



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Meeting Summary Minutes  
April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

**\*\*MEETING WAS HELD VIA CONFERENCE CALL\*\***

**I. Call to Order**

Wayne Miller, Vice-Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Wayne recognized prisoners of war and asked 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.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made to approve the February 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the February 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

**III. Update on Second Veterans Home**

Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported she was contacted by City of Rockville Mayor Bridget Donnell Newton as Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) Secretary George Owings had sent a letter stating that MDVA had chosen the hospital in Skyesville as the location of Maryland's second Veteran's home instead of the former Red Gate Golf Course located in Rockville. The letter has been shared with Commissioners. Bob Norton, Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), said MMC and the Military Officers Association of America Montgomery County Chapter were disappointed in the decision, but not surprised. Bob said it is MMC's ultimate goal to have a second Veteran's home located in Central Maryland and they will support the decision. Many MMC members felt that the former Red Gate Golf Course offered many advantages with its proximity to the VA Gaithersburg Community-Based Outpatient Clinic and the DC VA Medical Center. There were issues and questions regarding Red Gate including access to roads, infrastructure, financial implications, land donation, and green space conservation. Bob thanked Congressman Jamie Raskins and Congressman David Trone for their support as well as this Commission for working on this issue and bringing it to the attention of the County Executive and County Council.

**IV. Chair and Vice Chair Report**

Dan Bullis, Chair, reported that the County issued a press release on behalf of the Commission detailing contact information and resources for Veterans during the COVID-19 health crisis. View press release: [https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press\\_Detail.aspx?Item\\_ID=25167](https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=25167). Dan added that the American Legion is also available to provide assistance to Veterans in need.

Dan reported he reached out to the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic and let them know the Walter Reed Society (WRS) is available to provide monetary assistance to Veterans and family members. WRS donated \$20,000 to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and \$20,000 to Fort Belvoir as well as a donation to Red Cross at Walter Reed to assist them in their efforts. Jason Smith, Serving Together, asked Dan how referrals can be made to WRS. Dan said referrals can be made by e-mail or phone directly to Dan. Jason Smith of Serving Together said many smaller non-profits that ST works with are at capacity and there is still a large population of Veterans who are in need of assistance. Jason said he will share this information with those non-profits.

Dan reported that the Commission provided FY21 budget testimony to the County Council, which included funding support of \$350,000 to Bethesda Cares to expand their outreach to Veterans.

Wayne reported that the Silver Spring Vet Center (SSVC) is open with some staff working from home and the rest at the SSVC making phone calls to Veterans and conducting telehealth sessions. If a Veteran does come to the building seek services they are told all counseling is being done off-station. Wayne reported that he has been checking in on individual Veterans and group telecounseling sessions will continue this upcoming Monday via teleconference. Wayne Stinchcomb, who is a member of the Maryland National Guard, has been deployed by Governor Hogan to assist with the COVID 19 crisis.

#### **V. Discussion on Military/Veterans Recognition**

Dan asked about upcoming months of recognition. Betsy said that the Montgomery County Public Libraries are closed and we will not be able to create a display case for May to honor Montgomery County residents who have been killed in action. She added that the Commission has fallen hero lists online dating back to World War I of all County residents who have been killed in action. Betsy also said that the Rockville Memorial Library and the Silver Spring Civic Building have digital displays. She asked Neil if the County could post information in May directing residents to view our website. To view the fallen heroes lists, visit [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans), click on tab Fallen Heroes.

#### **V. Updates / Announcements**

Melissa Barber, ST, reported that she is working with a non-profit farm to provide fresh produce to Veterans at Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless and Bethesda Cares. The first of these deliveries will be in the next three weeks. There is grant funding provided for this food distribution and volunteers are providing transportation for food delivery. Jason noted that additional drivers will be needed in the future. The produce includes lettuce, kale, tomatoes, cucumbers, honey, and eggs with some of the local branches occasionally donating chicken or beef. Melissa also reported that ST Peer Navigators are still taking calls and Program Managers are still hosting Veterans Collaboration meetings virtually. She added that ST is hosting a stress reduction workshop tomorrow offered by Red Cross. She will send the link to Betsy so she can share with Commissioners.

Betsy reported that accessibility features are currently being installed at Riley's Lock. One accessible launch has been installed and another will be installed at a later time.

Bob Koffman, Commissioner, reported that in March 2019 President Trump signed an Executive Order to create a plan known as the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS). The kick-off date for PREVENTS was scheduled for April 30<sup>th</sup> but will now be a virtual kick-off. PREVENTS is largely a social media campaign using the hashtag #morethanneverbefore. The campaign can currently be found on Facebook and Twitter and will soon be on LinkedIn and Instagram. Facebook: [www.facebook.com/weareprevents/](http://www.facebook.com/weareprevents/). Betsy asked Neil Greenberger, Public Information Office, if he could draft a press release to make Veterans and their families aware of suicide prevention counseling and other resources they can receive during this time. Neil asked Bob for more information on PREVENTS to include in the press release.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, asked Neil for an update on the Homefront taping that was discussed at the last meeting that would include a discussion on Veterans healthcare between Michael Heimall, DC VA Medical Center, and Dr. Norvell "Van" Coots, MD, MSS, Brigadier General, US Army (Ret.), President and CEO, Holy Cross Health and Maryland Region of Trinity Health. Neil said that County Cable Montgomery is aware of the request and he will follow up with her.

**Adjournment:** 6:50pm

**Next Full Commission Meeting:** Tuesday, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020 via Zoom from 6pm to 7pm. Please view the agenda for information on how to join the meeting.

Respectfully submitted, Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I, Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager