



**Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Meeting Agenda**

**April 15, 2025  
6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**

**Michael Wilson, Chair  
Vice-Chair appointment in process**

**Join the meeting via Zoom**

<https://montgomerycountymd-gov.zoom.us/j/7390017153?omn=88285678148>

**If you want to call into the meeting**, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 739 001 7153 followed by #.

**If a Commissioner would like to speak during the meeting**, they can raise their hand if on video and Chair will recognize you or you can use the “hand raise” function under the reactions tab at bottom of page. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the middle of the page and the functions will be at the bottom of the page. Use the Zoom app to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press \*9 to raise your hand. Those calling into the meeting can press \*6 to mute or unmute their phone.

**6:00 Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance, Approval of February 2025 and March 2025 Minutes – Michael Wilson, Chair**

**6:10 Platoon 22 Veterans Service Center and Process of Establishing a Veterans Treatment Court in Frederick and Washington Counties – Niki Falzone, Executive Director, Platoon 22**  
[Welcome to Platoon 22](#)

**6:45 Chair Updates – Michael Wilson**

*Attendance Policy for Commissioners*

*Planning to Re-establish the Commission's relationship with veteran organizations – Who will volunteer to speak at various veteran service organization about work of the Commission*

*FY 26 Operating Budget Testimony for County Council*

**7:20 Updates from Commissioners**

*MCPS Education about Veterans - Mike Subin*

*What Veterans and their families need to know about purchasing a home and or renovation of an existing home – Miguel Sapp and Chris Thomas*

*Veterans Treatment Court Planning – Grace Caulfield*

**7:30 Adjourn**

**ADA Reasonable Accommodations:** Sign language interpreter services and other auxiliary aids or services will be provided upon request with as much advance notice as possible, preferably at least five (5) full business days before the meeting. To request any reasonable accommodation to participate in the meeting, please contact Carly Clem in advance at [carly.clem@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:carly.clem@montgomerycountymd.gov) or call 202-853-1109. In all situations, a good faith effort will be made to provide accommodations. For any additional questions or concerns, please contact Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison at [betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov) or please call 240-418-4865, MD Relay 711.



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Meeting Minutes  
April 15, 2025**

**\*\*MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM\*\***

**Call to Order - Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance**

Michael Wilson, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). He asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. He recognized prisoners of war and asked 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.

**Platoon 22 Veterans Service Center and Process of Establishing a Veterans Treatment Court in Frederick and Washington Counties – Niki Falzone, Executive Director, Platoon 22**

Website: <https://platoon22.org/>

Platoon 22 is a nonprofit, veteran-focused service organization founded in 2014 that is committed to ending veteran suicide through the fostering of meaningful connections and comprehensive support. Also serve active duty service members going through their first 90 days or re-entry, judiciary involved veterans, first responders and family members as defined by the veteran. Platoon 22 is headquartered in Frederick County in partnership with Goodwill Industries. The office serves the entire state of Maryland as well as Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Platoon 22 is looking to expand into mid-Montgomery County and has formalized an agreement with a local baseball league to integrate into the community. Platoon 22 serves 2,000 veterans annually and provided case management to approximately 1,200 individuals last year. Of those 1,200 individuals, 86% were veterans, 7% were first responders and 7% were dependents.

- **Care Connection**

Link veterans and their families with essential services, including mental health support, housing assistance, and benefits navigation. This includes financial assistance programs and affordable housing opportunities.

- **Veterans Services Center (VSC)**

<https://platoonvsc.org/>

Opened in 2022. The center brings local Veteran services providers together in one place to provide essential programs and services to help you and fellow Veterans transition from service to civilian life.

- Services include benefits navigation and support services; access to counseling and mental health resources; career coaching and employment services; veteran peer connection; recreation; on-site shower and laundry facilities to support homeless veterans (no shelter services on-site); and other support services.
- On-site service providers include Platoon 22, Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families, Martinsburg Vet Center, Warrior Canine Connection, Thrive Home Health Services, The Might 30 Veteran's Ministry, Frederick Military Museum, and Goodwill Industries of Monocacy Valley. Off-site service providers include Frederick Community College, Mount St. Mary's University, Hood College, United Way of Frederick, Second Chances Garage, National Association for Black Veterans Western Maryland, ServingTogether, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Frederick County Veterans Advisory Commission, Maryland's Commitment to Veterans, and Yates Estates Home.

- Saw more than 5,000 visitors in 2004. There are 372,573 veterans living in the state of Maryland - 70% of those veterans live within a one-hour drive from the VSC. The VSC has served over 1,400 unique veterans.

- **Transportation**

Provide rides to veterans in Frederick and Washington Counties using their 12-passenger bus, equipped with a wheelchair lift - ensuring this vital service is available to all veterans.

- Provided 100 rides from August to December.

- **Community Building**

Foster connections among veterans and military-connected individuals to create a supportive network – one where they can share experiences and find true camaraderie. This work includes peer support groups, weekly get-togethers, and recreational opportunities.

- Weekly offerings from yoga to acupuncture.
- Host a breakfast group every Monday comprised of 40 to 50 participants, mostly Vietnam era Veterans, for peer support camaraderie.
- 624 veterans served.

- **Awareness & Advocacy**

Work to raise awareness about veteran suicide and advocate for policies and practices that enhance the overall well-being of the veteran community.

- **Affordable Housing**

Offer six affordable one-bedroom apartments at their Mulberry housing complex, dedicated to serving those who have served and those working to rebuild their lives. The current tenant makeup includes one re-entry veteran, three veterans supported through the HUD-VASH program, and two previously homeless individuals.

- **Veterans Treatment Court**

Platoon 22 was named as the dedicated Docket Coordinator for District 11 covering Frederick and Washington Counties in April 2024. This role ensures a harmonious environment conducive to treatment, fostering a supportive community and reducing recidivism rates. Key highlights of the initiative include:

- **Voluntary Participation:** Veterans have the autonomy to choose whether to enroll in the program, ensuring that they are active participants in their rehabilitation journey.
- **Focus on District Level Court Offenses:** The program targets victimless crimes, providing an opportunity for veterans to address underlying issues without the stigma associated with criminal offenses.
- **14-Month Program:** The typical program length spans 14 months, allowing veterans ample time to engage in treatment, access resources, and stabilize their lives.

Frederick County had established a Veterans Treatment Court several years ago but it never formalized. It was a challenge advocating for a formalized VTC this time. It took two years to build the current VTC. Platoon 22 coordinated with the local United Way. The docket meets at the District Court level every over Tuesday. Team includes state's attorney, private attorney, district attorney, judge and clerks. The biggest challenge is having a good relationship with the states attorneys and identifying a judge willing to take on the docket. There is not a lot of additional funding available for problem solving courts. Platoon 22 leans on its case management services which does not cost the judiciary anything. Support is also offered to veterans while they are incarcerated. If accepted, the best treatment plan is determined for each veteran. The Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families and Secretary Woods is very supportive of the VTC.

The floor was opened to questions.

- **Are the first responders who are being served also veterans?** Some do not have any veteran ties, while some fire and rescue workers also identify as veterans. Fire and police tend to stop by the Vietnam veteran breakfast to socialize. Platoon 22 is still trying to identify how best to support first responders who need mental health or trauma recovery. Many first responders come in from referrals and being able to get them into private care is the best track.
- **What are the current average numbers of veteran suicides a day nationally?** Pre-pandemic veteran suicides had been down to 16 per day. The VA has not published any formal data, but that number is believed to have increased to 20 per day. Suicide among veterans is 60% higher than the general population.
- **Is the weekly Vietnam era veterans get-together a group meeting?** It is not a formal group therapy session. "Breakfast Banter" started when the PACT Act was established and there was an increase in Agent Orange benefits. Platoon 22 was fielding many questions daily about the claims process and started a group to discuss these issues. The group became a way for these veterans to socialize and relationships were forged. If Platoon 22 sees a trend in questions, then they will be addressed during a group session rather than individually. The group does have wives, partners and adult children who attend as well. A bible study is also held at the end of every session with the on-site chaplain for those who want to participate. Sometimes the group members will meet for dinner or will vacation together. One disabled veteran has completely re-engaged with his community.
- **How can a similar program be duplicated in Montgomery County?** It is just a matter of communication, imagination and having different organizations coming together. Filing claims is the main piece. If you have a location and you can bring a veteran service officer there, everything else will fall into place. It was suggested that the Commission create an agenda item and for Grace Caulfield, Commissioner, and Donny Williams, ServingTogether, create a subcommittee.
  - Traffic and parking can be deterrents for anyone participating in programs. It was suggested using outdoor spaces at Montgomery Parks for programs that involve nature and the seasons.
  - The Cohen Clinic at Easter Seals in Silver Spring has a large conference room available as well as a free parking garage and access to the Metro. It was suggested starting a monthly breakfast session at the Cohen Clinic.
  - Niki reported that Platoon 22 is looking to create a resource hub in Prince George's County.
- **Do Montgomery County veterans participate in your programs?** Over 100 veterans from Montgomery County have visited the VSC, with most coming from the Kentlands and Clarksburg areas.
- **Montgomery County has the lowest veteran suicide rate in the state.** The Commission needs to continue to promote health, wellness and a sense of belonging.
  - Dr. Cynthia Macri, former Commissioner, serves on the Montgomery County Veterans Suicide Coalition which meets monthly.
- **How many veterans are served in the VTC per month?** There are currently 3 veterans on the docket. The length of the treatment program is a drawback. The VTC does receive many referrals.

### **Approval of February 2025 and March 2025 Meeting Minutes**

A motion was made to approve the February 2025 and March 2025 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and February 2025 and March 2025 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

### **Attendance Policy for Commissioners**

Michael reviewed the attendance policy for Commissioners.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, suggested changing current voting memberships from public positions to spouse or family member of a veteran. Public members tend not to participate.

All County boards, committees and commissions are one to two years behind in advertising for vacancies. Commissioners whose terms have expired are asked to stay on until they have been replaced.

It was suggested that Commissioners educate the public about the Commission.

### **Planning to Re-Establish the Commission's Relationship with Veteran Organizations**

Betsy reported she sent information regarding the disabled veteran property tax credit via her esubscription list, which has 7,500 subscribers. She suggested using esubscribe more to send out targeted information. Michael suggested that the Commission develop a marketing strategy to inform the community more about local services and programs.

The Commission needs to determine its top goals for the year. The Commission also use to maintain a speakers group that would speak at various schools and different organizations throughout the year. The Commission should identify which organizations it wants to target and assign Commissioners to engage with those organizations. Commission can review every quarter. It was suggested that the Commission determine organizations at the next meeting and hold a retreat during the summer months. Donny Williams, ServingTogether, reported other veterans Commissions throughout Maryland have had one of their Commissioners installed at each American Legion post to create a connection.

### **Commission FY 26 Operating Budget Testimony for County Council**

Michael submitted the Commissions FY26 operating budget testimony to the County Council last week. The testimony included support for vouchers for homeless veterans and their families, and funding for ServingTogether and Warrior Canine Connection. The testimony also included that this Commission is working in collaboration with the Maryland Military Coalition and the Military Officers Association of America to establish a Veterans Treatment Court in Montgomery County.

Michael suggested that the County Executive's weekly newsletter include a spotlight at the Gaithersburg VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic.

### **Chair Update**

Anneke Vandenbroek has submitted her resignation from the Commission. Betsy Luecking, Staff, is working with the County Executive's office to have another Commissioner appointed as Vice Chair.

### **Updates – Montgomery County Public Schools – Education about Veterans – Mike Subin**

Mike Subin, Commissioner, has been communicating with Karla Silvestre, Board of Education, and staff who are in charge of social studies curriculum. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) currently offers grade appropriate curriculum including books and lectures. There would be issues with closing schools for Veterans Day as it would affect the 180-day school year requirement. MCPS has already determined their school calendar year for 2026.

It was noted that high schools seem to have a fairly weak veterans day curriculum. It was suggested asking MCPS if they would consider having Commissioners or other veterans speak at schools.

### **What Veterans and Their Families Need to Know About Purchasing A Home and/or Renovation of an Existing Home – Miguel Sapp and Chris Thomas**

Miguel Sapp reported that he and Chris Thomas worked together to create a VA home loan presentation. Betsy and Carly Clem, Staff, are working to make the document accessible. Betsy noted that all documents shared by the County must be in compliance with new accessibility regulations, which will go into full effect April 2026. It was also noted that this presentation would be helpful for Commissioners to share when they are speaking with veteran service organizations.

### **Veterans Treatment Court Planning – Grace Caulfield**

The Veterans Treatment Court subcommittee will meet on April 17.

Michael reported the Commission needs to discuss having in-person meetings. It was suggested that the Commission have a retreat to discuss goals and priorities.

Betsy reported that Commander Everett Alvarez, who was taken captive in Vietnam after being shot down in Hanoi and is the second longest held prison of war, will be presented with a proclamation on May 7 at 1 p.m. from the County Council in recognition of the Congressional Gold Medal which he will be receiving. Betsy encouraged Commissioners to attend the event. She noted that Senator Chris Van Hollen was instrumental in co-sponsoring the bill for Commander Alvarez to receive the Congressional Gold Medal, which had a total of 53 sponsors. Commander Alvarez has been a resident of Montgomery County for over 40 years.

Joanna Starling, Commissioner, asked for clarification regarding the application for the disabled veteran property tax credit. The application asks for an income line item for the applicant's taxes, but if the individual files jointly with their spouse this line item would include their joint income. The disabled veteran tax credit is supposed to allow for only the veteran's income to be accounted for on the application.

### **Adjournment - 7:25 p.m.**

### **Attendance**

**Commissioners Present:** Grace Caulfield; Drew Garza; Elwood Gray; Veronica Pei; Miguel Sapp; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Michael Subin; Christopher Thomas; Michael Wilson, Chair

**Commissioners Absent:** Bernard Chesman; Jameelah Johnson; Charles Von Goin

**Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present:** Joseph Eyong (Congressman Jamie Raskin)

**Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent:** Charlise Richardson (Congressman John Sarbanes); Charlies Richardson (Senator Chris Van Hollen)

**Commission Liaison:** Sam Korper, Commission on People with Disabilities

**Staff Present:** Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

**Public Present:** Niki Falzone, Executive Director, Platoon 22; Lindsay Joseph; Chase Singer; Leslie Lyles Greene; Donny Williams, ServingTogether; Kirsten Likins; Analiese Pappas; Jordan Cerna; Jane McCarthy; Cynthia Macri