



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
June 20th, 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. A moment of silence was also held for the three soldiers recently killed in Afghanistan, including Army Sgt. Eric M. Houck from Baltimore; the seven sailors who died in the USS Fitzgerald accident, including Navy Personnel Specialist First Class Xavier Martin from Halethorpe; and Otto Warmbier, who suffered fatal injuries in North Korea.

II. Approval of Minutes

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

III. Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Education Center at the Vietnam Wall, Display of Photos, and Items Left at the Wall – Jim Knotts, President and CEO

Website: www.vvmf.org

PowerPoint: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/VVMFEdCenter2017.pdf

Over 9 million Americans served in the military during the Vietnam-era. Approximately, 2.7 million of those who served were in country or surrounding waters during that time. Every year, 5.6 million people visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Estimates are that over 50% of those individuals were not alive when the wall was dedicated in 1982. The wall lists 58,318 names and over 400,000 items have been left at the wall since before it was dedicated. The first item to be left was a medal that the brother of a soldier killed in Vietnam placed there. The medal was laid into the concrete.

In 2001, the VVMF decided to put context around the Vietnam Veterans Memorial by building a permanent Education Center on the National Mall. In 2003, legislation from Congress was passed authorizing VVMF to build the Education Center. It has taken over 12 years and millions of dollars for the project design and approval for construction. VVMF is currently in the fundraising phase prior to construction.

Original legislation designated that the two-story building be installed underground and for all monies for the project to be raised privately. No public funds may be used for construction.

The entrance to the building will be located on Henry Bacon Drive. The entry will already be one floor below ground and will feature a bookshop and a glass wall overlooking an atrium. Special legislation was passed from Congress in order to include a donor wall to recognize donors for the project. Individuals will entry through the Legacy of Service wall and they will walk down three switchbacks to reach the lower level. There is a balcony that will overlook the Wall of Faces. Cases will be installed and will include 6,000 items from the collection of items left at the wall. The collection will have six major thematic areas around what the wall has meant and how it's meaning has change for our country over time.

The Education Gallery's purpose to put context around the sacrifice of 58,000 people. It will present topics around the Vietnam-era at large in this area and help individuals understand what it meant to our country and how it impacts decisions that are made today.

The Wall of Faces will be a two-story, 50-foot wide digital display of the more than 58,000 service members whose names are engraved on The Wall. VVMF has made great progress in collection a photo for every name that is on the wall. All photos are available online at www.vvmf.org. There is a page for every single person on the wall. As of today, 6,126 are still needed. There are about 20 very active volunteers around the country and other less active volunteers helping to find these photos either through high school yearbooks, newspaper microfiche, or contacting family members.

The Legacy of Service Hall will represent our military service to our nation from Bunker Hill to present time. It will put the context of the Vietnam War in our nation's history as well as the service of the millions of men and women who have stepped forward to provide to our country. The Hall will show the conflicts that have come after Vietnam and leave room for future conflicts. The exhibit will really demonstrate the legacy of service across generations.

There will be opportunities in some exhibit spaces to recognize our partners in service. Five other nations sent troops to Vietnam. The Republic of Korea lost the most soldiers behind the U.S. at 5,099. The Australians lost just over 500.

VVMF is currently in the fundraising phase for this project. To date they have raised \$42.5 million. Fundraising is conducted through public presentations and outreach to corporations and foundations. They hope that more awareness of the Vietnam War will be created with the airing of Ken Burns Vietnam documentary film series in September. Jim noted that he has seen a few episodes of the documentary already and says it is an experience that gives a broad-based perspective from many different directions on what happened during the era. The documentary includes interviews with the South Vietnamese military, the North Vietnamese military, and the Viet Cong. Perhaps the documentary will help to renew our country's interest in the Vietnam War and give those Veterans the welcome home they deserve.

The floor was opened to questions.

It was asked if the Education Center will have a section that focuses on the war and what happened. Jim noted that the Education Gallery will feature multimedia presentations on a variety of topics. These presentations will include the social, political and military impacts on our country. Jim added that there are currently 14 lessons plans created on a variety of topics posted on the website for teachers to use in classrooms or for Veterans to use if they give a presentation at a school. They have attempted to be balanced and unbiased in their presentation of topics. All lesson plans include links to the original sources. Education resources: www.vvmf.org/teaching-the-vietnam-era.

It was asked if tickets will be required to visit the Center. At this time no tickets are required and the Center is free and open to the public. Park Service is responsible for running the facility. Tickets may become necessary as the opening of the Center draws nearer. Tickets cannot be sold as a fundraiser prior to the opening due to Federal government restrictions. Fundraising events cannot be held at the Center or at the Vietnam Wall.

It was asked how recommendations are made for the Educate Center. VVMF has a Content Advisory Committee comprised of a dozen recognized experts on Vietnam. The group is very diverse and includes those who served and war protesters.

It was asked why the education center must be underground. Jim reported that they did not want to destroy the line of sight from Constitution to the Lincoln Memorial. He added that due to environmental requirements, trees will be planted on the field where the center is and once they are matured, they will block the line of sight.

Every five years on the anniversary of the Vietnam War, VVMF holds a name reading ceremony four days before Veterans Day. It was discussed reading the names of those lost in Vietnam from other countries, but the idea was abandoned as some of the Vietnamese community could not come to a decision on including the South Vietnamese.

Those communities are still extremely fractured. Due to this, the Education Center will not pay tribute to the South or North Vietnamese soldiers who list their lives in the war.

It was asked what years VVMF uses to refer to the Vietnam War. Jim noted that since there was never a declaration of war there is no definitive war start date. The 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration Committee references 1955. The Vietnam Wall lists the time period as 1959 to 1975 as 1959 was the earliest year of a recorded date of death. Although, Jim noted that in 2004, it was discovered that a US Air Force Technical Sergeant had died in Vietnam in 1956.

Jim noted that on Friday, September 15th a POW/MIA Remembrance Day candle light vigil will be held at the Vietnam Wall starting at about 7:00 p.m. The event is open to the public.

IV. Update - Vietnam Memorial Project:

The Vietnam Memorial Project Subcommittee has met several times at the Wheaton Veterans Park to discuss possibilities of installing a Vietnam Memorial. The park setting is very peaceful and has the potential to include other war memorials.

Dan read a draft letter to County Executive Isiah Leggett requesting his support in establishing a Vietnam War Memorial in the existing Wheaton Veterans Park. The memorial will recognize those 131 fallen heroes who died during service in Vietnam as well as our living County's Vietnam Veterans. The goal is to have this memorial dedicated by County Executive Leggett on Memorial Day in 2018.

Proposed Drawing of Memorial:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/MCMemWalsh.pdf

Recommendations for the memorial include: using same stone as Vietnam Wall and using Omicron .53 font so names can be rubbed; 6 foot height; names to be listed in alphabetical order – first name, middle initial, last name, and no date of death; install a light to shine on the memorial; include an education component and install a small sign that refers people to Montgomery Community Media “Honor and Gratitude” documentary and any other relevant information; locate the memorial in the first flower bed on the left from Fern street entrance; install a digital display to be placed by the flag poles that will honor service members killed in action, view current Veterans, and other information on Veterans; rename the park to Montgomery County Veterans Park; move the POW/MIA flag under the U.S. flag and install a County flag; clean and fix the wall that is dedicated to all Veterans; move the plaque dedicated to Alberto Coleman near the plaque dedicated to Jack Hewitt; install a curb cut on Fern Street to create an accessible drop off area; add rose bushes, forget-me-nots, and poppies; and at the same time as this project is announced include that over the next five years the County hopes to have a memorial dedicated to include the names of those lives lost in the Global War on Terror, Gulf War, Korea, World War II, World War I and install a plaque that directs people to County Veterans website and Fallen Heroes.

The Wheaton Veterans Park will be transferred to Montgomery County Government from Montgomery Parks.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, made a motion to send the letter to County Executive Leggett. Mike Subin recused himself from the vote. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.

Jim Knotts is willing to share with the County VVMF's knowledge, information and resources they have from creating and designing the Education Center that may help in creating and designing our County's Vietnam War Memorial. Jim noted that he can assist with connecting the County with the quarry in India for the stone and provide technical details for the font and character depth. He also offered to provide technical assistance for the electronic display.

It was asked how funding for the project will be obtained. The County would go through procurement for estimates and then decide on funding.

It was asked if other counties in Maryland have a Vietnam memorial. Mike Walsh, Public, reported that virtually every County in the state has a Vietnam memorial. Mike Subin added that before the new courthouse was built in

1988, there was a stone located there with a plaque dedicated to those County residents who lost their lives in Vietnam. The plaque was moved to Memorial Plaza. The plaque does not list the names of those killed in action.

Henry Bockman, Commissioner, offered that to reach out to a group of contractors he is associated with about volunteering their services to clean Vietnam memorials across the country. Perhaps by cleaning these memorials it will help bring the focus to these memorials and the Vietnam War. Henry added that in the past his company has cleaned the Lincoln Memorial twice and the Jefferson Memorial once.

V. Chair Report:

Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported that Montgomery Parks is working to negotiate and evaluate a grant from the Department of Natural Resources to install a separate launch pad at Riley's Lock for Team River Runner. Currently, wounded warrior kayakers must use the same launch pad as the power boats. Montgomery Parks is also looking to make the existing trail and parking lot more accessible and add an accessible port-a-potty. Nothing is final as of yet.

VI. Announcements

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, reported that the Montgomery County Chapter of Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) will be hosting a luncheon at Manor Country Club on June 21st. Senator Roger Manno will be speaking. On July 19th the Chapter will welcome an expert who will discuss state legislation.

Bob Koffman, Commissioner, reported that The Bush Institute's Military Service Initiative will host Stand-To – A National Veterans Convening on June 23 in Washington, D.C., with key leaders from across the public, private, non-profit, and philanthropic sector to outline key priorities and an action plan to drive improved outcomes for veterans and their families. Bob is one the Veteran Wellness Task Force that will report. The other two task forces are on Veteran Employment and Veteran Education. To watch the event live, please visit: www.bushcenter.org/exhibits-and-events/events/2017/06/p-national-veterans-convening-stand-to.html.

Hazel Gross, Elks Lodge #15, reported that the Lodge received a \$4,500 grant from the National Foundation to provide furnishings for two apartments – one for a Veteran and her son and one for a single male Veteran.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported that he and Betsy had a meeting recently with VA representatives to receive an update on the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). The Department of Defense is interested in leasing out the rest of the building and installing a clinic. Betsy spoke with the owner of the building and was told they are awaiting approval from the VA for the drawings. Permits cannot be applied for until the drawings are approved.

Mike also reported that the County received a complaint from a resident who is Vietnamese and was offended that the City of Rockville was flying a North Korean flag in downtown Rockville. The City of Rockville had raised flags from around the world that are in the United Nations and posted them on lamp posts to show the City's inclusiveness. Mike worked with the City of Rockville to have the flag taken down.

Adjournment: 7:20 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, September 19th, 2017 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. 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