



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Meeting Summary Minutes  
December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**I. Call to Order & Introductions**

Dan Bullis, Chairman, 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**

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the November 2016 Meeting Summary Minutes. Randy Stone, Vice Chairman, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the November 2016 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

**III. Overview of the Montgomery College Combat2College Program – Joanna Sarling, ACSM EP-C, Veterans Program Coordinator**

PowerPoint: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/MC\\_Combat2College\\_Services\\_Dec2016.pdf](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/MC_Combat2College_Services_Dec2016.pdf)

Brochure: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/C2CBrochure.pdf](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/C2CBrochure.pdf)

Sample Program Calendar: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/C2CCalendar.pdf](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/C2CCalendar.pdf)

Website: [www.montgomerycollege.edu/combat2college](http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/combat2college)

In 2008, the Wal-Mart Foundation awarded Montgomery College a \$100,000 grant to support veterans and veteran programs at the community college. Montgomery College was one of 10 higher education institutions selected to receive a grant from the Wal-Mart Foundation because of its successful veteran educational assistance programs.

Montgomery College has three campuses (Rockville, Germantown, and Takoma Park/Silver Spring) with Vet Centers available at each campus. The Rockville Vet Center averages 30 Veterans per day and last year saw more than 100 unique visitors. They serve all Veterans, not just those with combat experience, and try to normalize the college experience. All programming is offered at no additional cost. After the Women Veteran's Center was opened in summer 2015, there has been a tremendous increase in female Veteran participation at all three campuses.

Montgomery College has the largest two-year engineering program in the country. The business program works with local and national groups. Pre-nursing and nursing programs offer clinical work at local hospitals that can assist with job placement after program completion. Veterans have priority registration for the Cyber Pathways Across Maryland grant program, which enhances access to postsecondary education for the cyber security field. Veterans with non-medical backgrounds are offered academic advising when they enroll in the nursing program.

While the Montgomery College online application does include a field for applicants to mark if they are a Veteran, it also includes a write-in field and data has been hard to capture. It is estimated that several thousand Veterans are enrolled with Montgomery College every semester.

Any Veterans interested in education regardless of their college or university choice are welcome to speak to Joanna about their benefits and opportunities.

#### **IV. Public Affairs Outreach to County Veterans to Enroll in VA Healthcare Discussion – Jereme Whiteman, Assistant Medical Center Director, Washington DC VA Medical Center**

The Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) is on track to open in December, 2017 in Gaithersburg. The space is being leased and is currently being remodeled for clinical/medical services. The building is large enough to accommodate future growth. The CBOC will focus on primary, mental health, and women's care. The clinic will also be equipped to offer tele-health upon opening. A tele-health clerk will be at the CBOC to assist in setting up the appointments with the DCVAMC physicians.

Currently, 6,019 Veterans in Montgomery County are actively receiving care at the Washington DC VA Medical Center (DCVAMC). There are 11,959 Montgomery County Veterans who are enrolled in the VA Healthcare System. Almost 6,000 Montgomery County Veterans who are enrolled are not receiving care at the DCVAMC. One reason may be the location of the DCVAMC. Services to be provided at the CBOC were chosen due to the services used by Montgomery County Veterans at the DCVAMC. It was asked if there were a way to reach out to the estimated 44,000 Veterans living in Montgomery County. The VA will mail a letter to all Montgomery County Veterans currently enrolled for VA healthcare when the CBOC is set to open. The VA will also post information via their social media accounts including Facebook and Twitter as well as advertise it on their radio show. It was suggested the information on how to enroll for VA healthcare benefits be added to the Commission's website. Mike Subin, Commissioner, suggested working with Ohene Gyapong, Deputy Director, Office of Public Information, to create an awareness campaign that would include advertisements on County Cable and at Montgomery County Public Libraries. Joanna Starling, Commissioner, suggested adding information about the CBOC to the County's Paperless Airplane e-newsletter.

Many Veterans are not aware that they are eligible for VA healthcare. If you served in the active military service and were separated under any condition other than dishonorable, you may qualify for VA health care benefits. If a Veteran was injured during active duty or if they are low-income they may be eligible as well. Current and former members of the Reserves or National Guard who were called to active duty by a federal order and completed the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty may be eligible for VA health benefits as well. Veterans can apply for benefits online, over the phone, in person or by mail ([www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply)).

Wayne offered to have the Mobile Vet Center available at events held throughout the County to assist in enrolling Veterans in VA healthcare. It was suggested that information about the CBOC be shared with every local American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars post as well as sharing information with Montgomery County Public Schools that could be shared with parents.

Dan suggested that the CBOC offer to register Veterans for Agent Orange, Gulf War Illness, etc. He added that blood pressure is now being considered a presumptive condition of Agent Orange and a ruling by the Secretary. It was also suggested that the CBOC hold informational benefits sessions to encourage Veterans to visit.

The DCVAMC parking garage on Irving Street will be renovated to add two more levels. As the garage will be closed during construction, 100 parking spaces will be added behind Fisher House. The spaces will be added in the Spring prior to the garage renovation and will remain once the garage has been completed. Mr. Whiteman noted that parking has improved as VA police have been monitoring to ensure that hospital staff are not parking in the garage. Bill Gray, former Commissioner, noted that he has used a free shuttle from the Metro Catholic University/Brookland Metro Station to the DCVAMC. Mr. Whiteman added that the DCVAMC also offers a free valet parking service.

The CBOC's in Prince George's County and in Southern Maryland are being replaced with larger clinics.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner and Director of the Silver Spring Vet Center, reported that the Vet Center has been offered space at the CBOC, but he has not received any confirmation in writing. Mr. Whiteman will look into this issue.

It was asked if oncology services will be available. Cancer treatment will not be available at the CBOC, but a primary care physician at the CBOC can authorize the Veteran to receive treatment in the community rather than at the DCVAMC, as long as the provider accepts VA rates. Through the Veterans Choice Program (VCP), the VA allows care to be obtained within the community if receiving it at the nearest VA medical center is considered a geographic burden (patient resides 40 miles or more from facility or if patient faces an excessive burden in accessing a facility) or if the wait time to receive care at the VA facility is more than 30 days. VCP is a temporary program that will end on August 7, 2017.

The Department of Defense (DoD) has shown some interest in renting space on the second floor of the CBOC. DoD services would be healthcare-related, but have different eligibility criteria.

#### **V. Chairman and Vice-Chairman Report:**

Dan Bullis, Chair, reported that he, Mike Subin, and Betsy Luecking, Staff, met with Retired Brigadier General Norvell V. Coats, M.D., President of Holy Cross Hospital, to discuss opportunities for Holy Cross to support the Veteran community. Dr. Coats will be meeting with Brian Hawkins, Director, DCVAMC, to discuss providing services with the VA as well as with Dr. Raymond Crowel, Chief, Behavioral Services and Crisis Services, to discuss providing transition beds at Holy Cross for the police Deflection / Diversion models.

Applications for the Commission have been received. Commissioners Mike Subin and Wayne Miller were appointed to the interview committee.

Randy Stone, Vice-Chair, will work on off-site meeting locations for the upcoming year.

#### **VI. New Business:**

At a recent public meeting of the Montgomery County Board of Elections, the Board had a discussion on whether or not to accept absentee ballots from military and overseas individuals that the County received past deadline from the State. While one member did not agree, the Board ultimately decided to accept the ballots. Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) have sent a letter. A motion was made to send a letter to BOE from the Commission regarding this issue. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, made a motion to send a letter to Gary E. Bair, Associate Judge, and John W. Debelius, III, Administrative Judge, for the Montgomery County Circuit Court, about the need for a Veterans Treatment Court in Montgomery County. A vote was taken and unanimously passed.

#### **VI. Announcements:**

Wayne Miller reported that all Vet Center Team Leaders have been promoted to Vet Center Directors and now have first line authority.

Mike Subin reported that County Executive Isiah Leggett has asked him to convene a meeting with Austin Morris, Representative of Senator-Elect Chris Van Hollen, and Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Ben Cardin, to discuss next steps after the successes of advocating for the CBOC and HUD-VASH vouchers. Mike also introduced Gail Nachman, Senior Fellow, who has been appointed by the County Executive to work with the VA to identify local non-profit service providers that could be placed at the CBOC.

Bill Gray, former Commissioner, reported that he attended Arlington National Cemetery for Wreaths Across America. He will also join Vietnam Veterans of America Post 641 and other organizations on Christmas Eve day at the DCVAMC to hand out presents to Veterans at the hospital.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, reported that Senators Roger Manno and Douglas J.J. Peters, will be reviewing the laws for Veterans hiring preference, Veteran income taxes, and Veterans pensions, and are consider changing

eligibility from the five armed forces to the seven uniformed services. The Maryland Council of Chapters of the Military Officers Association of America has completed a survey to identify qualified and cleared professional Veterans who choose to live outside of Maryland of the State tax on their pension. The Council is currently conducting a survey to identify if Veterans would be more likely to start businesses in Maryland if there were no tax burden for those people leaving the military.

Austin Morris, Representative of Senator-Elect Van Hollen, reported that a memorial sign for Marine Corps Sgt Alessandro Carbonaro has been installed at the East-West Highway bridge over the Georgetown Branch Trail. Sgt. Carbonaro's parents worked with Senator-Elect Chris Van Hollen to dedicate the sign. Maryland passed the Highway Heroes Act in 2015, allowing his family and lawmakers to petition the state to dedicate the bridge.

Dan encouraged Commissioners to review the Transportation Network Directory for People with Disabilities and Adults 50+: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/tnd](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/tnd). Betsy noted that Ride On and Metrobuses\* are free Monday through Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. for People with Disabilities, who are not conditionally eligible MetroAccess Users, and Adults 65+. She added that Veterans granted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as having a 60% or greater disability are eligible for a Metro Reduced Fare ID Card. Qualifying Veterans must complete part A of the application, but do not need to have their healthcare provider complete Part B or C of the application. Veterans who have less than a 60% disabled rating can apply for the reduced fare with their healthcare provider completing Part B or C. Veterans must submit their original letter of disability notification issued by the VA, a downloaded letter from the DVA website, or their DD Form 2765 - Uniformed Services ID Card for 100% Disabled Veterans to obtain a Reduced Fare ID Card.

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

**Next Full Commission Meeting:** Tuesday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

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