



Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs Meeting Summary Minutes – June 16th, 2015

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 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:

There was a motion to approve the May, 2015 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the May, 2015 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Veterans Economic Communities Initiative – Sharisse Y. O'Banion, Consultant, Washington, DC Metro Area Economic Liaison, Office of Transition, Employment and Economic Impact, U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs

On May 18th the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) along with leaders from national and local veterans service organizations, corporate employers and government agencies, announced the launch of the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative (VECI), an effort focused in a total of 50 U.S. cities to promote economic success for veterans. The goal of the VECI is to increase education and employment opportunities for America's veterans by bringing together local and national employers to coordinate services for veterans, service members and military families. VECI includes a VA Economic Liaison in each of 25 participating communities who will expand and encourage collaboration among private and public organizations that offer resources related to education, training and employment.

Last week Dan Bullis and Ron Drach met with Sharisse O'Banion, Economic Liaison for the Washington DC Metro Area, at the DC Chamber of Commerce. Sharisse is responsible for Maryland, D.C., West Virginia, Alexandria and Arlington.

Sharisse is visiting educational institutions, including University of Maryland and George Mason University, to ensure that students are utilizing and maximizing their GI Bill benefits and the Yellow Ribbon Program, if eligible. Sharisse also connects with non-profits to offer online certification programs that will assist veterans in gaining job skills that make them more marketable. She educates employers on the VA's Veteran Employer Center, a website that offers career tools such as a military skills translator, resume builder, training and vocational resources, and education and counseling. Employers can post jobs and review resumes posted to the site.

Economic Liaisons are collaborating with the Community Employment Coordinators that are housed at all 120 VA Medical Centers to reach out to homeless veterans.

Betsy has connected Sharisse with Dana Hendrickson, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), to discuss Maryland's Operation Hire program as well as connecting her with the County's Office of Human Resources contact, Karen Hochberg.

Maryland's veteran unemployment rate was discussed. Prince George's County and Montgomery County have the highest veteran unemployment rates in Maryland. Stan noted that the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) survey sample is composed of 60,000 households. Of that number approximately 600 veterans are surveyed. BLS cautions the use of their data as they have the highest sampling error. Dan Bolling, Commissioner, was asked to research veteran unemployment data for Montgomery County and report back at the next Commission meeting.

It was suggested that Sharisse have a key contact in each county she is working that can assist with the collaboration of agencies and non-profits. Sharisse is working with Capitol Post in Alexandria.

It was suggested that Sharisse connect with local small business administrations. Jerry Godwin, Commissioner, noted that the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program provides services to veterans to help with job training, employment accommodations, resume development, and job seeking skills coaching. Other services may be provided to assist veterans in starting their own businesses or independent living services for those who are severely disabled and unable to work in traditional employment. In some cases, veterans participating in the VR&E program may receive a subsistence allowance while they pursue an educational or training program in preparation for a future career.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, discussed the issue of preparing those separating from active duty with the necessary skills they need to obtain gainful employment after leaving the military. The Northern Virginia chapter of MOAA has developed a multi-step three-day seminar for the veteran and their spouse to attend. Jim, Harvey Kaplan, First Vice President, MOAA Montgomery County Chapter, Jim Dittbrenner, Tops Liaison, MOAA Montgomery County Chapter, and Stan Siedel, Easter Seals, are interested in starting a similar seminar in Montgomery County.

Jim D. stated that the VA Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP) pre-separation counseling is supposed to be given a year before an individual leaves the military, and two years prior to their retirement. MOAA has interviewed individuals who have left the military and CTAP is typically given 90 days before they leave. At this point those individuals leaving are not focusing on the pre-separation counseling as they are too worried about re-entering civilian life. Jim stated that Reservists and National Guard need to be included in outreach efforts. He noted that he is aware of a local National Guard unit where 50% of its members are still unemployed three years later.

Sharisse will provide updates and report back to the Commission.

IV. Department of Defense (DoD) Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP) – Ann Dodelin, Consumer Reviewer Administrator, Peer Review and Science Management, SRA International, Inc.

In 1992, a highly visible lobbying campaign by grassroots advocacy organizations, primarily the National Breast Cancer Coalition, increased awareness among policymakers of the need to expand funding for breast cancer research. These consumer groups emphasized the need to fund research in ways that were different from those employed by traditional medical research organizations such as the National Institutes of Health. In response, the United States Congress allocated specific funds for breast cancer research in the Department of Defense appropriations budget. The Department of Defense was chosen because of its long history in performing medical research studies and because of its administrative structure was designed for flexible and quick responses to changing needs and priorities. The success of this effort has resulted in an increase in the number of disease research programs for which Congress has mandated funding through the Department of Defense. As of 2009, many new programs have been added to CDMRP's portfolio and include Peer Reviewed Cancer, Orthopedic, Spinal Cord and Lung Cancer. CDMRP research was instrumental in developing the military amputee treatment center at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

The CDMRP's Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (PH/TBI) Research Program was established in 2007 in response to U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, Public Law 110-28, which provided \$150M for research on PTSD and \$150M for research on TBI. An additional \$1M was provided for research on PTSD in Public Law 109-289. Key priorities of the PH/TBI Research Program are to complement ongoing DOD efforts to ensure the health and readiness of our military forces and to support the Department of Defense Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence in its efforts to advance and spread PH/TBI knowledge, enhance clinical and management approaches and facilitate other vital services to best serve the needs of warrior families impacted by PH problems and or TBI. CDMRP also has a research program focusing on Gulf War Illness.

Scientists and clinicians at major research institutions, universities, and medical centers in the United States and in foreign countries conduct the research supported by these funds. Consumers include patients, survivors, family members, or caregivers of people living with a disease, injury or condition. To find consumers CDMRP reaches out to agencies and organizations that are working with veterans.

Jane McCarthy, Commissioner, noted that she was on a PTSD panel as a consumer representative. The panel's input helped the VA move towards more non-conventional treatment of PTSD.

V. Veteran Workforce Channel

Jim Hatch, Jim@theworkforcechannel.com, is working to create a military workforce channel that will assist veterans and their families with transitioning into civilian life and help start career paths. The channel will feature video libraries of resources.

VI. Update of Plans for Community Based Outpatient Clinic and Montgomery Cable TV Show “Homefront”, Zero 16 Campaign to End Veteran and Chronic Homelessness – Mike Subin

Mike Subin reported that there was a meeting with homeless providers in Montgomery County to discuss “Zero:16”, which is a national campaign that is working with 50 communities to bring chronic and veteran homelessness to zero by 2016. The County Council has appropriated \$500,000 for this effort in FY16. A plan must be submitted to the County Council by July 15th detailing how the monies are to be allocated. At the last point-in-time count 24 homeless veterans were identified. 10 veterans are ineligible for HUD-VASH vouchers.

Mike taped the first episode of the new Montgomery Cable TV show “Homefront” today. He interviewed County Executive Isiah Leggett. The episode will air in the next few months. “Homefront” will be taped once a month.

Brian Hawkins, Director, Washington DC VA Medical Center (DCVAMC), met with Mike and the County Executive today to announce that the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) for Montgomery County has been approved. As part of a pilot program the CBOC will offer primary care and mental health services as well as non-profits and agencies that provide non-medical services, such as job training, to veterans. The DCVAMC Montgomery County CBOC is expected to be 11,500 square feet and will be located near public transportation.

Mike also announced that the Vietnam Memorial that the Commission will be involved in fund raising for will be located near the Mid-County Regional Services Center in Wheaton. The County Executive needs to sign off on the location.

VI. Chair and Vice Chair Report:

Dan reported that Mike Subin was the keynote speaker at a Memorial Day event that was held at the Wheaton Veterans Park. The event was sponsored by American Legion Post 41, American Legion Post 268, and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 562.

Dan announced the American Legion Post 41 in Silver Spring will be hosting a DC Blues Fish Fry on July 11th. Admission is free.

VI. Unfinished Business: None.

VII. New Business: None.

VIII. Roundtable:

Sharon Hodge shared updated census data on veterans living in Montgomery County. See Attachment A.

Jerry Godwin, Commissioner, reported that the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development (DED), will be hosting a small business awards luncheon on Wednesday, June 24th at the North Bethesda Marriott Hotel & Conference Center. This year DED has added a veteran-owned small business category. The ceremony will feature keynote speaker Danny Farrar, CEO and Co-Founder of SoldierFit. The event is open to the public.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, reported that the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) has hired a new Veterans Benefits Specialist (VBS) for Montgomery County. His name is Robert White and he will be working at the Montgomery College Rockville Campus Monday through Thursday from 7:30am to 3:00pm. The 1st and 3rd Friday of the month he will be located at the Silver Spring Vet Center and the 2nd and 4th Friday of the month he will be located at MontgomeryWorks in Wheaton.

Bob Pelletier, MontgomeryWorks, reported that MontgomeryWorks has been renamed Workforce Montgomery. The Wheaton Office is hosting a veterans hiring event on June 26th from 10:00am to 2:00pm featuring 13 companies that will be ready to hire veterans on the spot.

Sharon Hodge, Commissioner, reported that she is working with the DCVAMC to plan a welcome home ceremony for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) / Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans. A date has yet to be determined. Sharon hopes to have the event at the Silver Spring Civic Building.

Adjournment: 7:45 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, September 15th, 2015 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Health & Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor Tan Conference Room, Rockville, MD.

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I; Betsy Luecking, Manager