



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
March 18th, 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

Bill Gray, Commissioner, made an edit to the February, 2014 Meeting Summary Minutes: change “MDVA Secretary Eric Shinseki” to “Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki”. Wayne Miller, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the February, 2014 Meeting Summary Minutes with the edit. Roland Kauffman, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the February, 2014 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved as amended. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. County Council and Key Issues Impacting Veterans – The Honorable Craig Rice, President, Montgomery County Council

Council President Craig Rice’s father served in the Marine Corps in Vietnam and is aware of the challenges and issues veterans face from their experiences and/or service-connected and age-related disabilities. The County Council and the County Executive are committed to addressing the needs of our veterans.

Council President Rice participated in the County’s 100,000 Homes Campaign Registry Week in November, 2013. He identified several veterans living on the street or in encampments in the woods. He noted that the County needs a strong mental health program in place to address the issues that veterans may have. He also discussed the need to create job and educational opportunities for servicemembers coming back to Montgomery County after deployment. Council President Rice highlighted educational opportunities being offered by Montgomery College is one-year certification training programs in fields such as biotechnology and cyber security. It is important to be proactive and assist them in transitioning back to civilian life.

Tomorrow Council President Rice will be convening the first Washington Metropolitan Regional Council Chairs Meeting comprised of Council Presidents and Mayors from around the Metro area, including the District of Columbia, Fairfax, Arlington, Alexandria, Howard County, Charles County and Prince George’s County, to discuss regional issues. One of these highlight issues is veterans affairs.

The floor was then opened for questions and comments.

Randy Stone, Commissioner, asked how the Commission can assist the County Council. Council President Rice recommended that the Commission keep the Council apprised on issues and concerns as they happen.

Roland Kauffman, Commissioner, recommended that changes be made to Maryland’s prison system to assist veterans in obtaining benefits and services to reduce the recidivism rate. Council President Rice noted that the State of Maryland is reviewing the County’s correctional rehabilitation model, which has been very successful. Roland also recommended that changes be made to the homeless shelter program to make it more welcoming. Council President Rice reported that the County is working to make shelters be seen as a transitional step in their path to be self-sufficient. He added that the County Executive and County Council have allocated additional funds to provide housing for the most medically vulnerable homeless. It was noted that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Capitol Health Care Network recently awarded a grant to the Montgomery County Coalition for Homeless for low-barrier Safe Haven emergency housing for 15

homeless veterans. The Darnestown Road shelter is the first one to open. It can serve seven male veterans at one time, with the average length of stay hovering around six months. Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison, added that the County has received 65 VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) vouchers over the last four years. Each voucher is worth \$13,122 per voucher or \$852,930 per year in housing subsidies.

Jane McCarthy, Commissioner, addressed the issue of the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in returning servicemembers. Jane also addressed the need for a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Montgomery County. Veterans currently seeking outpatient services must drive to Baltimore or DC. In 2008, the VA approved plans for a CBOC to be located in Montgomery County and in June 2013 the County was informed that the VA would soon begin identifying potential locations and was aiming to have bids by November. Last month the County was informed that the CBOC is now on hold as the VA is reprioritizing their plans. Congressman Van Hollen has sent a letter of concern about this delay to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. The letter was co-signed by Congressmembers John Delaney and John Sarbanes. Council President Rice said he will bring this issue to the attention of the other Councilmembers. He also acknowledged that PTSD is one of the biggest issues facing our returning veterans today.

Rich Fales, former Commissioner, noted that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) veterans strategic initiative will end next year and military families will no longer receive priority services. Rich also noted SAMSHA is currently offering a grant opportunity of \$400,000 to benefit homeless individuals in selective supportive housing. Council President Rice noted that the County seeks to capitalize on state grant funding opportunities whenever possible to maximize their potential.

Council President Rice encouraged Commissioners to contact his office or to connect with him via his social media accounts.

Planning for 2014 Recognition Events – Jerry Godwin, Chair, and Dan Bullis, Vice Chair

According to enabling legislation one of the Commission's duties is to "assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans". Jerry Godwin, Chair, instituted a Veterans Recognition Planning Workgroup. The Commission will start planning Memorial Day as well as other events for the rest of the year. The workgroup will also discuss activities for 2015 "The Year of the Veteran and Military Family". The workgroup will meet Wednesday, March 26th from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Silver Spring Vet Center. Ideas can also be e-mailed to Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison.

Given the time frame the Commission will not be hosting a Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans (WHVV) event this year. The Commission discussed future WHVV events and whether they should be targeted at the general public to create awareness.

Veterans Day falls on a Tuesday this year. The Commission will need to discuss if a ceremony or event should be held. The Speakers Bureau that was convened for last years Veterans Day was a great success. Many schools have shown interest in having the veterans speak to their classes year-round. Jerry noted that for the past several years the Silver Spring Town Center has hosted a Veterans Day Concert at the Silver Spring Vet Center in collaboration with the Commission. The event is always free.

It was suggested that advertisements about services available for veterans be placed on Ride On buses. It was also suggested that the County air public service announcements about services available to veterans on County Cable Montgomery. Community awareness about veterans should also be a strong focal point.

The number of veterans living in Montgomery County was questioned. Department of Veterans Affairs data for 2014 estimates approximately 44,648 veterans in Montgomery County. Mike Subin, Commissioner, noted that when the Universities of Shady Grove (USG) started to have representation from the Silver Spring Vet Center and Serving Together located in the university USG has identified almost 300 veterans since November, 2013. The original estimate for number of veterans enrolled was 12.

Chair and Vice-Chair Report:

Jerry Godwin, Chair, reported that on March 11th County Executive Isiah Leggett had his annual meeting with all the Health and Human Services (HHS) Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCC). BCC's were to present issues and one

question. The Commission brought up an issue that the Commission received from a County resident regarding that any veteran disabled over 50% would receive a waiver of his/her property tax commensurate with the rating. For example, if a veteran is 60% disabled then 60% of their property tax would be waived. The Commission also addressed that the calendar year 2015 be designated as “Year of the Montgomery County Veteran and His/Her Family”. The Commission asked about County Executive Leggett’s vision for providing supports to veterans and their families. Mr. Leggett noted that he is focused on reintegration and education of returning servicemembers.

VI. Unfinished Business

None.

VII. New Business

The Commission discussed operating budget testimony to be presented before the County Council. County Executive Leggett is recommending funding for the following Community Grants which will better support programs serving veterans:

- Warrior Canine Connection - \$40,000
- Mental Health Association of Montgomery, MD, Inc. - \$75,000 – Community-based model to coordinate resources and increase awareness for military, veterans, and their families (Serving Together Project)
- Team River Runner, Inc. - \$33,500 – Van purchase to support therapeutic paddling for wounded veterans.

Jane McCarthy, Commissioner, made a motion that the Commission challenge County Council to match the \$75,000 grant for the Mental Health Association’s Serving Together Project, and to accept the other two grants as proposed. Kris Kumaroo, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.

VIII. Roundtable

Marie Wood, Commissioner, noted that the [Sergeant Sullivan Center \(SSC\)](#) is seeking individuals to join Team SSC and run in the Marine Corps Marathon to raise funds for medical research, healthcare education, and public awareness on deployment related illnesses. The race will be held October 26th in Washington, DC.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, reported that the Silver Spring Vet Center (SSVC) will be holding an open house and ribbon cutting in June. Wayne noted that the SSVC currently has a three-year contract position open for a counselor to work with active duty servicemembers. The position could become permanent. Wayne asked for referrals to be sent to SSVC. Betsy added that she will send an e-mail out via her distribution and eSubscribe lists. Any Commissioner that has information, requests or events to share can be sent out by Betsy using these methods. She will also forward to Serving Together, if appropriate.

Sharon Hodge, Commissioner, reported that on Tuesday, April 8th at 10 a.m. the Washington, DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center will be holding a ribbon cutting ceremony for their newly renovated Women’s Health Clinic. On April 10th, from 9:00 a.m. to noon, the Vietnam Veterans of America will be giving a briefing on Capitol Hill about Agent Orange and the Intergenerational Effect on Families from 9:00 a.m. to noon.

Bill Gray, Commissioner, noted that Bob Pelletier, Veteran Services, MontgomeryWorks (MW), has offered space at the MW Wheaton Office for the Commission to hold a meeting and to see the services offered by MW.

Rob Welty, Serving Together, reminded the Commission that there will be a [Veteran Resource and Volunteer Fair](#) on May 10, 2014 at Glen Echo Park sponsored by the Veterans Collaborative. VC is a collaboration between Serving Together, Montgomery County Government, and agencies that serve veterans.

Rich Fales, former Commissioner, reported that Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 350 will be working with American All, an organization that preserves stories and post them to their website, to capture the stories of veterans. Rich will report back to the Commission about the VFW’s experience working with the organization.

Adjournment: 7:45 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting:

Tuesday, April 15th, 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