



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
April 16, 2019**

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 moment of silence was also held for Maryland National Guard Staff Sgt. Dinora Flores, from Damascus, who was killed in a car crash on April 2nd in Reisterstown. 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

A motion was made to approve the March 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the March 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Discussion of Commission Outreach and Awareness, Recognition Events, Annual Agenda

The Commission received an update on the continued search for 25 acres of land in Montgomery County for a Maryland Veterans home. At this point, the land is still being searched for. Mike Subin, Commissioner, stated that the County does not have the amount of undeveloped land available that is needed. Tina Benjamin, Office of the County Executive, has been tasked with locating land and is currently looking into the private sector for a possible donation. Mike noted that there is an issue with zoning on certain land that only allows for a certain number of people to live on that land and it cannot be pre-empted by the needs of this Veterans home. Mike said there may be an opportunity if a developer has land that they could donate to the State. For example, the developer for the Crown in Gaithersburg donated 30 acres to build a high school. Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Ben Cardin, suggested looking into the Nike Missile Sites that are located throughout Montgomery County, particularly the Laytonsville site which may be large enough. Those sites are owned by the Federal government and Mike asked Ken to research the possibility that the Laytonsville site is an option. Land in the agricultural preserve would not work as the Veterans home is too large to run on well and septic

Stan Siedel, Maryland Veterans Commission (MVC), reported that at the MVC meeting today the representative from Prince George's County announced he was in talks with the Prince George's County Executive about finding land for a Veterans home. It is unclear what the time frame is for the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) to locate the land. Betsy Luecking, Staff, will reach out to MDVA Secretary George Owings for more information. (Note: Betsy did contact Secretary George Owings who stated there is not a deadline. The State needs donated land and title before building.)

The County Government cannot solicit any donations. Commissioners can reach out to their organizations or to companies as a private citizen and let them know about that the MDVA would like to develop a second Veterans home in Montgomery County and needs at least 25 acres of land. The VA has the funding to build the facility and they are asking Maryland to match their funds.

A reporter from the Montgomery Sentinel was in attendance of this meeting and will be writing a story on the County's search for land. (Note: The Sentinel reporter did a good job reporting on the difficult subject of building a veterans home in Montgomery County. The link to her story :

<https://mont.thesentinel.com/2019/04/18/montgomery-county-veterans-affairs-commission-seeks-land-for-new-veterans-home/>)

Dan suggested reaching out to Mr. Cohen of the Steven A. Cohen Military & Family Clinic of Silver Spring or Mr. Fisher of Fisher House. Neil suggested Lakeforest Mall, which is currently for sale.

We are pleased that the DC VA Medical Center will have the MDVA Veterans Benefits Specialist (VBS) be located at the Gaithersburg Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) two days a week. This was made possible through a collaborative effort with Holly Young, DC VA Medical Center, and Michael Heimall, Medical Center Director. They are still working on their Memorandum of Understanding and need their attorneys to review it. The MDVA VBS will continue to have outreach days at the Montgomery College Rockville Campus and the Silver Spring Vet Center. Wayne Miller, Vice-Chair, reported that a Silver Spring Vet Center Counselor will be stationed at the CBOC one day a week starting next week.

Dan suggested tabling a previously discussed Commission outreach meeting at Leisure World until further notice as there was a presentation recently given by the Jewish War Veterans on benefits. Dan also suggested that the Commission sponsor a resource fair. Howard County recently held theirs and had a successful turnout. Betsy noted that the Commission was part of a resource fair that was held ten years ago in collaboration with Serving Together with 50 vendors and only 10 veterans attended. She suggested partnering with Howard or Prince George's County to hold a resource fair. Dan suggested inviting the point-of-contact for Howard County to discuss what went into their planning and if they could provide any advice. Neil suggested teaming up with one or two of the County's elected officials and various departments, drawing an example to the Senior Resource Fairs that are held every year. Dan noted that many non-profits in the area that serve wounded warriors have been downsizing because fortunately there are not as many wounded warriors as before due to the level of intensity of the current conflict. Stan suggested working with the Steven A. Cohen Clinic and Serving Together to partner on a resource fair.

In regard to a resource fair, it was suggested that the Commission find ways to engage the Veteran students at Montgomery College and the University of Maryland. Joanna Starling, Montgomery College, said that younger Veterans are just not interested in attending resource fairs nor do they have the time. Wayne said younger Veterans are also not seeking counseling services in the same numbers as older Veterans. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, stated that the majority of Veterans are not wounded, ill, or injured nor did they serve in combat. It seems that most programs are focused on those Veterans. Cynthia suggested teaming up with Team Red, White and Blue which connects Veterans and their community through physical and social activities, such as a running and biking clubs.

Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, suggested having a free concert with free food to encourage attendees and then literature could be given out to Veterans. Meredith Bruce, Commissioner, noted that many younger Veterans play video games as a coping mechanism and a way of camaraderie with other Veterans. She suggested a video game tournament.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, is a liaison to the Commission on Aging (COA). He asked what information he should share with COA. Dan said he would attend the next COA meeting. Jim will arrange for him to be put on the agenda. Representatives from all County senior centers attend those meetings and it would be an opportunity for this Commission to share information that could be displayed at senior centers. Betsy noted that there is currently a monthly military history and Veteran discussion group at the Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center in Silver Spring.

It was suggested that a one-year anniversary ceremony be held for the Montgomery County Vietnam Veterans Memorial that was dedicated on May 21, 2018. Quilts of Valor wanted to have a program at the memorial. Their mission is to cover all those service members and veterans wounded physically or psychologically with comforting and healing quilts. The ceremony last May was a huge event. It was widely attended, and the Vietnamese community, Veterans and families were well-represented. It was suggested that since the next Commission meeting is scheduled for May 21st, that time be used for the one-year anniversary ceremony at Memorial Plaza. Betsy will review last's year program to get an idea for speakers. The program could be inside

the cafeteria and we can ask Mission BBQ to cater. Time could be allotted prior to the program for attendees to visit the wall and socialize. It was suggested that the names on the wall be read prior to the meeting at the wall. Betsy will see if she can get the same police officer from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Dedication that rang a bell after each name was read. The event could be advertised at the Silver Spring Vet Center, Gaithersburg CBOC, DC VA Medical Center, and at local American Legion's and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Attendees can park for free at the Council Office Building parking garage after 6pm as well as the jury lot which should be empty at that time of night. An accessibility notice will be put on the event notice so individuals that need accessible parking can contact Betsy to arrange for accessible disability parking at the Executive Office Building.

IV. Chair and Vice-Chair Reports

Dan Bullis, Chair, reported the Director of the DC VA Medical Center was currently scheduled to speak in May. It was suggested he speak at the May event or be invited to present at the June meeting. Dan is also working on future meeting presentations from 100 Entrepreneurs Foundation, Inc., which provides wounded Veterans and their family members with information about entrepreneurship and opportunities to build their own businesses, and the Advanced Military Training Center at Walter Reed that provides amputee care to injured Veterans and offers the latest in cutting edge equipment to help with their recovery.

V. Announcements

Cynthia said she reviewed the PowerPoint Betsy e-mailed to Commissioners regarding the VA's MISSION ACT. Under the expanded VA Choice and Mission Act, she cautioned that Veterans that are seen outside of the VA system by civilian providers may not have their medical information shared with the VA and vice-versa. This can cause issues with primary and specialty care, and especially with prescription medications that may have deadly consequences if they interact with another. She noted that Veterans are entitled to a copy of their medical records as well as a second opinion on diagnosis and course of treatment. Yet, the freedom to choose your own provider may not be the best. Veterans cannot use just any provider and must use those that are signed up to be VA Choice providers. She encouraged Veterans to ask more questions and to request their medical records. Betsy asked Cynthia to write-up her assessment of the VA Choice and Mission Act.

Stan announced MCVET will be hosting their annual 5K/10K fundraiser on Sunday, June 9th. The County's Interagency Commission on Homelessness will be hosting a public hearing on funding priorities for the ICH. The public hearing will be held on Tuesday, April 23rd at 3pm at the Rockville Memorial Library, 21 Maryland Avenue. The Bar Association of Montgomery County will be hosting a forum on alternatives to criminalization of homelessness on April 26th from 1:30pm to 3pm at the Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Rockville. Registration is required.

Senator Van Hollen is hosting an event on April 18th to honor Veterans of color and to announce the introduction of the bipartisan World War I Valor Medals Review Act, which will ensure that Veterans of color who served during WWI are honored and their stories are told. Community resources for Veterans will be onsite. To be held at the Cambridge Empowerment Center from 12:30pm to 1:30pm at 615 B Pine Street, Cambridge, MD.

Adjournment: 7:20pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: ****PLEASE NOTE LOCATION**** Tuesday, May 21st, 2019 from 6pm to 8pm at the Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Memorial Plaza & Cafeteria, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

CVA May 2019 Meeting & Event Calendar

Tuesday, May 21st

Vietnam Veteran Dedication Commemoration & Meeting

5pm to 8pm

Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Terrace Level at Memorial Plaza, Rockville

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-

[Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/VietnamWallSaveTheDateFlyerMay2019.pdf](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/VietnamWallSaveTheDateFlyerMay2019.pdf)

Saturday, May 25th

City of Gaithersburg – Flags for our Heroes

11am through Memorial Day

Bohrer Park (next to Gaithersburg High School), 512 S. Frederick Avenue, Gaithersburg, MD 20877

www.flagsforourheroes.org

Monday, May 27th

City of Rockville - Memorial Day Ceremony and Parade

9am to 1pm

Rockville Town Center Park, 131 Gibbs Street, Rockville, MD 20850

Schedule of events: 9am – a musical tribute to America by the Rockville Concert Band and Chorus; 9:30am – a Memorial Day Ceremony Begins; 10:30am – 75th Annual Memorial Day parade begins