



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
September 25, 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 May 2018 and June 2018 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the May 2018 and June 2018 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Proclamation for Dan Bullis in Recognition of the Work of the Commission in Establishing the VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) – Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher, Maryland House of Delegates

Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher represents lower Montgomery County and will be joining the Maryland Senate in January. Delegate Waldstreicher thanked the Commission for all the work they do for the Veterans of Montgomery County. He presented the Dan and the Commission with a citation from the Maryland General Assembly in recognition of their continued dedication to Veterans as exemplified by the grand opening of the Gaithersburg DC VA CBOC. Dan noted that the CBOC has been a top priority of the Commission since 2008 when the Commission was established. It's fortunate it was opened before County Executive Leggett left office.

IV. Strategic Planning for Upcoming Year – Dan Bullis

CVA Enabling Legislation:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/CVABill2308EstLegislation.pdf

The Commission was established in 2008. Dan asked the Commissioners to review the Commission's enabling legislation and review the Commission's legislated duties:

- Research, assemble, analyze and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of veterans and their families;
- Institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans;
- Advise the Executive and the Council on the status of programs and services in the State and County related to the needs of veterans and their families; and
- Assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.

Dan noted that part of this Commission year will include the transition from County Executive Leggett to a new County Executive. It will be important for the Commission to educate the new County Executive on the pros and cons in serving in the military as well as the issues Veterans and their families face when transitioning back into civilian life. Prior to the meeting, Betsy Luecking, Staff, sent to Commissioners the Commission's transition plan that was developed for HHS.

The current meeting format of inviting presenters is appropriate. The Commission assists organizations with issues as best as possible and connects them with the appropriate resources or contacts. For example, Team River Runner presented before the Commission that they used an inaccessible boat launch at Riley's Lock for the kayak program for disabled Veterans. Betsy was able to connect them with Montgomery Parks (MP), which owns the land for Riley's Lock, and MP applied for a grant with Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to build an accessible launch, which will be installed this fall.

The following suggestions were made for the upcoming year:

- Outreach - Increase public awareness of the Commission
 - Public service announcement to be shared via social media, publications, advertisements
 - Advertise the Commission via Ride on bus signs during May and November
 - Invite Neil Greenberger, Public Information Office, to a future meeting to discuss social media and promotional ideas
 - Commissioners use their social media accounts to promote Commission meetings
 - Commissioners attend Veteran Service Organization and non-profit meetings
 - Promotes services and programs for Veterans and their families
 - Host meetings at different locations with high concentration of Veteran residents
 - Host a town hall meeting
 - Partner with organizations like Serving Together or the Vet Center to disseminate information about the Commission
 - Increase Homefront productions
- Community-Based Outpatient Clinic
 - Continue to promote its services
 - Ask the VA for monthly updates on patient data
 - Assist them with Ride on Issues
 - Assist them with directional street signage
- Continue to honor the County's fallen heroes
- Establish a relationship with the Maryland State Commission
 - Stay up-to-date on their priorities and coordinate efforts
- Strategize how to keep a full-time Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs – Veterans Benefits Specialist
- Identify Commissioners that can be key contacts for certain issues (homelessness, public affairs)
- Continue to discuss the Veterans Docket in the Mental Health Court and a separate Veterans Treatment Court

It was asked if the Commission includes the Commissioned Corps (USPHS and NOAA). The Commission has adopted to include Armed Forces and Commissioned Uniformed Services, but it is not specifically stated in the legislation. Jim Campbell, Commissioner, asked for clarification of the definition of a Veteran. It varies depending on the program or service. He added that service members of the National Guard and Reserve have issues involving service members who have been deployed and who come home to having their leases terminated, their jobs taken away, or have gone into bankruptcy. Jim asked if the Commission should be assisting these service members. Susan Webman, Commissioner, noted there are Federal statutes that provide protections for National Guard and Reserve. The Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) can assist and represent members. Betsy noted that if a National Guard or Reservist applies to be on the Commission, they are considered to be applying as a Veteran.

Julie Riggs, Serving Together (ST), reported that the VA's Support Services for Veterans Families (SSFV) program has been reduced by 3%. U.S. VETS lost their funding and their cases have been taken over by Friendship Place, which cannot accept any new cases. Funding available for preventative services or helping at-risk Veterans is very low and funding is only available to help homeless Veterans. Julie noted that in one week ST received assistance requests totaling \$24,000 from Veterans in the DC Metro area. ST is looking for creative resources to assist these Veterans that is becoming an increasing issue in the Veteran population. Dan suggested contacting the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund. It is an underutilized fund and continues to grow as it receives donations.

Wayne has spoken with at least four Veterans that have said they cannot afford to stay in school. These Veterans have two or three jobs and don't have enough time to contribute to the classroom. They have also been told to apply for student loans. Joanna Starling, Montgomery College (MC), said the MC Combat2College program has limited funds to provide Veterans if they have exhausted their GI Bill or if there is something the GI Bill won't cover.

Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, asked how to get a volunteer program scheduled at the CBOC. Betsy will put her in contact with the volunteer coordinator for the DC VA Medical Center and the CBOC.

Hazel Gross, Public, asked if the Commission coordinated with the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless. Betsy noted that any calls she receives regarding homeless Veterans are referred to the Coalition as they work on housing and placement. The Coalition makes Veterans aware of all programs available. Dan noted that John Mendez from Bethesda Cares will be presenting before the Commission in October to give an update on Veterans homelessness in Montgomery County.

Bob Koffman, Commissioner, said the VA staffing model for the CBOC will allow for minimum staff and additional staff will only be added as the patient population grows. It will be important to promote the CBOC and increase the number of patients seen. Jim stated that he was unable to drop-in at the CBOC for scheduled bloodwork for a VA appointment in DC. As the CBOC is newly opened, drop-in appointments may not be feasible for awhile. The Commission has received complaints about the phone not working at the County CBOC so appointments cannot be made.

V. Updates

The Commission will be interviewing applicants during the upcoming week. If a Commissioner's first term has ended and they are interested in serving a second term, they need to reapply.

VI. Announcements

Wayne reported he and the Silver Spring Vet Center (SSVC) are featured in the latest Vietnam Veterans of America magazine. Wayne also reported that today he received a citation from Governor Larry Hogan, Lt.

Governor Boyd Rutherford, and Secretary George Owings for his sacrifice, military service, and the service he provides to the Veterans of Maryland and Montgomery County at the Silver Spring Vet Center.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported he will be interviewing Retired Navy Commander Everett Alvarez for Homefront tomorrow. Commander Everett was the first American aviator shot down over Vietnam and held prisoner for 8 ½ years. He was a pallbearer at the Academy for Senator John McCain's funeral. Mike added that the Naval Academy is putting a program together of former POW's and they will be interviewing Alvarez on Thursday afternoon at the County's Memorial Plaza

Jim reported the Maryland Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) will be hosting a congressional luncheon on Wednesday, September 28th on Capitol Hill. Six state representatives and both state senators will be in attendance. The group will be discussing federal legislative issues. Jim shared information on the Maryland Military Coalition, which is a state-chartered commission, and encouraged organizations to join. One member per organization is allowed and each organization has one vote. Maryland Military Coalition Handout: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A&D%20Docs/CVA/MMC2018Handout.pdf>

Bob reported Warrior Canine Connection will be hosting a graduation this Saturday at 11am. The ceremony is open to the public.

Joanna reported the MDVA VBS has had their office moved to 51 Mannakee Street., Mannakee Building, Room MK251. Nathan Jones is still providing coverage on Thursdays. Joanna also noted that the VA has said they will not have the Montgomery County VBS located at the Gaithersburg CBOC.

Frederick Mitchell, Public, is a Commander at American Legion Post 171 in Damascus. Frank came to the Commission meeting to see what the Commission is involved with and how AL Post 171 can assist with the Commission's goals and issues. He will share with members of AL Post 171 at their next meeting about the existence of the Commission and what was discussed at our meeting tonight.

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, October 16th, 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