



Commission on Veterans Affairs



MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, September 15, 2020

6 p.m. – 7 p.m.

**Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair
VIA ZOOM**

PLEASE NOTE: Given the concerns of the corona virus, the Commission on Veterans Affairs will be meeting virtually via Zoom. The meeting will begin at 6:00pm. We anticipate that the call will last approximately about an hour or so, give or take.

Join the meeting via ZOOM <https://zoom.us/j/91009886849> **Or, call into the meeting:** If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 910 0988 6849 followed by #

If an attendee 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.

- 6:00 Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance, Approval of July 2020 Meeting Minutes & Recognition of Dan Bullis for his service as Chair** (*Dan became chair in January 2015 and his term ended September 2020*) – Wayne Miller, Chair
- 6:10 September is National Suicide Prevention Month** – Bob Koffman, MD, MPH, Vice-Chair
- 6:15 [Montgomery Parks Completes Fully Accessible Boat Launch at Seneca Landing](#) – Next Steps** – Bob Green, Senior ADA Project Manager, Montgomery Parks, M-NCPPC
- 6:30 Veteran's Experience at Riley's Lock - Prevention & Wellness** – Joe Mornini, Executive Director and Co-Founder, Team River Runner
- 6:50 Updates**
- 7:00 Adjourn**

If you need a sign language interpreter or any other accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact Betsy.Luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Montgomery County Veterans Affairs Website – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans
Commission's Website – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva
Veterans Network Directory – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/vnd



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
September 15th, 2020**

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

I. Call to Order

Wayne Miller, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Wayne asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Wayne 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.

II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the July 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the June 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Recognition of Dan Bullis for His Service as Commission Chair

Dan Bullis served as a Commissioner from December 2013 through September 2020 and as Chair from September 2015 to September 2020. Wayne presented a certificate to Dan in recognition and appreciation from County Executive Marc Elrich. The certificate reads:

"Thank you for your outstanding leadership in serving as Chair of the Commission on Veterans Affairs from September 2015 to September 2020. Under your leadership, some of the highlights include that the DC VA Medical Center Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Montgomery County was established, Vietnam War Memorial was dedicated, Zero 16 Campaign to end Veteran Homelessness was successful, and accessible boat launch was built at Riley's Lock that is used by Team River Runner of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center."

IV. September is National Suicide Prevention Month – Bob Koffman, MD, MPH, Vice-Chair

VA PREVENTS Website: www.va.gov/prevents

PREVENTS Facebook: www.facebook.com/weareprevents

PREVENTS Toolkit: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/PREVENTSPartnerSPMToolkitFINAL.pdf>

Warrior Wounded Project (WWP) reported there has been a 44% increase in referrals to mental health providers since the pandemic. COVID-19 is causing an astounding rise in cases of depression and anxiety. The Center for Disease Control's (CDC) June 2020 Morbidity Mortality Weekly report showed 25% of the 18 to 24 population had acknowledged or admitted that they had seriously considered suicide in the past month.

On September 10th, 2020, Governor Larry Hogan issued a proclamation recognizing September as National Suicide Prevention Month and highlighted the administration's participation in the nationwide [Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families](#).

On March 5th, 2019, President Trump signed an Executive Order to create a plan known as the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS). This is the first federally sponsored suicide prevention effort. The goal of PREVENTS is to prevent suicide — among not just Veterans but all Americans. By adopting a holistic public health approach, PREVENTS is acting on the knowledge that suicide prevention is everyone's business, and that by working together, locally and nationally, we can prevent

suicide. Bob said PREVENTS has a pledge that community members can take to [pledge to help prevent suicide in their community](#) and will encourage others to join their efforts.

The PREVENTS Office has created a first-of-its kind, national survey to gain insight and invaluable feedback about the most pressing needs of our Veterans and how they prefer to receive important information on mental health services and suicide prevention resources. The survey will be available through the end of September.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, made a motion to renew the efforts to have a suicide centered program on Homefront. The motion was seconded. A discussion was had on the motion.

Michael Wilson, Commissioner, asked for more details about the program. Mike explained Homefront is a program on County Cable Montgomery (CCM) that gives residents an inside look at the lives of Montgomery County Veterans and their families and the services the County is trying to make available to them. View past episodes: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/CCM/homefront.html. Several months ago the Commission had asked the County's Office of Public Information (OPI) and CCM to tape a 30-minute Homefront special focused on suicide prevention and mental health resources for Veterans featuring Michael Heimall, DC VA Medical Center, and Dr. Norvell "Van" Coots, MD, MSS, Brigadier General, US Army (Ret.), President and CEO, Holy Cross Health and Maryland Region of Trinity Health. At this time CCM and OPI have not confirmed approval for the taping. Betsy Luecking, Staff, said Neil Greenberger, OPI, was working to get it on the schedule. Neil suggested that Betsy send the request to Barry Hudson, OPI Director, and Rich Madaleno, Chief Administrative Officer. Betsy will e-mail them and County Executive Marc Elrich tomorrow.

No further discussion was had on the motion. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.

Jonathan Alfaro, Commissioner, offered to help with the program as he has a digital marketing background.

Joe Mornini, Team River Runner (TRR), started a national program to have Veterans call other Veterans who are isolated due to the pandemic as a preventative measure. The program, Kayakers for Good, is designed to be a listening and referral resource for Veterans. If a Veteran is suicidal or considering self-harm they will be referred to the VA. 50 to 60 Veterans are currently enrolled in the program. Veteran volunteers have been calling many Veterans who are blind or visually impaired as they are very isolated and not able to get out and participate in normal activities. To participate in the program, Veterans can fill out a form online and TRR Resource Teammates will reply within 24 hours via phone call or email.. Mike suggested that Kayakers for Good and similar programs be listed as part of the Homefront show. Website: www.teamriverrunner.org/kayakers-for-good/.

Steve Bolen, Howard County Commission for Veterans and Military Families, shared two Veteran-owned organizations that offer programs to support Veterans mental health. The VA Way teaches mental health first aid to Veterans (www.thevaway.org). Work Play Obsession promotes and provides recreational activities and access to holistic health and wellness programs (<https://workplayobsession.com>)

Joanna Starling, Commissioner, asked what Maryland's Commitment to Veterans has been doing related to the pandemic.

Bob reported the Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention (CSP) quarterly meeting is tomorrow from 1pm to 2:30pm. The Commission will be discussing relevant activities for suicide prevention. Meetings are open to the public. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, is a CSP Commission member. CSP has three major committees that work on suicide prevention within the school system, data management and specific means and methods. More information can be found on their website: <https://health.maryland.gov/suicideprevention/Pages/Governor's-Commission-on-Suicide-Prevention.aspx>.

Cynthia reported she is on the Advisory Board for the EagleForce Warrior Foundation. The Foundation received a grant from the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission as well as funds from the County to administer the Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives for Seniors (PEARLS), which is an intervention for people 60 years and older who have minor depression or dysthymia and are receiving home-based social services from community services agencies. PEARLS is an evidence-based program that started at the University of Washington in Seattle. The aim of the program is to identify or screen people for social isolation issues or other issues including food insecurity, rental assistance, and healthcare and provide them

with local community resources. PEARLS provides eight 50-minute sessions with a trained social service worker in the client's home over 19 weeks. Cynthia noted that Veterans will be matched with other Veterans or persons with similar interests. The program works to address and treat the symptoms that are causing depression by teaching individuals to recognize depressive symptoms, define problems that may contribute to depression, and devise steps to solve these problems. PEARLS will be available in Montgomery County starting October 1st. Cynthia will share a flyer with Betsy that provides more information.

V. Montgomery Parks Completes Fully Accessible Boat Launch at Seneca Landing – Next Steps – Bob Green, Senior ADA Project Manager, Montgomery Parks, M-NCPPC

Website: www.montgomeryparks.org/montgomery-parks-completes-fully-accessible-boat-launch-at-seneca-landing/

LocalDVM.com Article: www.localdvm.com/news/maryland/montgomery-parks-completes-first-fully-accessible-boat-launch/

Bob Green, Senior ADA Project Manager, Montgomery Parks (MP), M-NCPPC, reported MP has completed their first phase at Seneca Landing, which is the accessible floating launch for kayakers and canoers. The new launch has been a great success so far and is heavily used. He thanked Joe and Betsy for spearheading this project. MP is currently in the second phase of the project which involves designing accessibility improvements to the existing boat ramp. MP received a \$100,000 grant from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) two years ago. That funding will be applied to the accessibility improvements. The project will cost more than the grant. The boat ramp is paid for out of user fees. The accessibility improvements should allow an individual to drop off their boat and have an accessible sidewalk, ramp and an area to tether their boats. This will also improve the safety of the boat ramp as the concrete ramp can become very slippery. The goal is to have the designs completed within the next two months. MDNR will have to review and approve the design. MP hopes to have construction started this winter so the accessibility improvements are fully operational in the spring.

Betsy noted that walkways have also been installed at Seneca Landing as well as a railing on the walkway ramp down to the street making it safer for individuals who use wheelchairs. Cement surface has been installed at the picnic area, there are accessible parking spaces and an accessible walkway to an accessible Port-o-potty. The whole area has been made useable. Betsy suggested that a shelter be added to the picnic area like they have at Hadley's Park. Bob would like to have funds to install a shade structure.

VI. Veteran's Experience at Riley's Lock – Prevention & Wellness – Joe Mornini, Executive Director and Co-Founder, Team River Runner

Website: www.teamriverrunner.org

Joe thanked Betsy and Bob for their work on having the accessible launch installed. TRR has been using the accessible launch, or adaptive put-in, with Veterans from Walter Reed. TRR has another group that kayaks on Sundays. The groups are currently much smaller due to the pandemic. They are being very careful as many Veterans who participate have medical issues. Jonathan Alfaro, Commissioner, said he attended a TRR session at Walter Reed and he met a lot of Veterans, some with disabilities. He said the program helped the Veterans to focus their minds on something else for an hour and he was amazed at how progressive and trained the participants were.

Joe said the accessible launch levels the playing field for getting in and out of the water. He is often asked what is necessary to have an adaptive put-in for paddling. It takes three things – a port-o-potty, a place to park, and ease of putting in and taking out of the water. All three have been accomplished by Bob and his efforts. Joe noted that they have some very disabled Veterans and older Veterans have taken advantage of the new accessible launch. In particular, an 85-year-old Marine is really excited about being able to be more independent.

TRR started at Walter Reed 16 years ago and now operates chapters in 34 states. Veterans want to serve their community and Veterans within the various chapters teach adaptive paddling to individuals that may not be Veterans but have disabling conditions. Joe hopes that the Seneca Landing accessible boat launch will

become a National Adaptive Paddling Center of Excellence. He hopes to see them installed across the country. He encouraged Commissioners to refer Veterans to TRR. Individuals interested in kayaking must sign up for the Sunday program. Pre-pandemic, the Elks Lodge #15 provided a free picnic lunch for Veterans and their families every Sunday. They are currently fundraising. Calleva River School, which teaches paddlesports just down the road from Seneca Landing, lets TRR use their boats and kayaks for free. This will continue once TRR is able. Joe announced TRR is hosting a national virtual biathlon from September 27th through October 5th.

Betsy explained there were many steps to getting the accessible launch completed. She said this Commission learned about the need for an accessible launch at Seneca Landing when Joe presented June 2016. As a longtime visitor of the park, Betsy knew who owned the land and who to contact. This Commission wrote letters of support to receive funding. Bob had to receive many permits and permissions to get this job completed. Betsy noted that one of the articles written about the accessible launch referred to it as a "handicap launch". She stressed the importance that the launch is universal design and can be used by anyone in the community regardless of age or ability. It should not be considered as being used solely for a person with a disability. Veterans who have been injured do not think of themselves as disabled, but as a Veteran first. Betsy suggested that the towpath be made accessible for wheelchairs. As the area along the river is owned by the federal government they would need to be approached.

Dan said he is a Board Member on the Walter Reed Society (WRS), which has helped TRR in the past. He would be happy to entertain a proposal from Bob or Joe on specific needs that WRS could assist with financially. Betsy will discuss with Joe and send those thoughts to Bob so he can construct one document.

Joe shared his phone number and e-mail and said he is available to talk to anyone at anytime: 301-233-8882, joe@teamriverrunner.org.

VII. Chair and Vice Chair Report

None.

VIII. Updates / Announcements

Bill Gray, former Chair, reported Serving Together, in conjunction with Hope Connections for Cancer Support and the Prince George's County Commission for Veterans, hosted a prostate cancer panel discussion today for September's National Prostate Cancer Awareness month. Julie Riggs, Blue Star Families, also made a presentation and asked for military, Veterans, National Guard and Reserve family members to fill out the 2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey. From the survey results, Blue Star Families, in collaboration with Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families, analyzes trends related to major shifts in military life issues and helps local and national government leaders better understand the realities that military, veteran, and National Guard/Reserve families face.

Betsy announced the County Council Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee will be hosting their annual budget priority meeting with boards, committees, and commissions (BCC) in October. [Note: The HHS Committee will be meeting with BCCs on November 18th and November 19th. The date this Commission is set to meet with them has yet to be determined.] Last year this Commission supported continuing to provide \$650,000 in funding for Veteran homelessness, \$150,000 for Serving Together, and \$50,000 for Warrior Canine Connection. In April 2020, this Commission supported funding \$350,000 of additional funding to Bethesda Cares so they could expand their outreach to Veterans. This Commission will need to submit FY22 budget priorities to the County Council HHS Committee by November 3rdth. Betsy will send out last year's testimony for comments.

Betsy said John Mendez, Bethesda Cares, has offered to speak before the Commission. She suggested inviting him to speak in October to provide an update on homelessness in Montgomery County. October is also National Disability Employment Awareness Month and Betsy suggested having staff from WorkSource Montgomery present on what they are doing for Veterans.

Neil reported County Executive Elrich will be holding virtual forums on the FY22 Operating Budget on September 21st and September 30th. There will be an additional six budget forums and Neil suggested it could

be an opportunity for Commissioners to state its priorities. Betsy said Commissioners would have to present agreed upon priorities on behalf of the Commission. She suggested sharing input via e-mail or Zoom virtual meeting.

Adjournment: 7:00pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, October 20th, 2020 via Zoom from 6pm to 7:30 pm. Please view the agenda for information on how to join the meeting.

Respectfully submitted: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I; Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Jonathan Alfaro; Josephine Bahn; Dan Bolling; Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Robert Koffman; Cynthia Macri; Wayne Miller; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Michael Subin; Susan Webman; Michael Wilson

Commissioners Absent: James Campbell; Hannah Dibonge; Reggie Mitchell

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Christa Burton (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes); Austin Morris (Senator Chris Van Hollen); Ken Reichard (Senator Ben Cardin)

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: None.

Commission Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I