



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Strategic Planning Meeting Summary Minutes
September 20th, 2016**

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

Mike Subin, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the June 2016 Meeting Summary Minutes. Jim Campbell, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the June 2016 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Review of Current Projects and Discussion on New Initiatives

Update on Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC)

An official Golden Hammer Ceremony was held for the CBOC on September 19th. Commissioner Mike Subin was the master of ceremonies for the event. Featured speakers include Brian A. Hawkins, DC VA Medical Center Director, the Honorable Benjamin Cardin, Senator, the Honorable Chris Van Hollen, Congressman, the Honorable John Sarbanes, Congressman, Joseph A. Williams, Jr., Network Director, VISN 5, George W. Owings III, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, Ike Leggett, Montgomery County Executive, and Dan Bullis, Chair, Commission on Veterans Affairs. Mike presented the Commission with a golden hammer that was used at the event. The CBOC is scheduled to open in December 2017 and is located at 15810 Gaither Drive in Gaithersburg. Once renovated, the build space will offer 11,600 square feet with room for primary-care and mental-health clinics as well as space for tele-health, patient education, hearing aid fittings and specialty care. There has been discussion to include space for non-profit organizations such as Serving Together and representation from VA services such as the Silver Spring Vet Center.

Retired Brigadier General Norvell V. Coots, M.D., who is the new President and CEO of Holy Cross Health, has approached the County Executive about Holy Cross offering specialty or supplemental services at the CBOC. Mike Subin will be meeting with Mr. Coots and his staff to identify possible options. Dr. Coots previously served as Chief Executive Officer of the Walter Reed Health Care System.

County Executive Leggett has appointed a Special Fellow whose role will be to identify and coordinate with County-based non-profit service providers that can offer or supplement services at the CBOC. Mike will be assisting the Special Fellow with this task as well as coordinating with Brian Hawkins.

Jane McCarthy, Commissioner, what the eligibility requirements were for a Veteran to receive care at a CBOC. According to the VA, basic eligibility requirements are: If you served in the active military service and were separated under any condition other than dishonorable, you may qualify for VA health care benefits. Current and former members of the Reserves or National Guard who were called to active duty by a federal order and completed the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty may be eligible for VA health benefits as well. Eligible Veterans can apply over the phone, online, or in person. Once your application is successfully processed, you will be assigned an enrollment priority group (www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/resources/priority_groups.asp). Many Veterans qualify for cost-free health care services based on a compensable service-connected condition or other qualifying factors, while some Veterans may be required to pay a copay for treatment of their nonservice-connection conditions. Most Veterans will be required to complete a financial assessment at the time of enrollment to determine whether they are eligible for enrollment

and for free health care services. If the Veteran's gross household (including spouse and dependents, if applicable) income exceeds the VA income limits, the Veteran may be required to pay a copay for health care services. For more information on eligibility and how to apply please visit www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/apply/.

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, suggested that the Commission and the County assist the VA in their community outreach efforts to notify County Veterans that the CBOC will be opening and to encourage enrollment in the VA health care system. Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported that there are currently 8,000 Veterans in Montgomery County that are enrolled in VA Health Care. Betsy sent Austin Morris, Representative of Congressman Van Hollen, an e-mail with information regarding the new CBOC to include in their e-mail newsletter. Betsy will also share this information with the representatives of Senator Ben Cardin and Senator John Sarbanes so they can share it with their constituents.

It was suggested that staff directly involved with or providing services at the CBOC present before the Commission over the coming year.

Communication Plan

Randy Stone, Vice Chair, reported on communication efforts that were implemented prior to Commission recess including several articles that were featured in the County's Paperless Airplane bi-weekly e-mail newsletter, Tweets that were sent out via the County's Twitter account using the hash tag #mocoverts, and working with 311 to include entries in their database relating to Veterans services and programs.

Randy will be cleaning and reorganizing the Veterans book cases located at the Silver Spring Veterans Plaza. We are still in need of memorabilia items to be placed in the cases. He will also begin planning for a Commission satellite meeting to be held later in the year.

Octavia suggested creating a subcommittee under the Communication Committee that will focus solely on community outreach regarding the CBOC. Octavia volunteered to Chair the subcommittee. Commissioners interested in joining the subcommittee should contact Octavia.

Operation HomeFront Cable TV Show

Mike reported that they have been working to get Congressman Chris Van Hollen on as a guest. It was suggested that a future episode focus on the new CBOC.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Mike is still working with the Department of Transportation (DOT) as the plan is prepared. Dan suggested that Commissioners begin to contact the families of those killed in action in Vietnam to inform them of the future memorial and inquire as to whether they would like to be a part of the opening ceremony. At a prior planning meeting it was suggested that the County honor the South Vietnamese who served alongside U. S. Forces to include a South Vietnamese flag to be flown alongside the American Flag, the Maryland Flag, the County Flag, and the POW/MIA Flag.

Veterans Day Veterans Tribute Concert

Downtown Silver Spring will be hosting their annual Veterans Tribute Concert on November 10, 2016. Lisa Martin, Executive Director, Silver Spring Town Center, is currently planning the event. This year will focus on Korean War Veterans as well as September 11th first responders and others involved. The Commission made a motion to co-sponsor the event. A vote was taken and the Commission unanimously agreed to co-sponsor. Dan will work with the Walter Reed Society to see if they can assist with funding. Mike noted that the Montgomery County FEMA team spent 10 days at the Pentagon assisting with disaster recovery operations. He can provide Lisa with list of names of those involved.

Memorial Day and Veterans Day Planning

Dan reported that an open mic event will be held on November 8th at the Silver Spring Civic Building from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. It will be an opportunity for Veterans, their family members, significant others to speak about their experiences in the service, or their time waiting for love ones, or their time after injury. A similar event was held in Boston last year that was very successful. American Legion Post 41 is co-sponsoring the event alongisde the local Wounded Warrior Project. The Commission made a motion to co-sponsor the event. A vote was taken and the Commission unanimously agreed to co-sponsor.

Octavia reported that VFW Post 2562 will have a planning meeting tomorrow evening for the Veterans Day 2016 event. She will share information with the Commission when it is available.

It was suggested that the Commission announce a press release for Memorial Day about the new Vietnam Veterans Memorial and possibly have an event near the Memorial site. Mike will discuss with DOT their time frame to determine what is feasible.

It was discussed that many individuals do not know the difference between Memorial Day and Veterans Day. Jane noted that she and several other Veterans speak to schools on both Days and she specifically addresses the difference between the two. Julie Riggs, Serving Together, reported that ST manages the Speakers Bureau and she suggested creating a one-page handout explaining the differences between Memorial Day and Veterans Day that could be given to students. Octavia would like to be added to the Speakers Bureau.

Betsy Luecking discussed the possibility of Montgomery County displaying banners on light poles that would honor those who served (both those living and those who have died). Dan noted that he saw a similar project used in Ocean City, Maryland that honored WWII Veterans. The County would need to work with the various jurisdictions (City of Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, Rockville, Takoma Park) to display the banners. The cost of each banner is approximately \$175.00. Individuals would purchase the banner. Each jurisdiction could hang 60 banners. Banners would be purchased on a first come, first served basis. The County cannot accept payment and the funds would need to be accepted by a non-profit. Octavia volunteered for the Montgomery County Delta Foundation to manage the funds.

IV. Vote on Top Two Budget Priorities for FY18

A discussion was held regarding the Commission's top two budget priorities for FY18.

A motion was made to accept the budget priorities for FY18 as follows: to support continued funding for ending homeless for Veterans (\$500,000), to support the County's STEER and Sequential Intercept models that will help to identify Veterans in the criminal justice system that suffer from substance abuse and/or mental illness, and to ask for \$250,000 that would fund two case manager positions for the STEER program who can assist Veterans in obtaining VA services.

V. Roundtable:

Dan reported that Walter Reed recently hosted [Theater of War](#), a production that presents readings of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* to military and civilian communities across the United States and Europe. He also reported that Dr. Elspeth Cameron "Cam" Ritchie, a long-time Army psychiatrist, is now serving as the chief clinical officer for the District of Columbia's Department of Mental Health. She will be the contact for all mental health issues in our areas regarding the CBOC.

Julie Riggs, Serving Together (ST), reported that Jessica Fuchs, Program Director for ST, will be leaving to take care of her family. Her last day will be October 14th. ST will be posting the open position later this week. The Mental Health Association of Montgomery County recently rebranded themselves as EveryMind to reflect that programs are now offered in Montgomery County, Northern Virginia and D.C.

Stan Seidel, Commissioner, Maryland Veterans Commission (MVC), reported that MVC will be touring Charlotte Hall Veterans Home on October 1st.

Jim reported that the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) will be hosting their monthly luncheon on October 19th at Manor Country Club. George W. Owings III, Secretary, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs will be speaking. At the November 16th luncheon Jane McCarthy will present about her experiences as a Nurse in Vietnam. Cost of the lunch is \$25.00.

Octavia reported on several bills that were recently signed into law. [Senate Bill 245 – Labor and Employment – Hiring and Promotion Preferences – Veterans and their Spouses](#) authorizes employers to grant a preference in hiring and promotion to eligible veterans, spouses of eligible veterans who have service-connected disabilities, and surviving spouses of deceased eligible veterans. The bill goes into effect October 1st, 2016. [House Bill 0898 – Property Tax Credit – Elderly Individuals and Veterans](#) authorizes local governments to grant, by law, a property tax credit for a dwelling of (1) an

individual who is at least 65 years old and has lived in the same dwelling for at least the preceding 40 years or (2) a retired member of the U.S. Armed Forces who is at least 65 years old. The bill went into effective June 1st, 2016. [House Bill 1014 – College Affordability Act of 2016](#) was established to provides a tax credit of as much as \$5,000 for residents who have a student loan debt that exceeds \$20,000. The bill went into effect July 1st, 2016.

Adjournment: 8:30 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, October 18th, 2016 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Health & Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor Large Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager