



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Meeting Summary Minutes  
November 19, 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 October 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the October 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

**III. Remarks & Discussion – The Honorable Marc Elrich, County Executive**

County Executive Marc Elrich discussed the opportunity for Montgomery County to be the site for a second Veterans home. Earlier this year the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) approached the County about finding a site of at least 25 acres that the County could donate. A potential site has been located in the City of Rockville at the former Red Gate Golf Course. County Executive Marc Elrich thanked Senator Ben Cardin and his representative Ken Reichard for bringing this site to their attention. Rockville would be a good location for the Veterans home as it is easily accessible and close to transit and services. Montgomery County is home to 42,000 Veterans and it would be great to not rely on Charlotte Hall for services. MDVA has discussed building a cluster of residential units that would surround the facility. Betsy Luecking, Staff, said the MD Depart of Veterans Affairs has set aside \$22M and the VA \$41M for construction this project.

Discussions for the second Veterans home were put on hold until after the City of Rockville's Mayoral and Council election on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Dave Peterson, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), said before the City of Rockville election MOAA sent all 15 candidates a questionnaire about their support for a second Veterans home in Montgomery County, potentially at Red Gate Golf Course. All five candidates who won the election are in support including the re-elected Mayor Bridget Donnell Newton. County Executive Elrich said if the City of Rockville agrees to the terms, then it will be up to MDVA and VA to move forward. He added that the County would like to work with the City of Rockville to acquire land at Red Gate Golf Course to develop a vehicle maintenance facility/bus depot that would be used by both the County and the City of Rockville. There is enough land to accommodate both the Veterans home and the facility. The new bus depot would move half of the busses from the Shady Grove Depot.

County Executive Elrich is not aware of a timeline to approve a location and said the discussions have been fluid. The VA would have to make a formal proposal to the City of Rockville, who would review and approve before going forward with the agreement. There are some improvements that can be made to the location during the process of building. County Executive Elrich does not see any impediments other than a formal agreement. John Mendez, Bethesda Cares, said there is a shift in the homeless Veterans population now being housed. He has substantial data to share with staff to demonstrate the need for vulnerable Veterans to age in place. Dan said he will reach out to Tina Benjamin who is the contact person for County Executive Elrich on this effort.

The County continues to support Veterans and Veterans organizations and continues to look at how to address the needs of Veterans. The Commission worked to have a VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Gaithersburg which has made a meaningful difference for Veterans.

Montgomery County functionally ended homelessness for Veterans by the end of 2015. The number is a functional zero meaning that homeless Veterans will still enter the system, but there is enough permanent housing available in the County to house them quickly. The County will continue to monitor the number of homeless Veterans and is committed to working with that population.

The County is looking at other ways to assist the Veteran population with employment. The Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce offers free training program for service-disabled Veteran-owned and Veteran-owned small businesses through their Veteran Institute for Procurement (VIP).

County Executive Elrich discussed the issue of the POW/MIA flag being removed from Memorial Plaza in June to accommodate the Pride flag for Pride Month. The POW/MIA flag was reinstalled the next morning.. There were no ill intentions and the County will be installing a flag pole early next year in front of the Council Office Building or the Executive Office Building to fly the Pride flag or other such flags during recognition months. Government only flags will be flown at Memorial Plaza in the future. The floor was opened to questions.

Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, asked about increasing the medical and mental health workforce to deal with the increase of opioid use and overdosing. She also asked about increasing bed space for this population. County Executive Elrich said the opioid epidemic came upon the County like a tidal wave. He hopes Governor Hogan sets aside sufficient funding to deal with this epidemic. County Executive Elrich does not know if the Veterans home would have any flexible space for individuals or whether all units will be permanent housing. Governor Hogan is aware that there is an enormous deficit of beds in Maryland and not just for opioids but for mental health in general. Approximately one-third of the population in the Montgomery County jail system has mental health needs and should be treated somewhere else, but there are no other options. There is not a hospital in the state that has the capacity to handle the need. County Executive Elrich recently had a meeting with the Circuit Court judges and one judge said what we are doing is unconstitutional, but we are doing it because we have no choice. County Executive Elrich hopes Governor Hogan and the state legislators are willing to provide funding and that the opioid settlement money will assist in paying for some of this. Addiction is a lifelong problem and facilities need to be available to help provide support. Cynthia discussed the potential model of starting medication-assisted treatment (MAT) in the jail. The problem there is no place for them to receive treatment once they are released. Raymond Crowel, Director, Health & Human Services (HHS) said Department of Correction & Rehabilitation (DOCR) has a Jail Addiction Services program that is a comprehensive jail-based treatment program designed to provide intensive addictions treatment to eligible inmates of the Montgomery County Correctional Facility. HHS and DOCR are currently in the process of setting up MAT. The idea is to have treatment started in the facility with a smooth transition back into the community. HHS is also looking at opportunities for emergency rooms to provide an injection of methadone and sending those individuals straight to a MAT program for follow-up. Cynthia suggested that the County could provide workforce development training programs to increase the workforce to provide these services.

County Executive Elrich said the County has an agency called WorkSource Montgomery that is supposed to be providing job training programs, but their focus has been more on job placement based on the individual's current skill and education level, and not assisting those individuals in learning the skills needed to obtain higher level jobs. He along with the County Council want to restructure WorkSource Montgomery and create programs that help all residents, including Veterans, to get the training and skills they need to enter the workforce. Montgomery County has discussed internally to remove hiring requirements from some positions as there are many jobs that don't require an associate's or bachelor's degree. In the past it was assumed one would obtain a college degree. Today, Montgomery College is offering more certificate programs. Cynthia said there are online certificate courses individuals can take to help fill the mental health positions that are available. County Executive Elrich said WorkSource needs to be in the school system and train high school students for work.

Blair Eig, Chief Medical Officer, Holy Cross Health (HCH), said Holy Cross Hospitals offer medication assisted therapy in the emergency room, but there is no option for outpatient therapy. He is working with [Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk](#) on the Health and Government Operations Committee on these issues. Delegate Pena-Melnyk which will be introducing several bills, but there will not be enough funds. County Executive Elrich asked for more information regarding the legislation and offered to testify in support in Annapolis. He acknowledged that we need a state solution to this problem as the issue is throughout all of Maryland.

Susan Webman, Commissioner, said there are Federal programs within the Department of Education, Department of Labor, and at the VA that can compliment the programs offered by WorkSource Montgomery. County Executive Elrich said some WorkSource Montgomery funding is from the Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Other funding for WorkSource comes from the County and through fundraising. He wants to reconstitute WorkSource to focus on training. He attended a presentation over the summer given by the Prince George's County WorkSource office and they provide apprenticeship and job training programs. After hearing the presentation County Executive Elrich was encouraged to push harder to dismantle the current structure.

County Executive Elrich asked the Commission to continue to bring issues to his attention.

#### **IV. Chair and Vice Chair Report**

Dan showed the Commission two shadow boxes he received with photos and medals that honor two Blair High School students who were killed in action in Vietnam. Dan asked if this could be displayed at the Silver Spring Civic Building (SSCB) Plans are to have rotating displays year around at the Silver Spring Civic Building and Rockville Memorial Library in May and November.

On November 12<sup>th</sup>, Dan accepted a proclamation from Councilmember Sidney Katz recognizing Veterans Day and honoring Montgomery County's 42,000-strong community of veterans and the work of the Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs. This will hang at the American Legion and rotated amongst Veteran organizations.

#### **V. Discussion – Military / Veterans Display Cases at Silver Spring Civic Building**

Neil Greenberg, Public Information Office, has been asked by the Commission to assist with the display cases at the SSCB. Neil said he can conduct interviews and write a short biography of the Veteran with their photo to highlight in the case. He suggested spotlighted one Veteran at least once a month as it relates to the theme of the monthly display case topic. Betsy said County Executive Elrich has asked if this Commission would like him to spotlight a Montgomery County Veteran that was killed in action or is still living every month on the County's website, or if this Commission would like to do it.

Susan said last month the Commission had decided to focus on Black History Month in February. Betsy has asked the NAACP Montgomery County Branch to assist in gathering items for the display cases. In February 2018, former County Executive Isiah Leggett officially renamed the Great Hall at the SSCB to The Buffalo Soldiers Great Hall. Wayne Miller, Vice-Chair, suggested that Neil could interview members of the Commission for Black History Month and Vietnam Veterans month. Neil said he can start on the interviews now to have them ready. He said if he had the resources he could assist in changing the display cases every month. Betsy said this is the first time there has been a display featuring both those who were killed in action and those who are still living who served. She has spoken with several gold star families that like this idea as it shows a community that all fought together.

#### **VI. Announcements**

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, asked why Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) do not close on Veterans Day. There is a requirement for so many days in the school year, and as Veterans Day does not always fall on regularly scheduled day it can be disruptive. Wayne said many Veteran Service Organizations, like the American Legion (AL) and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), host their own Veterans Day events. Though Veterans Day is a Federal holiday, the Vet Center is working down at the Mall in DC providing

supportive counseling. MCPS has asked Veterans to speak on Veterans Day. Dan said MCPS marching bands and JROTCs and ROTCs help support local AL and VFW events.

Bob Koffman, Commissioner, asked if the Gaithersburg VA CBOC has given Betsy any updates on Veteran enrollment and if more services will be provided. Betsy has not received any recent data and will contact them.

Wayne asked for an update on the accessibility of the entrance at the Gaithersburg VA CBOC. The entrance has an accessible ramp, but for those who use wheelchairs it can be hard or impossible to open the doors to the facility. A complaint was made with the Office of Human Resources (OHR) and an investigator conducted a site visit and filed a formal complaint with the VA for them to install automatic doors. Betsy noted that automatic doors are not required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but they can be installed if the facility is cited as being inaccessible. There is no rule in Montgomery County that facilities must have automated doors. It depends on who is doing construction at the time. When the ADA was first passed in 1990, the County was working to make sure they were in compliance. Betsy said about ten years ago Montgomery County Government decided to go above and beyond the ADA. The County will include automatic doors now for new construction or facility renovations. Betsy also asked OHR to cite the VA for accessible parking lot compliance. Austin Morris, Representative of Senator Chris Van Hollen, has been in touch with the DC VA Medical Center about this issue and they said they would have automatic doors installed within 30 days. John asked if this Commission could ask the County Council to review current building codes and ask for an amendment that would require facilities such as hospitals and VA facilities to install automated doors. Betsy said Montgomery County has adopted the Maryland Accessibility Code which includes the ADA and Fair Housing Amendments Accessibility Guidelines as well as some additional requirements unique to Maryland. It would seem appropriate to ask the VA to include automated doors at their facilities.

Anna Towns, NAACP Montgomery County Branch, announced the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Committee hosted their 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Open House on Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup> at the Rockville Memorial Library. The event featured a showing of award-winning film "SixTripleEight" which honors the only all-female African American 6888 Postal Battalion that served in Europe during WWII. In February 1945, the U.S. Army sent 855 black women from the Women's Army Corps (WACs) to England and France to clear the backlog of mail in the European Theater of Operations. By war's end, the SixTripleEight had cleared over 17 million pieces of backlogged mail ensuring the troops stayed in touch with their loved ones back home. The women had never been recognized in the United States until recently when this documentary was made. The open house included a meet and greet with Pvt. Indiana Hunt-Martin (Retired), WWII survivor of 6888 Postal Battalion. Pvt. Hunt-Martin was given a quilt by the Quilts of Valor. The Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Committee works on outreach to Veterans and connecting them to benefits and services that are available. The Committee works with churches and non-profits to provide more effective advocacy to connect Veterans. Anna said there can be a lack of communication between Veterans and available services. Betsy made remarks at the open house regarding the Gaithersburg VA CBOC and several attendees talked to her afterwards that they were unaware Montgomery County had a CBOC.

Audrey Martin, Homeless Persons Representation Project (HPRP), announced HPRP provides homeless or low-income Veterans in Maryland free legal assistance with service-connected disability benefits, non-service connection pension, and discharge updates. As of August 27, 2019, HRPR offers intakes at the Gaithersburg VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month from 12pm to 3pm. Staff also meet clients wherever they may be including shelters, soup kitchens, libraries, and community centers. HRPR has a no wrong door policy and if they cannot directly assist the Veteran they will connect them with an agency that can and will follow-up with that Veteran.

Blair announced that over the past year HCH has trained over 600 colleagues on cultural competency for working with Veterans and active military. They are also working with the VA DC Medical Center and Gaithersburg VA CBOC to provide services that the VA does not offer. Blair said while discussions are slow going, there are some things they can partner with them on. The HCH Kensington Clinic has conducted over 100 compensation and pension exams for retiring military service members over the past year. HCH offers a Volunteer Vets Visiting Vets Visiting Program at both their Germantown and Silver Spring hospitals. Volunteers

are Veterans that have completed the military culture competency training program and who visit Veterans who are inpatients. Blair noted that on D-Day June 6<sup>th</sup> two inpatients were Veterans that were in Normandy and received a volunteer Veteran visit and they loved it. To become a Veteran volunteer, fill out the online application: <http://www.holycrosshealth.org/veterans-volunteer-application>. HCH staff do ask specific questions during intake to help identify if the patient is a Veteran, as well as when and where they served in order to help medical staff identify diseases or areas they may have been exposed to such as Agent Orange and burn pits. HCH offers a two-hour class every month that discusses diseases that can be attributed to military service and how it affects families. Anyone is welcome to attend.

Dave announced the MOAA Montgomery County Chapter will be hosting a luncheon tomorrow, Wednesday November 20<sup>th</sup> at Manor County Club. Guest speaker Col. Harvey Kaplan, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Ret) will present on Normandy 75 years after the allied landings.

Col. Bob Norton, USA (Ret), Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), said MMC has urged the Maryland Delegation to engage with state and local leaders on developing a second Veterans Home in Maryland. MMC is appreciative of the ongoing commitment to this process from Federal lawmakers. Betsy noted that it is a Federal, state and county commitment with 65% of funding from the Federal government, 35% of funding from the state, and land donated by the county.

Stan Siedel, Maryland Veterans Commission, said it is important to educate children on Veterans Day about what it means to be a Veteran. Serving Together (ST) had previously organized a speakers bureau for Veterans to speak at public and private schools, but due to staff turnover that initiative was put on hold. Julie will assign the speakers bureau to ST staff and will work on Memorial Day speakers as well as Veterans Day speakers for next year. Julie added that there is a divide between military servicemembers and civilians because it is an all volunteer military force and many civilians do not have a connection to the military. It is important to continue to educate our kids to appreciate our military and create a connection and cooperation between civilians and service members.

Stan announced that the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training (MCVET) is hosting a winter coat drive. He will accept donations and give to MCVET in Baltimore. Stan is also available to provide tours at MCVET.

Scott Schlesinger, Kemp Mill Jewish War Veterans Post 360, announced Post 360 held a Veterans Day Dining Out on November 10<sup>th</sup>. The event was well attended with many active duty Orthodox Jews in uniform. It was great for those in the community to see those who are serving or who have served. Scott also met members who had served in Normandy. Retired Rear Admiral Paul Becker was the guest speaker.

Julie announced the Montgomery County Veterans Collaborative will meet on Wednesday, November 20<sup>th</sup> from 2pm to 4pm at Every-Mind, 1000 Twinbrook Parkway, Rockville. Featured speakers include Maryland's Commitment to Veterans, David Galloway, Outreach; Lifeline Horse Rescue and Rehabilitation, Inc. - Leila Hertzberg, Executive Director; and Thrive USA Home Care - Danny Rodriguez, Director of Operations. Julie also introduced Dan Jones, new Peer Navigator for Serving Together.

Austin announced that on November 12, 2019, in honor of Veterans Day, Senator Van Hollen introduced legislation to extend critical financial protections for servicemembers to Veterans and consumers. Press release: <https://www.vanhollen.senate.gov/news/press-releases/in-honor-of-veterans-day-van-hollen-introduces-legislation-to-extend-critical-financial-protections-for-servicemembers-to-veterans-and-consumers>.

**Adjournment:** 7:20pm

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

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