



Commission on Veterans Affairs



Meeting Agenda

November 19, 2024

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Michael Wilson, Chair

Anneke Vandenbroek, Vice-Chair

Join the meeting via Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86963993103>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 869 6399 3103 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 October 2024 Minutes – Michael Wilson, Chair**
- 6:10 Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families Planning for Efforts to find Land and Expand its Veteran home Footprint – Robert Finn, Sr. Advisor to Secretary Woods, Department of Veterans & Military Families
Proposed Veterans Home and Community – Vipin Desai and Scott Wallace, Esq.**
- 6:40 Public School Holidays - Veterans' Day – Michael Wilson**
- 6:50 Discussion on National Veterans and Military Families Month Activities - Should Commission seek to change name to Commission on Veterans and Military Families, similar to Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families recent name change. Need to review how Montgomery County Public Schools is supporting children of military service members, veterans and deceased veterans – All**
- 7:00 Chair and Vice Chair Updates – Michael Wilson & Anneke Vandenbroek**
- 7:10 Updates from Commissioners**
- 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 call 202-853-1109 or via MD Relay at 711. ****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

November 19, 2024

****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.

Approval of October 2024 Meeting Minutes

Due to time constraints, October 2024 Meeting Minutes will be approved at the December meeting.

Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families (MDVMF) Planning for Efforts to find Land and Expand its Veteran Home Footprint – Robert (Bob) Finn, Sr. Advisor to Secretary Woods, Department of Veterans & Military Families

Twenty years ago, Bob and former MDVMF Secretary George Owens were working with the VA to identify a second home in Maryland as they were aware back then that Charlotte Hall back could not support the needs of the veteran community. There were some discussions with Montgomery County and possibly building a home in Rockville on property where Red Gate golf course was located, but unfortunately those plans did not solidify. Bob noted that MDVM has not forgotten about the need for a veterans home in Rockville/Montgomery County.

In 2019, MDVMF located a 140-acre site in Sykesville, Maryland (Carroll County). They have been working on the project for five years and are currently working with an architect on construction drawings which should be completed by May 2025, at which time MDVMF can request funding from the VA. It will be an innovative, state-of-the-art, non-institutional skilled nursing facility that provides veterans with the best care in a resident-centered environment. Maryland will use the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Small House Model Design Guide which integrates design with resident centered care. The home is programmed for 128 beds. On-site services will include 24-hour nursing care, dialysis, dental, optometry, occupational therapy/rehab and pharmacy. It will be the first newly constructed home to implement in house dialysis services for residents. Additional features planned are a community center, wellness center and barber/beauty shop. Construction is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2025 and completed in the summer of 2027. Every resident will have an individual room of approximately 300 square feet. Eventually Charlotte Hall will be rebuilt with the same home design. The project cost is \$181 million.

The state of Maryland is providing 35% of the funding for the Sykesville home. State Veterans Homes may request up to 65% of the cost of construction or acquisition of state nursing homes or domiciliary or for renovations to existing State Homes. Former Governor Hogan set aside \$63 million in funding while the federal government will be providing \$117 million. Governor Wes Moore is also a huge supporter of the state home. Bob noted that currently the state is looking at a budget shortfall for 2025 and the state funding may be used for a temporary basis on other programs.

MDVMF has also been having conversations with Perry Point Healthcare to obtain a long-term agreement for seven acres of land to build a veterans home. The earliest time of construction of the home would be 2035 due to the timeline it takes to build a home. MDVMF is also in discussions with the Maryland Department of Health regarding Deer's Head Hospital Center in Salisbury, Maryland to build a small home there. They are currently having soil test points completed to determine if the area could be built on.

MDVMF is working with the VA Healthcare System on a veterans home in the Hagerstown, Maryland area. The VA is considering moving the existing community-based outpatient clinic located in Hagerstown to a different location near route I-81. If the VA acquires enough land, MDVMF may be able to co-locate a veterans home on the same property.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

It was noted that none of the proposed locations for future veterans home are close to Montgomery County. There is a private developer that has indicated he would be interested in donating a plot of land for a veterans home. Bob said Secretary Woods is interested in learning more about the opportunity. The land should be large enough to build a 128-bed facility similar to the one being built in Sykesville.

It was asked if there are any concerns regarding the VA's commitment for construction funding with the change in administration for next year. Bob reported that the VA is historically under-funded for state home construction with an annual budget of approximately \$161 million. This budget encompasses the entire country and homes are put on a priority list. Existing homes with modernized renovations take more priority than new homes. It would take a budget of \$1.2 billion to complete all 81 current projects in the pipeline. In 2017, VA received \$670 million in funding from other federal agencies that had not used their entire budgets. The VA is once again trying to capture funding from agencies that did not spend all of their fiscal year 2024 budget. This would need to be approved by Congress before the end of the year. The Sykesville home is currently last on the project list. Commissioners can reach out to their elected officials in support for more VA funding for veterans homes and/or to show their support for the Sykesville home to be moved up on the list.

Proposed Veterans Home and Community – Vipin Desai, Owner, VIP Properties, Inc., and Scott Wallace, Esq.

Vipin has approximately 27 acres of land located in Eastern Montgomery County off Norwood Road where he would like to build an assisted living home for seniors, disabled veterans, and spouses of deceased veterans. The facility would provide medical, rehabilitation and social services.

A concept plan for the veterans assisted living facility was reviewed. The first floor would house the common areas, offices of doctors and other services, and a courtyard. The facility would encompass 303 units on the top two floors. A one-bedroom studio would be 300 square feet, a two-bedroom unit would be 550 square feet, and a three-bedroom unit would be 650 square feet. The facility would have close proximity to a shopping center and public transportation. There are potential constraints and costs involved with the sewer line.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

It was asked how the development would be primarily funded. Vipin said the intent is to pay for the project through private, county, state and federal funding. If public funding can be secured the land will be donated via a long-term ground lease. Vipin would privately finance the balance of the site. If he cannot secure any funding from public sources than the property will be used for a different type of development. It was noted that if the project receives federal funding it will be required to subject an environmental impact statement and the study can take up to two years.

It was asked how the Commission can assist. Support will be needed at the local level with the planning board and the County Council.

Bob reported that he has discussed this proposal with Secretary Woods. There are some challenges with working with the federal government. The property would have to meet certain criteria, such as individual rooms and at minimum a 128-bed facility, in order to be eligible to receive federal funding. The property would also be at the bottom of the current priority list. There may be other options. Some states have used private-public funding for their state homes. For example, Maine has created a 501c3.

One of the concerns nationwide is the number of medical staff needed to support the facility. MDVMF spoke with Senator Cardin's office over a year ago to discuss provide incentives for individuals to go into medical careers that would serve veterans.

It was asked how the facility would be accredited and how compliance would be maintained.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, was tasked with scheduling another brainstorming session with MDVMF, Vipin, Scott, and Mike Subin, Commissioner. More information regarding zoning is needed.

Public School Holidays - Veterans' Day

The Maryland State Board of Education determines the school schedule. The state can mandate specific days be holidays but individual counties can oppose those mandates. It has been recommended in the past that Veterans Day be a school holiday, but Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has opposed it. Schools are required to meet a 180-day school year. There is some flexibility in their scheduling. Mike Subin offered to discuss this issue with the Superintendent for Montgomery County Public Schools.

A motion was made that the Commission pursue making Veterans Day a public school holiday. The motion was seconded. The motion was opened for discussion.

Miguel Sapp, Commissioner, stated he would prefer that the school system use November 11 at 11 a.m. as a remembrance or observation period. A discussion of the origins of Veterans Day would serve the students more than a holiday. In addition, every year the students could discuss a different war and/or a branch of service to include the Public Health Service and the Coast Guard. Students could have a writing competition where the County could award a prize of \$100.00 or a \$100.00 savings bond per school.

Michael Wilson, Chair, said he has a daughter would want her to attend Veterans Day events. Miguel noted that nothing would preclude a parent from taking their child out of school to do that. Having in school recognition on Veterans Day would ensure more students would participate in something versus students who would not participate in any event if it were made a holiday.

Janet Ammerman, Public, reported she organizes the Veterans Day event held in Bethesda. Several students from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School attend from the school band to perform at the event. Approximately 20 students from the school choir attended this past year's event to sing the national anthem. She agrees with Miguel's suggestion. She also suggested having veterans speak to students to introduce them to the military as a career possibility. This could have a larger impact than just giving everyone a day off.

Drew Garza, Commissioner, suggested amending the motion to that the Commission will engage with the Board of Education to determine what is feasible. It is unclear how anything could be implemented. He noted there could be concerns with curriculum for Veterans Day. Perhaps students could receive credit for attending a Veterans Day event.

Mike Subin reported Veterans Day is a county government holiday. He agreed changes in curriculum could be a major stumbling block. He suggested first engaging with the Board of Education and Superintendent to determine how they feel. He accepted Drew's amendment.

Chris Thomas, Commissioner, would prefer that the school system make Veterans Day a holiday.

A vote was taken on the original motion of connecting with the Montgomery County Board of Education to request that Veterans Day be made a school holiday. The motion passed.

Chris, Drew and Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, will join Mike Subin with contacting the MCPS Superintendent.

Betsy noted that this Commission does not have the authority to advise MCPS. If the Commission determines to pursue this issue further after discussions with the superintendent, Betsy will need to get permission from the Office of Intergovernmental Relations before the Commission can move forward with writing a letter to the state.

Discussion on National Veterans and Military Families Month Activities

It was asked if the Commission should change its name from Commission on Veterans Affairs to Commission on Veterans and Military Families, similar to the name change of Maryland Department of Military Families. Any changes would require legislation by the Montgomery County Council. A name change would also change the scope and mission of this Commission. There could be implications for staff members who currently provide staff support to the Commission part-time. The Commission would want to be able to ensure it can make the appropriate resources and referrals to support families. It was suggested that the Commission add voting member slots for military family members. There are currently four public slots that are hard to fill. It was suggested that the Commission review the current enabling legislation and identify gaps.

Dana Burl, Deputy Secretary, Military Family Policy and Programs, MDVMF, reported Calvert County Veterans Affairs Commission voted last night to change their name to the Commission for Veterans and Military Families. She suggested connecting with that Commission to understand their process. Anne Arundel County is also looking into changing their name. Dana noted that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has expanded its mission to provide supports to dependents, caregivers and survivors but has not changed its name. The goal is to put systems in place and establish good policies to ensure that our military families are thriving which will then help the veteran. When our families are thriving, our veterans will too. MDVMP is also ensuring they have strong situational awareness of active duty, guard and reserves. Betsy suggesting having Dana and the Calvert County Commission for Veterans and Military Families to the next Commission meeting.

Chair and Vice Chair Updates

Michael Wilson participated in a Veterans Day event hosted by the Germantown American Legion Post held at Mission BBQ. He suggested inviting the Post to a future Commission meeting as part of the Commission's outreach efforts and to create a partnership.

Next meeting is December 17.

Updates from Commissioners

Chris gave remarks at the [Operation Green Light Ride On bus unveiling](#) on November 6. The bus is wrapped in a design depicting the U.S. flag, an outline of veterans, and highlighting Operation Green Light. The bus also features a neon sign reading "Operation Green Light" to illuminate the bus at night. The Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs website and the ServingTogether number is printed on the back of the bus. It was suggested that Michael Wilson write a letter of gratitude to Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich, Montgomery County Councilmembers, and the Director of the Montgomery County Department of Transportation and to suggest that they keep the bus on the road year-round with potentially change the route throughout the county. Betsy asked Donny Williams, ServingTogether, to provide data if the number of calls increased due to the bus cards.

The Howard County Commission on Veterans Affairs is honoring high school seniors who are entering the military. It was suggested having their Chair speak to the Commission about this program.

Jameelah will be attending a discussion on veterans women's health and recruitment of women in the military at the Library of Congress on November 21.

Adjournment

7:29 p.m.

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Grace Caulfield; Drew Garza; Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Veronica Pei; Miguel Sapp; Michael Subin; Christopher Thomas; Charles Von Goin; Michael Wilson, Chair

Commissioners Absent: Bernard Chesman; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Anneke Vandenbroek, Vice-Chair

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

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes); Ken Reichard (Senator Ben Cardin); Charles Richardson (Senator Chris Van Hollen)

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

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

Public Present: Robert Finn, MDVMF; Dana Burl, MDVMF; David Skisano, MDVMF; Donny Williams, ServingTogether; Vipin Desai; Scott Wallace; Bill Gray; Wayne Miller; Jane McCarthy; Gary Palmer; Lindsay Livingston; Pete Freudenberger; Janet Ammerman