



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
June 18, 2019**

I. Call to Order

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.

II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the April 2019 and May 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the April 2019 and May 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. POW Flag at Memorial Plaza – Evan Glass, Councilmember, Montgomery County Council

Councilmember Glass thanked the Commission for accommodating him on their schedule. He said that his father was a Vietnam Veteran and his maternal grandfather was in the Army Air Force in WWII and ran bombing missions from England over Nazi-occupied territories. On his 20th mission he was shot down and spent 20 months in a prisoner camp. His grandfather instilled in him a dedication to public service.

Councilmember Glass shared that in May 2019 the County Council approved the County's \$5.8 billion operating budget. The Council restored four bus service lines that served the upcounty region. The Council also added \$5 million to the Housing Initiative Fund to create more affordable housing. The Council added two sheriffs to the public safety budget and staffing levels were restored at the Hillandale and Burtonsville Volunteer Fire Departments.

Councilmember Glass is the lead person on homelessness in vulnerable communities. At this time, the Veteran homeless population is at effective zero thanks to our previous County Executive Isiah Leggett and Councilmembers. The chronically homeless population is nearing effective zero with approximately seven to eight individuals not having a place to stay on any given night. The County will also be working with families, which are typically single women with children.

A constituent reached out to Councilmember Glass about the Ride On bus platform on Gaither Road as it was not accommodating to him to reach the new Gaithersburg VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). He worked with the VA and the Department of Transportation (DOT) to fix this issue so patients will now have much better access to the CBOC.

Last week, Councilmember Glass worked with County Executive Marc Elrich to raise the Pride flag at Memorial Plaza in Rockville as June is designated as Pride Month celebrating the LGBTQ community. This was the first time the Pride flag had ever been raised by the County.. The ceremony was attended by more than 75 people. At his request, Councilmember Glass said that the Department of General Services (DGS) decided to remove the POW/MIA flag in order to accommodate the Pride flag as there were not enough rings to raise both on the flagpole. Once the County realized the sacredness of the POW/MIA flag it was put back on its own flagpole and the Pride flag was installed under the State flag.

County Executive Elrich issued the following statement regarding the POW/MIA flag:

For Immediate Release: Tuesday 11 June

The Pride flag did not replace the POW/MIA flag. On June 10th, when the Pride flag was raised, there was not a mechanism in place for both flags to be displayed. This has been corrected, and both flags are flying now. The Pride flag was raised to honor Pride Month and will be replaced by the County flag at the end of June.

Councilmember Glass said there was no ill will or malice meant by removing the POW/MIA flag and it was re-installed 12 hours after it was taken down. He stated that after the incident his staff had to stop answering phone calls and social media due to the deluge of offensive and hateful messages he received.

If you have any concerns or comments, you can contact Councilmember Glass at 240-777-7966 (V), councilmember.glass@montgomerycountymd.gov.

The floor was opened to comments and questions.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, said it was not DGS' fault or their idea for removing the POW/MIA flag. It had been suggested that the County flag be taken down. The issue was not that the Pride flag was installed. The issue is that the POW/MIA flag was taken down. Memorial Plaza is hallowed ground. Over 500 people attended the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall that occurred May 2018. The Memorial was commemorated last month for the one-year anniversary. Mike asked what the rationale was for removing the POW/MIA flag.

Councilmember Glass said he asked County Executive Elrich if they could raise the Pride flag but had no other input or control over the event, which was planned by the County Executive and DGS. He regrets he was not part of that conversation and only learned that the POW/MIA flag had been removed just prior to the ceremony. He stated that the County has learned from this, and will move forward.

Josephine Bahn, Commissioner, asked why Memorial Plaza was chosen to raise the Pride flag and if an event walkthrough had been planned. Memorial Plaza was chosen as it is the County's primary flagpole. Again, the site chosen was an internal conversation among County Executive staff that Councilmember Glass was not included in. The event had been planned more than a month in advance and had been rehearsed, but a walk through of Memorial Plaza was not included.

Scott Schlesinger, Jewish War Veterans, suggested that the Commission publicize how important it is to recognize POW's and MIA's as the general community may not be aware.

Dan recognized it was an unfortunate and unintentional mistake. Dan invited Councilmember Glass to join the Sons of the American Legion and presented him with a flag pin in remembrance of his grandfather.

Neil Greenberger, Public Information Office, reported the County Executive's Office is working on a policy to be issued soon that will clearly state that the flags at Memorial Plaza will never be replaced or taken down for any reason. There are concerns that after raising the Pride flag any group may want to use the flagpole.

IV. History and Advances Made in Caring for Veterans Requiring Amputee Care Resulting from Combat Injury – Dixie Johnson, RN, MSN, CRRN, CCM, Amputee Care Coordinator, Amputee Care Program, Military Advanced Training Center (MATC), WRNMMC Department of Rehabilitation

Dixie Johnson is one of two amputee care coordinators at Walter Reed. She gave a presentation on the history of amputee care and the advances made over the years.

PowerPoint: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A&D%20Docs/CVA/WRNMMCJune2019.pdf>

After the presentation, the floor was opened to questions.

How many people that are screened are turned away? If the individual is eligible, they are not turned away although they may have to wait for services. Approximately 15% to 20% are not eligible and they will assist those individuals with getting a referral to the VA.

Do you have contact with the clinicians at the VA? The Amputee Care Program (ACP) works closely with the VA, both locally and nationwide. The VA DC Medical Center has sent patients to ACP, and ACP has also referred patients to the VA DC Medical Center. Sometimes the VA may not refer an individual to the program because they do not want to be billed for the care. When ACP sends Active Duty service members to the VA for rehabilitation care, ACP has to pay the VA and vice versa for referrals sent from the VA to ACP.

The Silver Spring Vet Center provides free counseling. Wayne Miller, Vice-Chair, said the Silver Spring Vet Center can provide readjustment counseling to Veterans either on-site at Walter Reed or at the Center. The Steven A. Cohen Military Clinic in Silver Spring also offers free counseling to Veterans, military service members, and their spouses.

Will APC pay for different types of prosthetics as required by various sports and activities? Yes, they do as they want the Veterans to be active. If the Veteran has an interest in a particular sport or activity, they will work to get them that prosthetic unless it is not feasible. For example, one Veteran wanted a hockey sled and ACP reached out to a non-profit to get it for him.

What types of patients does ACP receive from the Department of Defense (DoD)? Many are foreign-military allies that have been injured in war, some are reporters that have been injured overseas, and they received many victims of the Boston marathon bombing.

National Institutes of Health (NIH) provides lodging for their patients. Do you coordinate with NIH? The VA cannot utilize their lodging as the individual has to be receiving care at NIH. ACP has an agreement with NIH for those who are cancer patients. Several NIH cancer patients with amputees have received rehabilitation care at ACP.

Funding for transportation and lodging for individuals who need financial assistance. Dan noted that the Walter Reed Society provides ACP with funding for those individuals who return to Walter Reed for post-amputee care and need assistance with transportation and lodging.

V. Chair and Vice Chair Report

Dan reported the one-year commemoration ceremony for the Vietnam Wall Memorial was well-attended and well-done. Mission BBQ catered the event. Michael S. Heimall, FACHE, Medical Center Director, DC VA Medical Center, presented before the Commission. Dan noted that this Commission has a good relationship with the DC VA Medical Center and the Gaithersburg CBOC.

Commissioners need to submit their year-end travel reimbursement forms to Carly Clem, Staff, by tomorrow, June 19th.

The Commission does not have meetings in July or August. If a Committee or workgroup would like to meet during this time, they can contact Betsy Luecking, Manager. The next Commission meeting will be held September 17th.

Dan has seen POW/MIA tables at the Manor at Silo Falls restaurant in Brookeville and at Seibels Restaurant in Burtonsville.

VI. Updates

Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Ben Cardin, reported he met with the City of Rockville last week and they are looking for ideas to develop the recently closed Red Gate Golf Course off Route 28. The golf course is 108 acres. Ken suggested it could be a good location for the second VA home. The course already has public water and sewer.

Dan reported he has been talking to the Vice President of Development at Brooke Grove Retirement Village in Snady Spring who recently toured Charlottee Hall. They have been connected to Secretary George Owings, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, and are interested in partnering with the VA to develop a second VA home on their property. Dan is concerned that the funding allocated in the Federal system will be reallocated if a location is not chosen soon. Dan noted that there has been some media attention as a Montgomery County Sentinel reporter attended the April 2019 Commission meeting and her article included that the County was searching for at least 25 acres of land for a second VA home. Neil will work with Dan on next steps.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, made a motion for the Commission to support both suggestions as well as any additional suggestions as feasible locations for the second VA home. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously passed.

VII. Announcements

Julie Riggs, Serving Together (ST), introduced Bernadette Garrett. Bernadette was connected with ST through Maryland's Commitment to Veterans. She is interested in starting a Toastmasters club for Veterans, wounded warriors and transitioning military members. Toastmasters is a non-profit that can help individuals develop communication and leadership skills. The Steven A. Cohen Clinic at Easterseals will be hosting a test meeting in July (date to be determined) to see if there is enough interest. While the club will not be limited to Veterans, they will be the focus. Easterseals offers a Veterans Staffing Network that the club may also be able to tie into. The annual cost is \$90 per member and is billed bi-annually every April and September. Bernadette would like to offer the costs to be subsidized, but that would ultimately be decided by Toastmasters International. She asked the Commission to help advertise the club. Julie noted they will also be reaching out to Team Red, White and Blue.

Michael Wilson, Gaithersburg-Rockville Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, reported the Fraternity, as part of a community outreach project, donated sundry bags to Fisher House at Walter Reed.

Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, reported she works with the EagleForce Warrior Foundation, a non-profit that provides air and ground transportation to military hospitals for wounded, ill and injured military service members and their extended families. Cynthia will connect Dixie with this Foundation and suggested they present before the Commission at a future meeting. Cynthia also reported Maj Genl Kelly McKeague will be presenting at the Japanese American Veterans Association (JAVA) meeting on July 13th at the Harvest Moon restaurant in Arlington, VA. Maj Gen Kelly McKeague began service as the Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA).

Wayne reported the Silver Spring Vet Center will be having an open house from 10am to 3pm on Thursday, June 20th at the Knights of Columbus, 9707 Rosensteel Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910. The open house will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Vet Center program. Between 10am and 11am there will be several presentations, including one from Quilts of Valor who will be presenting quilts to 8 or 9 Veterans. Many Veterans organizations will be in attendance. Dan noted that former U.S. Senator and Vietnam Veteran Max Cleland, who created the Vet Center counseling program, made a video for this event that will be shown during the presentations.

Jim reported the Maryland Military Officers Association of America will be hosting their monthly luncheon tomorrow at Manor Country Club. Newly elected Maryland Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield will be presenting.

Adjournment: 7:40pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, September 17th, 2019 from 6pm to 7:30pm. Held at Health and Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor 1A Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I /
Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager