



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
December 19th, 2017**

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

A motion was made to approve the November 2017 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the November 2017 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Update on the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) – Austin Morris of Senator Chris Van Hollen’s Office

Austin Morris conducted a conference call with Minkoff, the development company and property owner that is working with the VA, Ken Reichard from Senator Ben Cardin’s Office, Mike Subin, and Betsy Luecking to discuss the issues that are delaying the opening of the CBOC. The VA initially wanted drywalled offices, but then decided on a modular set-up. This significantly impacts the costs from \$50,000 to \$600,000. Minkoff was having difficulties getting the new contract from the VA with the cost breakdown. Austin also conducted a conference call with the VA after speaking with Minkoff to discuss these issues. Since then, the VA has sent Minkoff the updated contract. Once the contract is confirmed, Minkoff is estimating it will take 180 days to build out the property. Minkoff indicated It is now expected the CBOC will open in early summer. Please note that the Commission will notify the Commission and public when a firmer date is established.

IV. Vietnam War Memorial Update – Dan Bullis and Mike Subin

Dan reported the Wheaton Veterans Park was determined to be inaccessible and would require significant and costly Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) renovations including the installing of a new ramp from the garage. Betsy added that while the Park may have met requirements in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, it did not meet the standards set in the ADA law adopted in 1990 or the stricter ADA Standards for Accessible Design adopted in 2010. Also in 2010, Montgomery County signed a [Project Civic Access Settlement Agreement](#) with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). Project Civic Access is an on-going, proactive program designed to ensure that counties, cities, and cities throughout the country comply with the ADA by eliminating physical and communication barriers. The County’s ADA Compliance Team is now working to address all the findings included in the Settlement Agreement. Any renovation projects completed by the County must meet ADA standards. Candance Willett, Public, worked for Montgomery Parks prior to working for Easter Seals and noted that the Montgomery Planning Board was still in the process of reviewing the budget for Wheaton Veterans Park. The renovations for the park were estimated to be between \$5,000,000 and \$10,000,000.

The County has made the decision to move the installation of a County Vietnam War Memorial to Memorial Plaza, which is located on the Government Complex Center Terrace between the new Courthouse annex and the Executive Office Building in Rockville along Route 28. Memorial Plaza features an eternal flame, all the appropriate flags including a POW/MIA flag, several plaques that honor Veterans, and 24/7 security. Mike Subin reported that David Dise, Director, Department of General Services, has appointed Hamid Omidvar as Project Manager. The County will need to develop a system for booking the plaza for events so that it is used more frequently.

Mike Subin asked if the order of the flags located at Memorial Plaza should be changed to face towards the plaza. Currently, the flags are in correct order if you are looking at the plaza from the street. It was noted that it is not an issue as during most events a Color Guard is present with the correct designated military flags in order.

Mike Walsh, Public, reported Battley Harley-Davidson in Gaithersburg volunteered to put together a bike ride to the County's Vietnam War Memorial Dedication event including arranging police escorts. Betsy added that she could contact Brie O'Neal with Rolling Thunder to participate as well. Battley will be hosting a Ride to the Wall on Sunday, May 27th, 2018.

V. Discussion on Recommendations for Actionable Items for 2018

Susan Webman, Commissioner, suggested working on employment issues and inviting organizations that assist Veterans with obtaining employment to present before the Commission. Ron Drach, Commissioner, suggested inviting Worksource Montgomery to discuss their programs, updates, and barriers to providing services.

Dan would like the Commission to work on public awareness about the Commission. Susan will identify local publications and contact them about publishing an interview with Dan.

Randy Stone, Vice-Chairman, will work on Commission satellite meetings for 2018.

Josephine Bahn, Commissioner, will continue to work on the proposed "Thank A Veteran" social media campaign.

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, recently toured the Fisher House in DC. There are two Fisher House locations in Montgomery County. The Director at Fisher House noted that after the holidays they are in dire need of food and toiletry donations. Octavia recommended the Commission create a continuous program to provide donations of supplies to these two locations on a regular or quarterly basis. It was also suggested that a representative of Fisher House present at a future Commission meeting.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, recommended that the Commission hold a legislative breakfast similar to the Commission on Aging where they invite all the representatives from Montgomery County and present them with a list of legislative items on aging issues. Harvey Kaplan, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), is currently putting together a package of support items to follow during the next session. Mike noted that the Commission can lobby at the State level as long as it does not conflict with County positions and they are first approved by the County's Office of Intergovernmental Relations. He suggested the Commission appoint a subcommittee now to review legislative items and make recommendations as by the time the Commission meets again in January the Maryland General Assembly is already underway. It was suggested that the Commission invite a representative from the Maryland Veterans Commission on to discuss legislative issues and how to better partner with them. It was also suggested that Harvey attend to discuss MOAAs agenda.

Dan recommended that the Commission ask the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) for an update on the Veteran Trust Fund, the criteria that is used for applications, and how the fund is managed. MDVA receives profits from veteran service organizations that have slot machines at their posts which is used for the Veteran Trust Fund.

Dan noted that County Executive Isiah Leggett is leaving office in December 2018 and the Commission will need to work with a new County Executive at that time. In the Commission's enabling legislation, it states "The Executive must designate a chair and vice-chair from among the Commission's members." Since the Commission was established in 2008, there has never been an election of officers as the Chair and Vice chair have been appointed without elections. Dan stated that he really intended early on to rotate the Chair every couple years. He stated that he didn't think anyone will beat Bill's record. Dan indicated that he talked about having an election this past summer time and then thought maybe he could see the CBOC and Vietnam Memorial. go up. Now that's slipping. There is a need to get on track of normal cycle of appointments/elections so we can have an opportunity to elect a new chair in the months ahead. He indicated he would still be involved with the Commission even after the appointments/election to see these things happen. Dan indicated he did not have to be the Chair during that time of the implementation of the CBOC and Vietnam War Memorial.

VI. New Business

Candance Willett, Outreach Coordinator, Easterseals, and U.S. Navy Veteran, introduced herself to the Commission and spoke about the services offered at the new [Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic](#), which had its grand opening on November 2nd. The Cohen Clinic provides no or low-cost high-quality, accessible, and integrated behavioral health care to veterans and their families or caregivers. Services are offered regardless of discharge status and to whomever the veteran considers their closest kin. The Cohen Clinic is located at 1420 Spring Street, Suite 300, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Mr. Cohen's work with veterans began in part because of a personal connection – his son served in the United States Marine Corps and is currently serving in the Reserves. He has donated to NYU Langone to fund PTS research. He also donated \$300,000,000 to create the [Cohen Veterans Network](#) to improve the quality of life for recently returned veterans and their families by working to strengthen mental health outcomes and complement existing support, with a particular focus on post-traumatic stress. There are now seven clinics operational around the country that are in high need veteran and military family communities.

Other military and Veteran services offered by Easterseals include the Veteran Staffing Network, a Military Family Respite Program, Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs, Family Caregiver Training, Little Warriors Child Development Program, and Senior and Adult Day Services. Easter Seals also partners with the Veteran Consortium to provide free legal clinics for Veterans. For more information about Easterseals services and programs, please visit <http://www.easterseals.com/DCMDVA/our-programs/military-veteran-services/>.

Candance offered for Easterseals to host a free resource fair that the Commission could be a part of along with other VSOs.

Dan asked for an update on Warrior Canine Connection. The VA issued a work stoppage due to an unknown contractual issue and all services were ceased immediately. There were 104 active duty service members and veterans in the program. They are working to work out the issues with the VA to get the program back up and running.

VII. Announcements

Dan reported Elspeth Cameron Ritchie, MD, MPH, COL (ret), will be having another book signing on January 11th at American Legion Post 41 in Silver Spring. Her new book is titled "Gay Mental Healthcare Providers and Patients in the Military: Personal Experiences and Clinical Care".

Bob Koffman, Commissioner, reported he and Rick Yount, Warrior Canine Connection, attended the Guitar Legends for Heroes Benefit Concert that will air nationally on television on December 23rd. All funds raised will be granted to non-profit organizations helping veterans, service members and their families across the country, including: Headstrong, Psych Armor, Hope for The Warriors and Warrior Canine Connection.

Octavia reported over the next three to six months the VA will be realigning to give more power to the VISNs. This should result in better and more streamlined services provided by the Medical Centers.

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, January 16th, 2018 from 6:00pm to 7:30pm at Health & Human Services Building, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor 1A Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager