



## Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs Meeting Summary Minutes – September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015

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

Dan Bullis, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Dan 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:**

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the June, 2015 Meeting Summary Minutes. Mike Subin, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the June, 2015 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

### **III. Zero: 2016 Campaign to End Veteran and Chronic Homelessness in Montgomery County – Chapman Todd, Zero: 2016 Campaign Coordinator, and Nili Soni, Montgomery County Continuum of Care Coordinator, Special Needs Housing - [Zero: 2016 Plan – Montgomery County](#) - PowerPoint Presentation**

Zero: 2016 is a national effort of 75 communities across the country who have committed to ending Veteran homelessness by December, 2015 and chronic homelessness by December, 2016. Montgomery County's Zero: 2016 initiative is in addition to the successful 100,000 Homes Campaign. Montgomery County will continue to use a Housing First model as the basis for its plan. The plan is a result of collaborative discussions between the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and key stakeholders including family and single adult shelter providers, Veterans groups, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) providers, and others.

The Continuum of Care (CoC) is Montgomery County's local homeless program planning network. It is a public-private partnership that includes County and other government agencies, non-profit service providers, landlords and others who have a role in the County's housing market. The purpose of the CoC is to encourage and support local organizations in coordinating efforts to address housing and homeless issues and reduce homelessness.

For the purpose of the Zero: 2016 campaign the County has given a much broader definition of a veteran: any individual experiencing homelessness who has served on active duty in the United States Military, regardless of discharge status. The active duty requirement is not time restricted, which means that it applies to any length of service beyond training or boot camp. This definition includes persons who are not eligible for some homelessness programs and services provided through the VA.

The goal is to house 56 veterans who are Montgomery County residents experiencing homelessness into permanent housing by December 31, 2015. The goal number is based on the current number of homeless veterans who have been identified in the County's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), the 2015 annual Point-in-Time Survey (24 veterans identified), the VA staff working at the Veterans One-Stop Center located in the Montgomery County Crisis Center, and staff of the regional Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) contractors as being connected to Montgomery County.

A functional zero does not mean there will never be a homeless veteran. It means there is a system in place that will rapidly provide housing placement services.

Local and national data shows that a third of homeless veterans who enter the system need long term supports with the other two-thirds needing short term intervention. 85% of homeless veterans are eligible for a VA program.

CoC has developed a master list of all persons identified as veterans and are currently homeless in Montgomery County. The list is updated regularly and in most cases daily in order to ensure it has the most up-to-date information. The list includes veterans that may already be accessing programs, on a wait list for a housing unit, or who may self-resolve their homelessness.

Federal housing resources include the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Program, which provides long-term rental assistance vouchers and social services specifically targeted to homeless veterans, and Supportive Service for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program, which provides time-limited financial and supportive services to individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness to enable them to quickly regain stability in permanent housing after experiencing a housing crisis and/or 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 appropriation will be funding two new programs, a permanent supportive housing program to be operated by the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH), and a rapid rehousing program to be operated by Bethesda Cares. MCCH's Operation Homecoming Program is targeted to 20 veterans, including five families, who may or may not have documented disabilities, but have significant behavioral health, medical, or other significant barriers that will require ongoing rental assistance and social services supports. Bethesda Cares' Veterans Rapid Re-Housing Program is targeted to 15 veterans, including families, who need assistance in obtaining housing, short or medium term assistance with rental payments, and some time-limited social services support. The Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) has allocated 10 housing subsidy vouchers for veterans who are homeless, which will be case managed by the MCCH program.

As of August 31, 2015 23 veterans have been housed this year. There are 21 individuals and 4 families still seeking housing, but they have been referred to MCCH or Bethesda Cares or have been connected to HUD-VASH or SSVF.

The floor was opened for questions.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, asked how individuals can donate funds or goods to organizations that serve homeless veterans. Chapman Todd said he will compile a list of resources and e-mail it to Betsy.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, asked if the group was working with the Montgomery County Correctional Facility (MCCF) in Boyds. The MCCF regularly attends the group meetings and the list of homeless individuals is shared with them on a regular basis so they can identify any individuals at their facility.

Randy Stone, Vice Chair, asked about effective ways to approach landlords and encourage them to rent to homeless veterans who have vouchers. Chapman noted that it is about educating the landlords on voucher programs. Mike Subin reported that the County Executive will be drafting a letter that will be sent out to all the landlords in the County to explain the initiative.

It was asked what contact number should be given out to a homeless individual. Nili reported that contacting the County's Crisis Center (240-777-4000) or any of the homeless shelters in Montgomery County will notify the CoC.

#### **IV. Update on Hiring and Expectations of Veterans Benefits Specialist for Montgomery County – *Phil Munley, Director, Veteran 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.

During your initial visit with MDVA staff, they will review military separation discharge documents, DD214'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. The 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).

The floor was opened for questions.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, asked if the VA takes social security into account for income limits. Phil noted that the VA does include all income sources, including social security.

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, asked how the MDVA could assist Veterans Service Organizations, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, gain membership from younger veterans. Phil suggested contacting Dana Hendrickson, Director of MDVA Outreach and Advocacy, who manages outreach and education to veterans and their families. She also sends a weekly e-mail to the MDVA distribution list that includes information on events, job opportunities and resources. Dana can be reached at 410-260-3842 (V), [dana.hendrickson@maryland.gov](mailto:dana.hendrickson@maryland.gov). A member of the public suggested contacting Elsie Moore, OEF/OIF/OND Program Coordinator at the DC VA Medical Center, at 202-745-8000 x 56282 (V). The Program Coordinator is responsible for the coordination of care and services of military service members transitioning back into civilian life.

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](#)

**V. Update and Planning for “A Salute to Montgomery County Vietnam Veterans”** – *Merlyn Reineke, Executive Director, Montgomery County Media, and Neil Greenberger, Legislative Information Officer, Montgomery County Council*  
Planning continues for the Salute to Vietnam Veterans event to be held on Saturday, October 24<sup>th</sup> at the Universities of Shady Grove (USG) in Rockville. USG is donating the venue which has capacity for 1,000 people. The event would be approximately 90 minutes from 10:30 a.m. to noon. Doors open at 9:30 am with exhibitor table, coffee and pastries. Bob Schieffer, who recently retired as host of the CBS show *Face the Nation*, has agreed to be the host and guest speaker. Commander Everett Alvarez, Jr., a Navy pilot held prisoner in North Vietnam for more than eight years after his plane was shot down in 1964 and who is now a Rockville resident, will be among the featured speakers as well as Douglas “Lamar” Allen Jr., a helicopter pilot from Burtonsville received the Distinguished Flying Cross for flying his helicopter in a monsoon to rescue numerous wounded and injured soldiers who were pinned down after an ambush. Congressman Chris Van Hollen will give remarks. Congressman John Delaney and Senator Ben Cardin have been contacted.

Flyers for the event will be available tomorrow. Merlyn will share them with Betsy to distribute. Please contact Meryln if you would like flyers to distribute to your veteran services organizations and groups. You can find information and register for the event on their website: <http://www.mocovietnamvets.org>, or via their Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/honoringvietnamvets](http://www.facebook.com/honoringvietnamvets).

**VI. MOAA Proposal for Transition Support to Veterans in Montgomery County** – *Commissioner Jim Campbell and Jim Dittbrenner, Military Officers Association of America Transition Group for Northern VA and Southern MD*  
Jim Campbell, Commissioner, noted military service members transitioning back into civilian life are unprepared when seeking employment. The Northern Virginia (NOVA) Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) Business and Networking Group (BANG) was created in 1996. BANG is a monthly program that provides business and

networking assistance. Each month an employer is invited to speak about their company and offers assistance as well as accepting resumes. In addition BANG sends out a weekly e-mail broadcast that provides employment opportunities, veterans' updates, and job fair announcements. The group is open to non-military job seekers and networkers.

The Montgomery County Chapter of the MOAA is interested in starting BANG in Montgomery County. They are asking for the Commission's endorsement and support. A motion was made to endorse the endeavor of the Montgomery County MOAA of creating BANG in Montgomery County. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.

**VII. Update of Plans for Community-Based Outpatient Clinic and Montgomery Cable TV Show "Homefront", Zero 16 Campaign to End Veteran and Chronic Homelessness – Commissioner Mike Subin**

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported that the VA has notified the County Executive of their plans to solicit space to lease for a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Montgomery County. The space will be 25,000 square feet with 11,000 square feet for the CBOC and 14,000 square feet for non-profits and service providers. The proposed delineated area will be along the 270 corridor in Rockville and Gaithersburg.

The County Executive has taped his episode on the Montgomery County Cable show "Homefront". An air date has yet to be scheduled. They plan on interviewing Dan Bullis, Chair, for the next episode.

A Respect the Space meeting was held and in attendance were Betsy Luecking, Staff, Nancy Greene, ADA Compliance, the Chief of the Maryland Building Code Enforcement, and representatives from Department of Transportation, Department of Permitting Services, Office of Human Rights, and the Police Department. The group will discuss code enforcement of accessible parking spaces and properly striped parking lots. In 2010 a bill was passed by the State of Maryland requiring local jurisdictions to bring existing park lots into compliance with Maryland Accessibility Code requirements for parking spaces for individuals with disabilities. The group will reconvene in 30 days to discuss which entities are responsible for enforcement. The County Executive will be drafting legislation that will enable enforcement authority of those entities.

**VIII. Chair and Vice Chair Report:**

Dan Bullis, Chair, reported that the Commission will need to draft two FY16 policy issues that will be presented before the County Council Health & Human Services Committee on October 15<sup>th</sup>. The issues must focus on the theme of prevention. A discussion was held and the following policy issues were decided on:

1. Prevention efforts to end homelessness for veterans
2. Access to health and mental health care.

A motion was made to approve the two FY16 policy issues. The motion was seconded. A vote was held and the motion was unanimously approved.

**IX. Unfinished Business:** None.

**X. New Business:** None.

**XI. Roundtable:**

Mike Walsh, General Public, reported that Battley Harley Davidson in Gaithersburg is still available to assist with a veterans motorcycle ride in November. The Commission will need to decide very soon whether or not they wish to proceed with planning. It was suggested that a planning meeting be held to discuss this possible event.

**Adjournment:** 7:45 p.m.

**Next Full Commission Meeting:** Tuesday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Health & Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850.

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I; Betsy Luecking, Manager