

**Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs  
20 November 2020  
WebEx Meeting**

**Opening**

Mr. Rudder brought the meeting to order at 9:00AM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was held for POW's, MIA's, those deployed, their families and all those killed in the line of duty. Mr. Rudder invited the Board members to introduce themselves:

**Board Members**

Mr. Rudder, Rio Grande County Veteran Service Officer, Vietnam Era Air Force Aviation Electronics; used his GI Bill to get a teaching certificate then taught shop for 25 years

Ms. Golonka, works at XCEL energy doing their veterans programs, still in the National Guard, has done four tours overseas

Mr. Dailey, Grand and Summit County VSO, US Army Medical Corps, Vietnam

Mr. Steen, Commissioner, Teller County, 32 Years Commissioned service, US Army Infantry, Active Duty and National Guard

Mr. Gonzalez, retired Air Force, 20 years in intelligence, then a school teacher, currently serving as Commissioner of El Paso County

Ms. Scanlon, USMC Veteran, Women Marine Association; joined at 9:15pm

**Minutes**

Mr. Dailey motioned to approve the minutes, Mr. Steen seconded. Unanimous approval to approve the minutes as presented.

**Staff**

Mr. Hopkins, Deputy Executive Director of Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

Greg Dorman, Legislative Director of DMVA

David Callahan, Strategic Director DMVA; 34 Years active duty service in the Army, OEF/OIF

Rich Tremaine, Director CDVA East

Joanne Iglesias, Director CDVA West

Paul Von Rieseemann, DMVA Budget Specialist

Megan Fraser, Administration DVA East

Carissa Snyder, Officer Manager DVA East

Gail Hoagland, Grants Administrator DVA East

Jessica Quackenbush, Administration DVA West

Angela Ingalls, Veterans Memorial Cemetery

Heather Benjamin, DVA West

**Visitors**

Theresa Rudder

Robbie Robinson, VCLC Commission

### **VTF Grant Application Changes for FY 2021-2022**

Ms. Hoagland presented three proposed changes for the Board's consideration:

- 1) Process for submission – by email, instead of snail mail. Due in part to COVID protections, and eliminates the deadline issues.

Mr. Steen queried if all of our applicants have email capability? And if so, do they have the ability to submit such large files? Ms. Hoagland responded that she has broken down the applications into two files and clearly delineated what goes into which one. Further, as everything is currently electronic, if they don't have email capability then they probably can't administer their grants. Mr. Robinson pointed out this also requires them to have scanning capability. Ms. Hoagland agreed. Mr. Dorman offered that applicants could take pictures of the documents with a cell phone? Or that DocuSign could be used. Mr. Hopkins queried if they are currently in fillable PDF forms, because then everyone would need Adobe Acrobat; they are Word Documents which is more common, and may be more accessible to more people. Most complaints received last year had to do with the accessibility of the old process and he is therefore very receptive of the new ideas although agrees with the concerns thus far mentioned. Ms. Quackenbush offered that Google can turn documents into fillable forms and they just hit submit. Mr. Steen queried if a VSO doesn't have a scanner could grant funds be used to provide one? Ms. Hoagland responded in the negative and stated that currently, all grantees are scanning and submitting their reimbursements electronically; the last grantee who was using paper has now been assisted in transitioning to electronic means for submittal. She pointed out that times are changing and everyone is becoming more proficient. Mr. Dailey warned about last second electronic filing, if an application doesn't reach Ms. Hoagland on time then there may be complaints. He also pointed out that currently many CVSOs can't get into their offices and this may prove to be an additional problem. Ms. Hoagland believes this will actual decrease the submittal issues.

- 2) Requirement to attend kick off training

Ms. Hoagland explained that each year, while provided, a number of grantees don't attend the training meetings. These are then the ones who have difficulties managing the grant, leave out important and required paperwork, and struggle in general. Mr. Tremaine queried if they should record the training and post it on the YouTube channel so that the applicants can access them in case they need to double check. Ms. Hoagland stated that the training is provided on WebEx and is recorded and the applicants can access the recording on that platform however, adding it to the YouTube channel as well could be considered. Ms. Hoagland's suggestion is that anyone who does not attend the training will have their funds frozen until they attend one of the make-up opportunities provided to them in an effort to ensure that everyone has the access and ability to complete the training.

Ms. Scanlon joined the meeting.

Mr. Steen queried if Ms. Hoagland would like to institute a test at the end of training. Ms. Hoagland indicated this was a good idea and would work on ways to implement this suggestion. Ms. Hoagland cited that previously, she tried getting grantees to sign a document stating that they had read the handbook however, the rate of return was abysmal so she took it out for a while. A grantee provided

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feedback that it should be returned to the process and she did. The rate of return last year on the signed page was about 75%.

- 3) Funding thresholds –
  - a. Increase likelihood of grantee success
  - b. Increase execution rates
  - c. Decrease need for as many modifications.

Ms. Hoagland explained that the proposed process will slightly change the way the Board approval works. The Board will first have to decide to award a grant, then there will need to be a determination if a threshold should apply, then the amount of the award determined. The goal is for the grantees to use the money appropriately and fully, however she has repeatedly received feedback from first time grantees who ask for large sums of money and are awarded such sums that they weren't truly ready for what they were getting into and smaller sums in their first year(s) would have been smarter. Discussion ensued amongst Board members and DMVA staff.

Ms. Hoagland stated that there is also a minor proposed change on the application form indicating that the signature represents acceptance of the Grant Award terms and Conditions and then queried if anyone had any other changes that they would like made to the application itself. There were none.

Mr. Longinos motioned to approve the changes as suggested by Ms. Hoagland, Mr. Steen seconded, although he verified that Ms. Hoagland would act on the Board's suggestions. Ms. Hoagland stated she had been taking notes and felt like it was the processes behind the changes that they were commenting on the most. Board members Dailey, Golonka, Gonzales and Steen voted for approving the changes suggested for FY 21-22. Ms. Scanlon abstained. The motion passed.

Ms. Scanlon requested that when Ms. Fraser sends out documents for the Board that Ms. Fraser specifically notes which documents, if any, will be voted on.

### **Budget Update**

Presented by Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Van Rieseemann. Mr. Hopkins stated that due to the increased measures due to rising Covid numbers. There is a significant number of new tasking's coming in with the NG supporting with alternate healthcare facilities in addition to the work they are doing with fire mitigation. The down select for the HQ for US Space Command took place. Buckley did not make the cut, Peterson and Colorado Springs did, in addition to four other possible locations.

The determination on who will be the Acting Deputy Director while Mr. Hopkins is gone has been made. Two individuals will split at 7.5 months each. David Callahan will begin on January 1, the handoff has already begun. The second replacement, beginning mid-August will be Mr. Dorman. Mr. Hopkins acknowledged that this will affect the legislative session staffing in 2022 however, Mr. Hopkins believes there will be flexibility in the budget at that point in time to have a temporary Legislative Liaison for that year. Mr. Hopkins stated that the two biggest cuts are coming to two specific line items: the Executive Director's office took a significant cut as did the tuition assistance program for the Division of the National Guard.

The Governor has already presented the budget, and it is now going into the JBC process. Mr. Hopkins turned the floor over to Mr. Von Rieseemann. Mr. Von Rieseemann introduced himself, he has been with

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the department for four years, the state for nineteen years. The Governor did announce a special session, beginning Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>. It is anticipated to go 3-5 days, they do not anticipate DMVA being affected by this at all. It is focusing on COVID. A total of \$572,137 dollars was reverted last year, most of those didn't impact any services provided. In both 2019 and 2020 some of the cash funds were swept. Cash funds affected for DMVA include: Real Estate Proceeds, Veterans Trust Fund and Veterans Assistance Grant. Total funds swept were \$8,908,395. Regarding the Veterans Assistance Grant, a few years ago there was a bill stating if the Senior Property Tax Exemption funding was not fully used it would go into the VAG and another program. The VTF funding comes from the Tobacco Master Settlement and there has been no legislation to change that. The Board members made queries.

Mr. Von Riesemann presented the FY 21-22 Budget request. There are four line items: 1) Executive Director and Army National Guard 2) Division of Veterans Affairs 3) Air National Guard and 4) Federally Funded Programs. The cemetery does get some funding from cash sources as well, as there is money for each interment. Ms. Scanlon inquired if they will be losing any FTEs at the WROS. Mr. Hopkins stated that some of the FTEs across the state will be redistributed, they are trying to capitalize on currently empty spots, or not filling spots when they are vacated. Over a 2.3 year period there will be a cut to the department of roughly 20%.

Reductions for a Reimagined DMVA include 1) Total net fund reduction of another \$475,000, this will primarily come from the general funds and 2) continuing Tuition Assistance Funding for the Lower Demand. Questions and discussion ensued between the Board members and the DMVA staff regarding the budget.

The Veterans Assistance Grant will be continued at current funding levels through the supplementation of cash funds from the Veterans Assistance Grant cash fund. The statute mentioned earlier that diverts excess property tax savings to the cash fund (vice the general fund) has been changed and the Veterans Assistance Grant will no longer receive these supplemental funds. The Veterans Assistance Grant will continue with the general fund appropriation, subject to any changes made by the General Assembly. Ms. Scanlon queried if the National Guard is getting extended past December. Mr. Dorman said that is a question for the President, 30 states have already requested that.

Mr. Dailey thanked Mr. Hopkins for coming up to his county for the Veterans Day celebration.

Mr. Steen thanked Mr. Hopkins for his transparency. Stated that he is on several boards for the state and this is by far the best experience.

Meeting took a brief recess at 11:05am.

Meeting reconvened at 11:15am.

### **Old Business**

#### **Strategic Plan**

Ms. Fraser presented two suggestions regarding the strategic plan. The first is that the quarterly strategic plan for the Board falls in the months of October, January, April and July. The second suggestion is that prior to those meetings the Board members email their updates regarding the SPIs to Ms. Fraser so that she can distribute them to everyone. The Board members agreed with both

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suggestions. Ms. Fraser further requested any non-monitoring site visits reports that have not yet been submitted need to be sent to Ms. Hoagland as soon as possible.

### **New Business**

#### **Veterans Memorial Cemetery**

Ms. Ingalls from the Veterans Memorial Cemetery requested funds in the amount of \$21,010 from VTF monies for the purpose of replacing the Rainbird Irrigation Computer, this comes with 5 years of technical assistance. The current system went down, and cannot continue to function as needed. They also need to replace the gravesite locator kiosk as the current one is no longer supported. A Dinotouch would be purchased which is also what is in use at Ft. Logan.

Mr. Rudder verified this is within purview and the monies exist. Ms. Hoagland answered in the affirmative and explained that the VMC historically receives \$50k - \$100k each year.

Ms. Scanlon motioned to approve at \$21,010. Mr. Steen seconded. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

#### **WROS Funding**

Ms. Hoagland provided background information regarding this issue. Ms. Scanlon motioned to amend the prior approval of \$150,000 to \$157,862. Ms. Golonka seconded. Mr. Dailey queried if they are approving for administrative costs, and if they are, is that legal? Ms. Hoagland stated yes it is for administrative costs however it was a direct request from the JBC that the Board approved with additional funds. Mr. Dailey inquired of Mr. Hopkins if this is legal. Mr. Dorman replied that as this money is coming from the VTF that it should be fine however he believes the Board is owed a White Paper on this for clarification as the VTF allows for monies to support the Board or to Veterans. Ms. Scanlon requested to table this motion until the next Board meeting. Mr. Steen seconded. Unanimous approval of motion to table.

#### **Annual Report**

Mr. Rudder queried when the Annual Report needs to be submitted. Mr. Dorman stated it is due at the end of the calendar year, he said they would like to have it by the middle of December. Mr. Dorman states that some of the letters needed have already been received but the key piece is the letter from the Chair.

#### **Non-Monitoring Site Visits**

Non-Monitoring Site Visits, Ms. Hoagland. She requested if the Board member has not been able to connect with the grantee, to please let her know, she is happy to assist. After the first of the year, they will plan on doing the next round as long as the Board members still want to do so. Ms. Hoagland informed the Board that at this point, per the goal they had set themselves, they wanted to have a minimum of 8-10 grantees that have been contacted however, only 5 have been conducted. Ms. Golonka had two of them. Mr. Rudder excused Mr. Dailey from needing to write any at this time; Ms. Scanlon also offered to assist with contacting more grantees. Mr. Gonzalez stated he had not yet done his and would like his resent to him.

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Ms. Scanlon queried about the matters containing to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District. Mr. Steen pointed out there is a new member of Congress in the third district. He queried if Mr. Dorman takes the lead on introductions. Mr. Dorman stated that he stays away until they assume office.

### **Reports**

#### **Mr. Robinson**

Mr. Robinson said that there is nothing new to report on the Veterans Monument Veterans Trust Committee. Repairing the monument will be covered by state insurance. Regarding VCLC's they have hired a Nursing Home Administrator at Rifle. They are still shut down due to Covid. Testing now occurs every other day. A resident at Fitzsimmon's recently contracted Covid and some staff do from time to time. Funding disappeared that had come from veterans to increase the pay of their nurses at this time there is nothing to be done about it.

#### **Mr. Dorman**

Mr. Dorman said they are moving forward with a Restoration of Honor Bill similar to New York. This will restore service members being discharged as Honorary if they were discharged due to sexual orientation. The Board members made queries for further information. Mr. Dorman informed the Board that the Department is neutral on legislation for a new license plate for members of the US Space Force.

#### **Ms. Iglesias**

The Veterans Memorial Cemetery has begun the second phase of the construction process which has to do with the pond lining. The Veterans Day ceremony was cancelled due to Covid but there was still a flyover. Wreaths across America is December 18<sup>th</sup>. Mesa County is moving to red on the Covid Dial however, WROS and the Cemetery will still have staff come to work in person even though they will be closed to the public.

The Veterans Memorial Cemetery held no services this week however, they will begin next week with up to ten individuals in the committal shelter. They are still working on the backlog of internments from earlier this year. The WROS has new tenants, Shield Security and Western Colorado Area Healthcare. They also have the long awaited VA lease. The HUD-VASH program is moving in, starting with 12-14 employees, potentially the suicide coordinator and the VA enrollment specialist may move in as well. They are actively seeking new tenants and focusing on behavioral health which is a pressing concern in the area. The advisory board is working on creating a sponsorship program with local businesses to support the group programs at the WROS by making a yearly donation.

The new parking lot construction is advancing. All western county CVSOs took the post conference evaluation and Ms. Iglesias and Mr. Oney worked together to review the assessments individually with each CVSO. The weekly meetings with all western CVSOs are continuing and they see them as mini-trainings and an opportunity to network. Ms. Iglesias has been conducting on-site visits to each county. This has included meetings with each CVSO as well as their direct supervisor and county commissioners as appropriate to dialogue on the role of the CVSO. Mr. Oney and Ms. Iglesias have been putting together a draft agenda to host a regional training in March. She stated that this will likely be held over two half days to accommodate those that decide to attend in person. This agenda will be submitted to

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the Board for review. Ms. Scanlon verified that masks are required for the wreath laying ceremonies and internments. Ms. Iglesias replied in the affirmative.

### **Mr. Tremaine**

Mr. Tremaine stated that the YouTube channel is growing exponentially, they are receiving good customer feedback on what they would like to see. The National Office of VA Experience is on the second day of their event. On the first day of the event, the CO VSOs involved broke the VA record for satisfaction rating at 96.5%. The SVSOs have been contacting their regional VSOs and will be doing onsite visits once they are permitted. The assessment had a very high failure rate and the SVSOs and Mr. Tremaine reviewed the questions and worked to help the CVSOs get understand the answers they missed. They had a preceptor for the two new VSOs who abruptly resigned, since Mr. Tremaine is a certified VSO with the VA he went ahead and took over the preceptor responsibilities for the rest of their training year. Five of the seven service officers have medical reasons to not come into the office, there are only four people who ever go in. Mr. Steen stated he would be glad to help with the CCI connection. Mr. Tremaine thanked him for that assistance. Ms. Scanlon queried now that they have gone to regions, how do they handle women veterans issues. Mr. Tremaine stated that Mr. Darjeen is handling it but they also have a network of female CVSOs that will assist.

### **Ms. Hoagland**

Ms. Hoagland stated that she is beginning to have regional feedback meetings with grantees to find out what is working and what is not. As she can't get out right now to do site visits this is the next best thing. She received information that one of the grantees and his wife both got Covid, had been in the hospital. He was recently released and is on the road to recovery, unfortunately his wife is not expected to make it. She is surprised this is the first grantee as so many of them are high risk. Mr. Tremaine stated if they are a patient at the VA Eastern CO Healthcare System that an email was sent out yesterday inviting them to be part of the initial vaccination group with the Pfizer vaccine.

### **Board Member Remarks**

Ms. Golonka stated that the NG has gone fully virtual for their training groups. Ms. Golonka enjoyed her non-monitoring site visit. It gave her insight into what is happening in the area, she finds this information invaluable and would like to continue them. She gave commendation to Ms. Hoagland for all the work she does.

Ms. Scanlon agreed that the site visits are very informative. The CO Women Marine Association will be delivering breakfast and gifts for the Marines and Sailors at the reserve center at Buckley Air Force Base next month. She highlighted the increased level of homelessness when the moratorium on evictions due to rent non-payment is lifted at the end of December; she sees many veterans will be in need of assistance. She also volunteered to trail the vaccine.

Mr. Gonzalez stated that they did a Veterans Day proclamation on November 10<sup>th</sup>. For the first time however, all events for Veterans Day were cancelled. He did receive an invitation to a virtual event with the Air Force Academy, talking about how active duty military personnel can be involved with their local communities.

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Mr. Steen shared that the AL commander in Teller County will now also be serving as a county commissioner; we are however losing the district director for Senator Gardner who is the spouse of a veteran. Mr. Steen's last day in public office is January 12<sup>th</sup>. He is starting a consulting business and will continue to serve at the Governor's pleasure on this Board.

Mr. Dailey stated that the last month has been different in northern CO. He brought it a mobile medical unit after the fires to assist. There was extensive paperwork to get DC to approve travel of more than 50 miles. TO go from summer to winter with a fire, with snow. The current problem is downed power lines with snow. The houses that weren't burned are at risk of having their pipes burst once they get their power back on and get to start heating up. It has been difficult to get insurance claims processed. 65% of the homes up there are secondary homes. He needs to discuss what options he has with expanding his grant purview to assist. They held a Veterans Day ceremony at which Mr. Hopkins and a soldier whose last post was the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were the guest speakers. He sadly highlighted a veteran and his wife who took shelter in their basement during the fire and made a final call requesting a new flag as theirs had burned; unfortunately neither of them survived.

Mr. Rudder stated that they had a veterans day parade and while half the parade route was empty they didn't march for the guests, they marched for themselves and the flyover, done by three local pilots, was perfectly timed. He further stated he will be missing Bill Hammon who passed away Tuesday morning this week. Ms. Hammon will be needing lots of support now as she is now alone. As a VSO he is getting calls from Saguache and Alamosa counties as they are struggling to contact their CVSOs. He thanked everyone for their efforts for the Board.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

December – WebEx

January – WebEx

### **Adjournment**

Ms. Scanlon motioned to adjourn. Mr. Gonzalez seconded. Unanimous approval. Meeting adjourned at 12:45pm