to the 286-bed skilled nursing program. The Home also offers memory care in secure units. The Home is Medicare/Medicaid certified, and all Veterans receive a per diem subsidy from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs that reduces their cost of care. It is inspected annually, as required by the Office of Health Care Quality, MD Dept. of Health & Mental Hygiene, and by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The Home was recently upgraded from a four-star rating to a five-star rating.

The MDVA Outreach & Advocacy Program's mission is to develop innovative ways to seek out and inform Maryland's veterans about benefits and services that are available from federal, state, and local organizations, as well as solicit feedback from veterans regarding their requests and needs for additional services. The program sends out a weekly e-mail

through their distribution list, which you can sign up for online at <http://veterans.maryland.gov>. The e-mails feature employment opportunities, events, resources and other information.

The Maryland Veterans Trust Fund make grants and loans to Veterans and their family members who are in dire financial situations, or to private organizations that help Veterans (homeless programs, substance abuse programs, etc.). The Trust Fund gives citizens, businesses, and other organizations a way to express their support to Veteran causes through their donations and contributions. For more information and to request an application for the Veterans Trust Fund contact the MDVA Grant Administrator, Mark Hendricks at 410-974-2399.

Handouts:

- [Additional Benefits for VA Service Connected \(SC\) Veterans](#)
- [Tinnitus and Hearing Loss – Acoustic Trauma in Military Service](#)
- [Diseases Associated with Exposure to Agent Orange](#)
- [Disability Pension](#)
- [Death Pension](#)

#### **IV. Serving Together**

Serving Together (ST), with help from government, local organizations, and businesses, is striving to provide a sustained, coordinated system in support to those Veterans living throughout the region and welcome home the newest generation of Warriors. ST is a project of Mental Health Association of Montgomery County (MHA).

ST's Veteran and Family Peer Navigator can help military service members, veterans, and their dependents find information on financial assistance, employment programs, benefits services, housing and homelessness assistance, and more. You can reach the Peer Navigator via phone at 301-738-7176 Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or via e-mail at [peernavigator@servingtogetherproject.org](mailto:peernavigator@servingtogetherproject.org).

ST sends out a weekly e-mail every Friday. Individuals can sign up for the e-mail distribution list by visiting <http://servingtogetherproject.org> and scrolling to the bottom right hand corner of the page.

#### **V. Roundtable**

Barbara Ramundo, Deputy Director of Hero Dogs, briefed the Commission on the organization. Hero Dogs, Inc. is a Maryland 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation that raises and trains service dogs and places them free of charge with our nation's Veterans to improve quality of life and restore independence.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, reported that the Silver Spring Vet Center is looking to open a satellite office in upper Montgomery County. He does not have specific details yet as far as a specific location. Wayne is seeking recommendations for free space.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, reported on the first meeting of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) Montgomery County Business and Networking Group (BANG) held on November 3<sup>rd</sup> at Montgomery College. The meeting was well-received by attendees.

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, reported that VFW Post 2562 in Wheaton was contacted by the County during the planning of their annual Veterans Day event that next year they will have to pay for use of Wheaton Veterans Park where the event is held. Betsy Luecking, Staff, will look into this issue.

Austin Morris, Representative of Congressman Chris Van Hollen, reported that the VA has indicated that funding for the Montgomery County CBOC will be included in the budget for fiscal year 2017 and it is expected to open in the summer of 2018. A member of the public indicated that residents of upper Montgomery County are accepted at the Fort Detrick CBOC in Frederick County.

Sharisse O'Banion, WorkSource Montgomery, reported that WorkSource is now offering free online certificate courses through Coursera.

Dan Bolling, Commissioner, reported that the David Lynch Foundation has received a \$250,000 grant from the Wounded Warrior Project that will provide transcendental meditation scholarships for Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). For more information please contact Dan at 301-204-7569, [danbolling08@gmail.com](mailto:danbolling08@gmail.com).

Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported that the County Executive is hosting a Senior Summit on Thursday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> and has asked for representation from the Commission. Interested Commissioners can contact Betsy directly.

**Adjournment:** 8:00 p.m.

**Next Full Commission Meeting:** Tuesday, December 15<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Health & Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Large Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I;

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager