



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
October 16, 2018**

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

A motion was made to approve the September 2018 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the September 2018 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Update on Programs and Services Associated with Veterans Services – Nick Heynen, Veterans Supportive Housing Specialist, and Deborah Taylor, Program Manager, Bethesda Cares

Nick Heynen is the Veterans Supportive Housing Specialist and he works with Veterans who are currently homeless and those who recently were housed and need ongoing supports. Bethesda Cares has 12 slots available for Veterans - 5 are for rapid rehousing and 7 are for permanent supportive housing. There are currently 10 Veterans being served by Bethesda Cares. The youngest is 40 and the oldest is 66. For those in housing, the Veterans pay 30% of their income towards rent and Bethesda Cares pays the rest. Some Veterans are unemployed, and Bethesda Cares pays 100% of their rent. Case management is included in the permanent supportive housing program and Veterans are connected to any available benefits they are eligible including food stamps, MANNA food, cash assistance, and VA benefits. Veterans in the rapid rehousing program stay with Bethesda Cares anywhere from 6 to 18 months with the goal that they will be self-supporting again. They are also connected with any benefits they may be eligible for and case managers assist the Veteran with finding employment. Rental assistance is provided through a mixture of funding – some comes from the County's Continuum of Care and some from the HUD-VASH program. Permanent supportive housing allows for Bethesda Cares to conduct mental healthy, physical and substance abuse assessments as well as provide social supports.

Deborah Taylor, Program Manager, oversees case management and direct services. The outreach program is constantly canvassing the southern part of Montgomery County and homeless individuals are asked if they served in the military. She explained that a Veteran had been identified in March and by May he was housed through another County permanent supportive housing program in a bed that was set aside for someone who was medically vulnerable.

Bethesda Cares does not only serve the homeless. John Mendez, Executive Director, and is also a Veteran, has received funds for Veterans homeless prevention resources. These funds serve between 40 to 50 Veterans annually to prevent homelessness. Resources include help with utility or rent costs and are meant to assist

during a short-term period. These funds are specifically used to help Veterans and no other agency has a similar program.

Nick told the story of a Veteran he works with who has severe asthma and needed to go to the DC VA Medical Center for treatment. Nick went to pick him up in Germantown. The Veteran was experiencing much discomfort from what they thought was asthma. As the Montgomery County Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) had recently opened as Nick had attended the ribbon cutting, he took him there instead as it was closer from where the Veteran lives in Germantown. The doctors at the CBOC immediately recognized it was not an asthma attack. The Veteran was experiencing and diagnosed him with congestive heart failure. The Veteran was taken by ambulance to Shady Grove and is now recovering.

It was suggested that the Commission advocate to increase the funding for assisting Veterans at Bethesda Cares. Betsy Luecking, Staff, will review if funding from Councilmember George Leventhal's resolution to add \$500,000 to the budget for homeless resources are being given to Bethesda Cares.

The floor was opened to questions.

Does discharge status matter for eligibility? Wayne Miller stated that as long as the Veteran served at least one day of active duty they are eligible. For Veterans who have a dishonorable discharge, Bethesda Cares will work with the Veteran to have their discharge upgraded. Upgrading from a dishonorable to a general discharge can help the Veteran become eligible for VA benefits. For a Veteran to be eligible to receive funding from HUD-VASH they do need to meet Federal eligibility guidelines. Some Veterans with Bethesda Cares are receiving VA funding. In instances where the Veteran has a dishonorable discharge, County funding is used to provide services.

Is Bethesda Cares connect to Every-Mind and Serving Together (ST)? Yes, and Nick meets with Mike Ball, Director of ST, once a month. While ST does not have a specific Veterans homeless program, they are able to connect Veterans to additional resources. Veterans enter their information into a database and are contacted by various organizations if they are eligible for services. Bethesda Cares also works with the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic (MFC) at Easterseals. They are taking a Veteran tomorrow an intake.

How much money does the County provide for funding Veterans homelessness or at-risk programs? For Veteran homelessness, the County's goal is to maintain a level of "functional zero" each month. This means that sufficient permanent housing resources are available at a level to accommodate all Veterans who might become homeless during a month. For Montgomery County, the number of Veterans identified as homeless and needing housing should not exceed six (6) persons at any given time. Montgomery County is one of five jurisdictions in the country who have reached functional zero for Veteran homelessness and been able to have a sustained period at the functional zero level. To date we have housed more than 132 Veterans since the Zero:2016 effort officially kicked off in June 2015. The first month at the functional zero level was December 2015, and the monthly count for Veterans who are homeless each month from then on has been at or very near the target level. As part of Montgomery County's Fiscal Year 2016 Budget, an appropriation in the amount of \$500,000 was approved to provide housing and supportive services to homeless Veterans in the County. As part of Montgomery County's FY17 Budget, an appropriation in the amount of \$150,000 was approved to provide permanent supportive housing to homeless Veterans in the County. The county has utilized federal funds like HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program (VASH) and Supportive Service for Veteran Families Program (SSVF). The County's strong commitment in seeking and securing local funds to serve veterans who cannot readily be housed with remaining federal resources has been the key to the success of ending Veteran homelessness.

To ensure that any Veteran who is homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless in Montgomery County has access to a permanent housing option, systems have been put in place to identify Veterans as quickly as possible, share information, and align available resources. Daily, providers and the staff of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are in contact to check if any new Veterans have been engaged through homeless outreach, shelters system, VA funded programs, or from other sources. Based on the needs of the Veterans, a plan is made for the appropriate housing intervention and then a referral is made. Every other week, the entire team of providers, HHS staff, and VA staff meet as a group to discuss all open cases, and the expected timeline for the Veterans to be permanently housed.

What is the referral process? Bethesda Cares does not take referrals directly. All referrals should go through Fatmata Kamara, VA Outreach Social Worker. Her contact information is 202-256-9261 (V), e-mail fatmata.kamara@va.gov.

Who helps the Veteran file a VA claim? It was suggested the Veteran work directly with the VA or Nathan Jones, Veterans Benefits Specialist, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs. Wayne Miller, Commissioner, advised that if a Veteran thinks they are not eligible for VA benefits due to their discharge status should apply anyway. Some Veterans have received benefits despite their dishonorable discharge status as they had served 180 days of honorable service. Also, a Veteran will specifically explain why a Veteran is denied a claim. For example, the VA will explain why the Veteran did not meet a higher rating for a disability. If that Veteran thinks that they do deserve a higher rating, they can show this ruling to their medical care provider and ask them to provide documentation, so the Veteran can appeal the claim. Wayne also noted that survivors and dependents of a Veteran who dies from a disability received from service in the military can claim those benefits. Even if the Veteran never filed a claim while living, they can still apply for those benefits.

IV. Discussion – FY20 Policy Priorities for County Council HHS Breakfast

The Commission is presenting their FY20 Policy Priorities to George Leventhal, Chair, County Council HHS Committee on Monday, October 22nd.

Judy Black, Washington-Rockville Elks Lodge 15, noted that several years ago when the County was focused on ending Veterans homelessness, the Montgomery County Coalition on Homelessness asked each charitable organization and church to assist one Veteran by providing furniture and household items. It cost Elks Lodge 15 between \$1,500 to \$2,000 to furnish one apartment. Elks Lodge 15 had received a \$10,000 grant that was used for this purpose. The funds are already used for the year and they have applied for a new \$10,000 grant that could be renewed for up to five years. Judy noted that there is a huge gap in services for homeless Veterans moving into a new home. Some Veterans are not given any furniture or household supplies and many Veterans end up sleeping on the floor as they have no mattress. While A Wider Circle does provide furniture donations, most Veterans do not have access to a moving van to transport the donations to their home.

It was suggested reaching out to Interfaith Works and their network of congregations for furniture donations. One issue is transporting the furniture from the donation center to the Veterans home. Cynthia suggested students volunteer for Student Service Learning (SSL) hours to help move furniture. This could be a learning opportunity for students as it increases awareness of Veterans as well as homeless individuals. It was suggested contacting local furniture stores for donations.

The Commission needs to assess the need in terms of how many Veterans and families need assistance as well as identify gaps that exist in services. Betsy added that the Commission's role is to review services available for Veterans, identify gaps, and advocate for funding, not to provide direct services to Veterans. There needs to be one agency in the County designated to coordinating services such as providing furniture and household goods.

IV. Outgoing Commissioner Randy Stone, Vice-Chair

Dan presented Randy Stone, Vice-Chair, with a certificate of appreciation from County Executive Isiah Leggett in recognition of his service to Veterans and their families of Montgomery County, MD serving on the Commission Affairs from 2012 to 2018. Randy said it has been a tremendous honor serving with everyone to serve our Veterans and their families.

V. Updates

The County Council will be holding a public hearing on Tuesday, October 30th at 1:30pm regarding the \$99,500 state grant to install an accessible launch at Seneca Landing. Joe Mornini, Team River Runner, and Judy Black and Hazel Gross, both from Washington-Rockville Elks Lodge 15, will be testifying in support. The accessible launch is scheduled to start installation this fall.

Betsy reported she had been contacted by a Veteran whose wife was married before to a man that served in the Navy during Vietnam. He was a cryptologist and was killed in a plane crash outside of the zone enroute to Vietnam along with nine other service members. Their names were never added to the Vietnam Wall because they did not meet Department of Defense requirements as they died outside of the war zone. Betsy had the Veteran contact Austin Morris, Representative to Senator Van Hollen. Since then Senator Van Hollen has sent a letter to DoD asking them to reconsider the ten service members who died to be added to the wall.

VI. Announcements

Michael Wilson, Gaithersburg-Rockville Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi, announced they are hosting a [Male Health Symposium](#) on Saturday, November 10th from 1pm to 4pm at the North Potomac Recreation Center. He anticipates at least 100 participants and that Veterans will likely attend the event. He is working with several partners including the County's African American Health Program that will provide free health screenings and health classes as well as Black Nurses Rock who will assist with the health screenings. AmeriGroup is available to hand out health information. The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is unable to attend but is providing literature and hand-outs. Anytime Fitness will be providing basic fitness instruction. Julie Riggs, ST, has said she will attend. The County's Public Information Office (PIO) will be advertising the event in the Paperless Airplane e-newsletter. Michael is seeking free flu shots. It was suggested he contact RiteAid as well as the Montgomery College Nursing Program to have nursing students available to give the flu shots. It was asked for a Commissioner to attend the event.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, announced the Maryland Military Coalition (MCC) will be publicly unveiled on November 9th at 2pm at the War Memorial Building in Baltimore. Organizations interested in joining MCC have until December 31st, 2018. MCC Info: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A&D%20Docs/CVA/MMC2018Handout.pdf>.

The Disabled Veterans Foundation (DVNF) will be hosting their second annual [Veterans Resources Fair](#) on Thursday, November 8th from 9am to 2pm at the Silver Spring Civic Building. The event is free and veteran-related organizations will be in attendance providing resources, free suits, gift cards, free food, giveaways and more.

Brenda Campbell, MFC, announced MFC will be hosting a free Veterans legal clinic on Friday, October 26th from 10am to 3pm at 1420 Spring Street, Silver Spring, MD 20910. MFC is also hosting free yoga every Friday from 12pm to 1pm and on select Saturdays from 10am to 11am. Registration is required for yoga classes. MFC has started a [food pantry and clothing closet](#). They are in need of toiletries. Brenda will be available to accept donations at the November Commission meeting.

Stan Steidel, Maryland Veterans Commission, announced American Legion Post 276 will be hosting a Veterans wellness seminar on Sunday, October 21st in Severn, MD. He also announced the World War One Centennial Commission has declared November 11th, 2018 as Bells of Peace day. At 11:00am that day a nationwide bell tolling will occur to honor the 116,516 American men and women who died in WWI.

Cynthia announced the Frederick Community Health Fair will be held on Saturday, October 27th at the Frederick Fairgrounds. The documentary Thank You for Your Service will be shown at Frederick Community College on Wednesday, October 17th.

Wayne asked for a discussion on who will be cleaning the Montgomery County Vietnam Memorial. The Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) washes the Vietnam Wall in DC every Saturday from April to November.

Dan announced the Silver Spring Town Center Inc. will be hosting their annual Veterans concert on Tuesday, November 13th starting at 6pm. The event is held at the Silver Spring Civic Building in the recently renamed Buffalo Soldiers Great Hall. This year Buffalo Soldiers will be honored, and a reggae band will be providing live music. The event is free. The Commission co-sponsors the event every year.

Adjournment: 7:20pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, November 20th, 2018 from 6pm to 7:30pm at the Department of Health and Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager