



Commission on Veterans Affairs



Meeting Agenda

March 19, 2024

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair

Join the meeting via Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/8516668340>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 851 6668 3405 followed by #. **If an attendee would like to speak during the meeting**, you 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 2024 Meeting Minutes – Wayne Miller, Chair**
- 6:10 Operation Second Chance and Women Veterans Programs – Katie Sanders, Director of Outreach and Development, Operation Second Chance**
- 6:45 Chair and Vice Chair Updates – Legislation Follow-up, Vietnam War Veterans Day Activities**
- 7:00 Commissioner Updates**
- 7:15 Commission Planning for Next Meeting – Wayne Miller**
- 7:30 Adjourn**

ADA Reasonable Accommodation: If you need a sign language interpreter or any other reasonable accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact carly.clem@montgomerycountymd.gov or 202-853-1109.

****See Commission duties on next page**

Duties of the Commission on Veterans Affairs

The Commission duties include:

1. 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;
2. institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans;
3. 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
4. assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.



Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs Meeting Minutes

March 19, 2024

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

Call to Order

Wayne Miller, 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.

Operation Second Chance and Women Veterans Programs – Katie Sanders, Director of Outreach and Development, Operation Second Chance

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

Operation Second Chance (OSC) is a non-profit located in Germantown, Maryland founded in 2004 that provides services for post 9/11 combat veterans who are wounded, injured or ill and active duty Purple Heart servicemembers across the country. OSC specializes in providing financial assistance to post 9/11 veterans with a 70% disability rating or higher. In 2023, OSC provided \$1.5 million in financial assistance to veterans, servicemembers and their families and helped keep more than 300 members in their home by paying mortgage or rent. Financial assistance is also available for utility bills (electric, gas, water, sewer), childcare during illness or surgery; vehicle payments; medical equipment not provided by TRICARE; temporary lodging and/or airfare for a family member to assist an injured or recovering member; and scholarships. OSC has a quick turnaround time of 24 hours once a financial assistance application has been filed.

OSC maintains and operates a retreat property called Heroes Ridge located on the Maryland/Pennsylvania border. The 275-acre property which is situated at the top of a mountain has four cabins (two of which are ADA compliant), a chow hall, recreation center, pool, horses, ATV's and miles of trails to explore. Retreats are all expenses paid for the veteran and their family, including transportation costs to the property. OSC offers retreats specifically designed for individual injured service members; couples; families; veterans; caregivers; battle buddies; gold star families; and female veterans. They also plan to offer new retreats for male veterans and a male companion of their choice (father, brother, uncle or cousin).

Overhead has averaged under 8% since inception. Every donation received goes directly back to the veteran and family member. OSC works closely with Walter Reed and other caseworkers to get veterans involved.

The floor was opened to questions.

- **Does OSC have any programs in March for International Women's Month?** OSC is working to get women veterans in the DC Metro area involved. Several activities have been scheduled including a girls outing at Top Golf in Germantown; coffee meet ups in Gaithersburg; a candle making workshop; and a walk and talk. Staff will be discussing potentially offering this events to women veterans from all eras in order to increase participation. Information about events can be found online: <https://operationsecondchance.org/calendar/>.
- **Do veterans or servicemembers create their own agenda for retreats or are itineraries already established? What is the policy for alcohol?** Retreats do have itineraries, but it is not tightly structured. Participants can choose what they want to do and are given an ample amount of time

between activities. OSC has a partnership with Ski Liberty and hosts ski retreats with equipment and lift tickets. Outside alcohol is not permitted.

- **Do you assist veterans with locating housing?** No, those veterans would be referred to other service organizations. It was suggested the veteran contact ServingTogether, Bethesda Cares or Operation Homefront.

Approval of January 2024 and February 2024 Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the January 2024 and February 2024 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the January 2024 and February 2024 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

Chair and Vice Chair Updates – Legislation Follow-up, Vietnam War Veterans Day Activities

[Bill 6-24 – Property Tax Credit – Disabled Veterans](#) has been introduced by Councilmember Fani-Gonzalez. Under Bill 6-24, a property tax credit would be available to an honorably discharged veteran who is at least 50% disabled, as certified by the VA, and whose federal adjusted gross income does not exceed \$100,000. The property tax credit granted under the bill would equal: 50% of the County property tax imposed on the dwelling house if the disabled veteran's service-connected disability rating is at least 75% but not more than 99%; or 25% of the County property tax imposed on the dwelling house if the disabled veteran's service-connected disability rating is at least 50% but not more than 74%. Betsy asked for Commissioners to provide feedback to be submitted as testimony on the bill. Dr. Cynthia Macri said women veterans are disproportionately affected as they are most likely to be married to other veterans. It was asked how this would affect eligibility for the property tax credit. Scott Schlesinger, Commissioner, said Councilmember Fani-Gonzalez has said income from VA disability payments were non-taxable and would not be included in gross income. This information is not included in the bill. It was noted that income in Montgomery County is different than income in other counties. This county also has higher property taxes. The county should be trying to attract more veterans to the county to help the economy and the job force.

Jane McCarthy, former Commissioner, will be guest speaker at a Vietnam War Veterans Day event being held in Bel Air, Maryland on March 29. Wayne will also be in attendance with other staff from the Silver Spring Vet Center.

Bill Gray, former Chair, and Carly Clem, Staff, installed a display for Vietnam War Veterans Day at the Silver Spring Civic Building. The display cases feature profiles of Vietnam War and Vietnam-Era Montgomery County veterans. Profiles are also posted online: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/VETERANS/Vietnam.html.

Dr. Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair, would like to present information at next meeting on psychedelic treatments trials for veterans being conducted at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital.

New Commission members will be confirmed by the County Council on April 2. Betsy worked with the Executive staff to get an opinion from the County Attorney regarding Ex-officio members no longer having term members. They do not apply or are interviewed for the position. They serve until the Department Head appoints someone else. From now on ex-officio members will not have term limits.

Commissioner Updates

Michael Wilson, Commissioner, reported the Gaithersburg-Rockville (MD) Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated hosted a community health event at Montgomery College on March 2. The event was attended by Jason Marshall from ServingTogether; Wayne Stinchcomb from Silver Spring Vet Center; Xavier Teasley from Washington DC VA Medical Center; and the Steven A. Cohen Clinic EasterSeals. He would like to utilize county resources more next year to increase attendance and target veterans.

Scott reported the General George G. Meade Chapter of the Military Order of World Wars will be hosting a Massing of the Colors on May 19 at Fort Meade. The Jewish War Veterans Kemp Mill Post will be hosting a

dining out event on June 2 with featured speaker former Chief of Staff for the Air Force General Norton Schwartz.

Dr. Macri reported the VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans will be meeting the first week of April. The Maryland Veterans Commission will be holding their next meeting in Hagerstown. Dr. Macri will be speaking at Leisure World about the Japanese American experience during World War II on May 21 for Asian American History Month. She reported the 2024 Patsy Takemoto Mink Quarter is the 12th coin in the American Women Quarters™ Program. The Honorable Patsy Takemoto Mink was the first woman of color to serve in Congress. She fought for gender and racial equality, affordable childcare, and environmental protection. She is best known for championing Title IX, legislation which opened new opportunities to women in education and school sports. Dr. Macri also reported the Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, Virginia will be offering a new glass working class beginning April 10 for veterans. Classes are offered free of charge to veterans. The Woodend Nature Sanctuary in Chevy Chase, Maryland will be offering three forest bathing sessions for veterans in March 2024, May 2024 and September/October 2024.

Lieutenant Commander Jackson, Public, introduced herself along with her colleague Lieutenant McCrimmon, Public, who are active duty services in the U.S. Public Health Services (USPHS) Commission Corps. They are co-leads for a veterans outreach committee and offered their support for veterans in the county. They have participated in preventative strategies such as suicide prevention and domestic violence through active community engagement and have partnered with federal agencies. They offered to provide the Commission with data relating to how many USPHS and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) veterans reside in the county as the Census Bureau does not include these numbers in their census counts. Dr. Veronica Pei, Public, added she is in the Commission Corps in the Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE) program which offers public outreach, targeted mental health trainings, and smoking cessation. Staff provide health screening services at community health events as well as targeted training on specific health topics.

Adjournment

7:13pm

Respectfully submitted: Carly Clem, Program Specialist II; Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Robert Koffman, Vice-Chair; Cynthia Macri; Wayne Miller, Chair; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Anneke Vandenbroek; Michael Wilson

Commissioners Absent: Josephine Bahn; Reggie Mitchell; Michael Subin; Susan Webman

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Joseph Eyong (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Ken Reichard (Senator Ben Cardin)

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes); Audrey Severn (Senator Chris Van Hollen)

County Staff Present: County Councilmember Natali Fani-González; Hazle Crawford, Office of Councilmember Fani-González; Jen Hodge, Local Behavioral Health Authority

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

Public Present: Bill Gray; F. Burke; Miguel Sapp; Bernard Chesman; Katie Sanders; V. Jackson; Linda Cosme; Veronica Pei; Drew Garza; Frantishka McCrimmon; Sarah Huang; Christopher Thomas