

Board Minutes
June 12, 2014, 0900 Hrs.
VFW Post 2411, 318 West 3rd St., Las Animas, Colorado 81054

Robby Robinson, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 0900 hours. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was observed for our POW, MIA, troops in battle and all service members.

Introduction of Members and Visitors

Board Members Present:

William "Robby" Robinson, Chairman
Jay Bobick, Vice Chairman
Dana Niemela, Secretary
Kathleen Dunem, Member
Rene Simard, Member
Christopher Holden, Member – Not Present

DMVA Staff Present:

Mickey Hunt, DMVA, Deputy Director
Ray Z. Dissinger, VTF Administrator
William "Bill" Conroy, CDVA Director
Tamara Edmond, CDVA Admin. Asst.

Guests Present:

Clayton Chidester, VFW Post 2411, Commander
Bill Deatherage, VFW Post 2411, Vice Commander
Jeremy Miller, VSO Prowers County
Ed Casby, VFW Post 2411
Leanne Wheeler, Veterans Advocate, Wheeler Advisory Group

Robby Robinson: Thank you to Clayton and the VFW for your hospitality in hosting this Board meeting.

Approval of Minutes from May 8, 2014

Unanimously accepted with amendments

Board Member Comments

Jay Bobick: No comment.

Dana Niemela: I attended the National Coalition for the Homeless Conference in Washington, D.C. in May.

It is important for Colorado to know how it is doing on a national level. I am really proud of the work we are doing especially this CBVA visit to Las Animas, the visits to the Western Slope, and supporting veterans with the work that Colorado Serves is doing. On a national scale, we are ahead of the game. Thank you for making the efforts and for building bridges with the community.

Robby Robinson: Clayton Chidester went with us out to Fort Lyon and it was great to hear that there is veterans' community support for Fort Lyon. It is important that everybody in the community knows what everyone else can provide.

Jay and I attended the Bill Signing on Memorial Day in Aurora. One of the Bills we were most concerned with established legislation for the Veterans' Assistance Grant. The Board is charged with advising the Department with the administration of that grant. This is an important step forcing legislature to consider this grant as a line item in the budget annually.

The other thing I wanted to mention is Jay Bobick has been with the Board for the past 6 years. He has served this Board and the veterans of Colorado admirably. I will miss Jay and he has been an invaluable contributor to this Board and fierce advocate for veterans. We will miss his expertise and contributions.

With Jay leaving, that will leave two vacancies on the Board and I will let Mickey address that.

Mickey Hunt: I spoke with the Director of the State Boards. Robby was reappointed for the next term and he will serve through July 2015. There have been two other Board Members selected, one from Grand County and one from Colorado Springs. It will be great to have the diversity and the other side of experience on the Board.

Public Comments

Clayton Chidester: Thank you to everybody for allowing us to host this meeting. From this Post, as you go into considering the rules and regulations for the application for grant funds, I want to ask for the Board's consideration. Currently, your rules say there will be no money awarded for Color Guards. I ask the Board to reconsider this rule. We support the National Cemetery here at Fort Lyon, we do about 4-5 funerals a month. Our color guard uniforms are pieced together and we look like a raggedy group. Some members of the color guard do not have a full uniform and some don't have anything. We would like to have a better representation with the color guard. The purpose of the veterans' organizations is to support the veterans both living and dead. We need help in getting the uniforms.

Robby Robinson: We will have to look at the rules. If the rules are statutory, then there is an issue, but if the rules are determined by the Board, then it is something we will take a look at.

We had a conversation earlier about how confusing the grant application process has been. You applied for a Veterans' Assistance Grant and submitted it on a Veterans Trust Fund grant application form. This is something we need to fix because if the Veterans' Assistance Grant is not a fillable form, then we need to correct that problem. Also, we need to do something to distinguish between the two forms so it is not so confusing for applicants. It does not help you until next year, but we are aware that it needs to be corrected.

Dana Niemela: Clayton, following up on the question you had about access to VA healthcare yesterday, did you say the doctor is in Colorado Springs and the nearest CBOC is in La Junta? Could you mind discussing that a little bit for clarity and to illuminate for those who were not in our conversation yesterday?

Clayton Chidester: The services available to veterans here is the TV doctor. When a veteran goes to the clinic, they talk to the TV doctor and then the TV doctor gives a diagnosis. I think when you go to see the doctor, you should be able to talk in person, to touch and feel to determine an issue. There are two nurses that are at the clinic. I can't give a figure for how many veterans they see. I did have a conversation with the doctor and she commented that she had about 1,000 patients. The doctors they have are over-extended.

It may just be this location, but having a doctor in person would be much more beneficial. I would like to see a doctor at the Fort Lyon facility who sees the patients there and who would also be available for veterans in the area.

Robby Robinson: Conceivably, I suppose you could have a doctor out there, I don't know. I don't think the population at Fort Lyon alone would ever justify a doctor out here.

Clayton Chidester: With whatever influence you have, if you could pass that on to the Governor or to the ones who make that decision, I would appreciate it.

General Discussion about healthcare available through the VA in Southeastern Colorado.

Jay Bobick: Clayton, I want to thank you for an excellent trip and for hosting the Board. It has been very informative and great seeing the positive support for Fort Lyon. I appreciate the opportunity to see how you are supporting veterans and the VFW supporting the community and Fort Lyon. It is not a need, it is a requirement. So, I really appreciate what you have done here in Las Animas and at Fort Lyon.

Ray Z. Dissinger: Based on a quick perusal of the laws, the Board decides what program is operated by non-profit organizations and if they meet the criteria decided by the Board and selected by the Board, then, the Board awards it and they set up the criteria for selecting appropriate veterans' programs. Therefore, the Board has the authority to grant assistance to veterans.

Robby Robinson: That is something we will have to put to discussion at the next Board meeting. Are there any other guest comments?

Jeremy Miller: I am Jeremy Miller the Veterans' Service Officer for Prowers County. I also run the DAV van program to help transport veterans to medical appointments and medical facilities.

I want to thank the Board for the recent grant approval. We are in need and this will help the veterans in Southeastern Colorado. We are the furthest out van that we know of. We drive the most miles through open country. We pick up veterans in Rocky Ford and transport them to Denver. What I requested this last time on the grant application was for money for cell phones to be used in the vans for the drivers. We were denied the money for cell phones for the drivers. We are asking that money be made available for cell phones for drivers. We want you to realize that this would be used for emergency situations and currently the drivers are using their personal cell phones. This is a long drive over open country and the veterans are ill when traveling.

I request that the Board would consider this to make money available for cell phones when looking at the money for next year's operations. I am not giving a veteran a cell phone directly but for help during transportation. With the clinic opening in Golden, a lot of the van drivers are not looking to go the extra miles to Boulder. They are driving over 12 hours a day and this puts them at risk for safety. Is there any possibility of transportation from the Denver VA Hospital to the Golden Clinic?

Bill Conroy: The Golden Clinic is primarily for Compensation and Pension examinations (C&P exams). It will be further to the new VA Hospital when it is completed. But, Jeremy, the Golden Clinic is not really that much further than the VA Hospital.

General Discussion of mileage to the Golden Clinic and transportation for veterans.

Jeremy Miller: I have not been to the one in Golden, so I am not familiar with that one. I just hear what the drivers are saying they need to do. It may be that my drivers need more information, but it is also something to consider.

Dana Niemela: Are they going to the VA Medical Center and to Golden for the C&P exams?

Jeremy Miller: They have to go to Golden for the C&P exams.

Robby Robinson: Are there any other public comments?

Leanne Wheeler: Thank you, Clayton, for hosting the event. My heart is full that the Board elected to meet out here and visit Fort Lyon. It has been great to see you all. It would be my hope that you make this part of your annual meeting schedule to come and see what is going on with veterans in the Southeastern corner of Colorado. It is also my hope that we become partners on location to advocate for veterans and meet statewide objectives. Thank you, Robby and the Board for all you are doing.

Dana Niemela: To the other gentlemen, is there anything you think we should know as people who have some influence in the veterans' community on behalf of veterans here?

Ed Casby: My concern is primarily with the VA. When I first went to get healthcare, they asked me, "Why did I wait so long to get care?" I told them I put it off through the years. They asked, "Why didn't you come in directly after your service?" I told them it is bothering me now. The VA needs to know that older veterans are as important as new veterans.

Robby Robinson: One thing they are doing now with active duty is they are getting the service members to go to the VA straight after their service and not to wait until it does bother them. It is so hard to get the documentation after waiting years to go in to be seen.

Reports

DMVA

Mickey Hunt: I will be touring on the 2nd of July with Project Sanctuary Retreat up at Granby as part of Colorado Serves. The 8th of July, I will be in Pueblo doing a veterans' town meeting. On July 9th I will be in Alamosa as a recap with providers reaching out to do a town meeting. As part of Colorado Serves, I am trying to go two times a month to rural areas to identify needs and so we can advocate for the veterans in rural communities. I did one at Fort Lyon about 3 months ago. I have been out to Durango, Montrose, Grand Junction, and Windsor reaching out to veterans to find out what the needs are so we can advocate for you. I am doing what the VA calls Patient Centered Community Care (PC3) meetings to get providers to sign up. It is fee-based and pays 10% less than Medicare. We are advocating, the Department, the Board, to help meet the needs of veterans. I have a meeting with Lynette Roffd to make steps to advocating and I continue to have interaction with the VA. We are making small steps and our voice is being heard. If they don't reply to you at least they are listening to me and I will take your message to them. I am facilitating veterans meetings and I could do a town meeting here if you need our help but you need to ask me to come. Fort Lyon could be a place to do it or we could have a meeting here at the VFW Post, but you need to let me know that you want a meeting. If you need our help and you want an advocate, then I will be willing to show up and help.

Veterans Trust Fund

Ray Z. Dissinger: 13/14 right now we are executing but we have over \$100,000 left in the fund. There are a lot of reasons for that because we have become more accountable and the advances have to be taken care of by the 15th of June. The contract is very specific. A lot of organizations would wait to spend their money until right at the end, and we can't do that anymore. Next year the emphasis will be on making sure applicants know they have to spend the money by a drop dead date. Some organizations applied for both grants and the Department is very strict on that so there is no overlap. A couple of organizations have had a

turn-over in the administrator (due to illness or passing away) so this has created a delay in spending all the money.

For 14/15 there was the one organization held in abeyance. I sent it out to everybody and we will have an update today.

Robby Robinson: The grant applicant in question was the transportation compensation for the American Legion Post #29 in Aurora. There was a question about the amount of money we wanted to spend for transportation because of the public transportation available in the Aurora area.

Ray Z. Dissinger: They responded to the question and they said they believe the public transportation is not adequate because they were transporting 4-5 veterans to multiple employers per day for interviews. They said they were able to place 64% of the veterans they work with in their community with jobs so far.

Dana Niemela: They said there was 64%.

Ray Z. Dissinger: Are we going to just fund part of the \$10,080 for mileage as well as gas cards?

Jay Bobick: I personally feel \$10,000 is a bit excessive. What that amount really should be, I really don't know but the expressed requirement is for veterans. I am concerned with the amount.

Robby Robinson: Does someone want to move on that so we can discuss it? The proper motion would be whether to fund the \$10,080 or not or come up with another amount.

Ray Z. Dissinger: Last year, we provided them with \$6,000.00.

Discussion of last year's grant amount and was it expended.

Jay Bobick: I move to fund at last year's level rather than the requested amount.

Kathleen Dunemn: I second that motion.

Robby Robinson: The motion is to fund the grant at last year's level of \$6,000. Are there any questions about that or any further discussion?

Dana Niemela: My question as I read this is from the back-up narrative and the justification. It indicates that the American Legion in Aurora is running an extensive employment program. They indicate that they get referrals and community recommendations from the Community Resource and Referral Center and by networking. They mentioned four general pick-up points for transportation to the VA Hospital. I reached out because I wanted to make sure that referring organizations and participating organizations were aware of this valuable service and the Community Resource and Referral Center and they said they did not make referrals to the

American Legion Post in Aurora. I talked to one of the work force center reps and he said he was the vet rep and he was unaware of this service. My comment is that if they are partnering with these organizations, I don't know that there is enough communication going on. The partner organizations should be made better aware of the partnership before they are listed in an application for a grant. I run an employment program in Denver, and I was not aware of these services. I think there needs to be better collaboration. I will be happy to talk to the American Legion Commander. At this moment, I am okay with funding at last year's amount.

Rene Simard: Is there any indication of turning people away or of people not being able to get to job interviews based on the information provided?

Dana Niemela: Ray? What is the breakdown of the actual budget being used for drivers?

Ray Z. Dissinger: \$8,280 was designated to be used for drivers, mileage, \$1,800 for clothing for interviews and miscellaneous (i.e., initial union dues.)

Dana Niemela: I would rather see it go for bus tokens for public transportation, clothing for interviews and union dues rather than for funding a transportation program. Also, what is the follow-up, if they can't get there for an interview, then how are they going to get there for work?

General discussion of transportation needs and employment services for Aurora.

Ray Z. Dissinger: I have a suggestion for the Board to move on the grant and then I will get an email out to the grantee so the Board could talk to the organization about the specific concerns about the transportation and how the money will be spent.

Kathleen Dunemn: Linkage would be really good so we know the specific outcomes and what metrics they are using.

Robby Robinson: The motion is for the total grant to be \$6,000 granted at last year's level. All in favor say aye. Any opposed? So that vote was unanimous.

Veterans Assistance Grant

Bill Conroy: We have been made aware that the Veterans Trust Fund (VTF) grant application and the Veterans Assistance Grant (VAG) are not fillable and need to be corrected. There has also been trouble with identifying which form is which. The applications are not easy to find. Many people still call the VAG the Tobacco Grant. We will clean up the website and take a look at the grants to make them fillable and easier to identify.

Mr. Les Kennedy is going to formally retire at the end of the month. We have a new hire to replace Les, Gail Hoagland and we hope to have her start on June 18th, next Thursday.

General discussion of the roll-over capability of the Veterans' Trust Fund and Veterans Assistance Grant. (See Colorado HB Bill 14-1205.)

Mickey Hunt: We were fortunate last year that we spent about 97% of the fund. This year one grantee struggled so it has been a learning curve for him. Those that execute by year end year after year, show that there is a real need.

Robby Robinson: How much money was available in the VTF this year?

Ray Z. Dissinger: \$843,938.

Robby Robinson: And we had \$ 1.6 million in request, so we had requests for two times that amount in money available. Bill, how many grants were requested for the VAG?

Bill Conroy: 29 grants and over a million available. I also wanted to say thank you to Clayton Chidester for hosting this body and for a great tour yesterday. I think all of us enjoyed it and learned a lot. This has been an excellent trip and a great opportunity to hear what is going on with the veterans. Thank you.

State Veterans Community Living Centers (SVCLC) Update

Jay Bobick: Things are going fine at the State Veterans Community Living Centers.

General discussion about Fitzsimmons and moving forward.

Dana Niemela: I have noticed that there have been a lot of openings at the Rifle Community Living Center; is that because of turnover or new FTE's?

Jay Bobick: There are new opportunities out there but there is also a turnover. A lot of it is due to the location. There are a lot of families not willing to make the drive to Rifle. The families that put them in there do not want to make the drive. It is an issue to keep the numbers up because of the location. We are making the best of the situation. The Eden Alternative is to make it more homelike. They ask the new veterans coming in about their lifestyle, if they like to sleep late, what their normal routine is like, and the emphasis is on how they live their lives.

General discussion about Eden Alternative certification and how Colorado State Veterans Community Living Centers have earned their certifications.

Discussion/Action

Audit Results

Robby Robinson: On June 3rd, the State Legislature Audit Committee reviewed the results of the performance audit. Those of us from the Board that were there were Mickey Hunt, Ray Z. Dissinger, Bill Conroy, and me. I thought it would be useful for those of you not there to hear the findings, and the recommendations for the Department and the Board. Senator King, Senator Balmer, Senator Guzman, Representative Sonnenberg, and Representative Ryden were in attendance. It went according to expectations and I would like to hear what the other members thought of the audit review.

Ray Z. Dissinger: I believe that the Legislative Audit Committee when they were done, they realize that the Department understands that there are things that need improvement. The Department provides a valuable service to veterans. I would like to thank the service organizations for their hard work in getting the grant money to the veterans.

Bill Conroy: I think where it started poorly it ended very well.

Mickey Hunt: The comments at the end were all positive. We will not use the Veterans' Trust Fund money for outside agencies. One comment applauded the volunteer organization that can operate and manage the fund so well. We are putting more money out to veterans. We want to push all money out to the veterans in need. Most of the audit recommendations have already been addressed and have been fixed. This is a volunteer organizations and the grant gives money to volunteer organizations. We spent 2-3% on administrative costs and there was a comment that applauded any organization that spent that kind of money and operated on 2.5% administrative costs and helped the number of veterans we help. We take hits occasionally but we are putting more money out to veterans' and we are going to continue to do that.

Robby Robinson: The committee now understands that the volunteers start at the Board level and it goes down to the service organizations applying for the grants. They understand now that there are volunteers all the way down to the local level. The other issue this audit brought up is that the priorities are not necessarily clearly established for the grant. We recognize that we list priorities but then we don't exclude anything or say this is the order of priorities. Every year we will make that more transparent. I told them and I think it struck a note particularly with those rural areas, these priorities reflect the view of Denver differently than the view of Durango. The first thing on that list is veterans' homelessness, which may not be the number one issue in Durango. It is in Denver. So why would we, a board sitting in Denver, have the right to cram down your throat a list of priorities? We don't. This program was created by VFW's and American Legions and then they got the funds allocated out of the Tobacco Fund money. In other words, it is a local effort so plug it back into the local community. I think Denver should not establish what the whole state should do with the money. We should look at what the people say who are coming for grants and they say this is what I can do with the money.

General discussion of the result presented to the Legislative Audit Committee.

Draft 06-25-14

Bylaws Revisions

Robby Robinson: You all have a copy of the proposed revisions to the Bylaws, I sent you an electronic version before the last Board meeting and you have a paper copy today. We need to determine how or if we want amend the Bylaws.

Jay Bobick: I move that the revised Bylaws be accepted as written.

Dana Niemela: I second that motion.

Robby Robinson: I will go through each of the changes just to make sure they are accepted. Each Board member is entitled to one vote. Currently voting by proxy is not allowed. Is there any discussion about the voting by proxy not being allowed? Is that what we really want?

Jay Bobick: It has always been that way.

Robby Robinson: Can we have someone vote by email or by phone if not by proxy?

Jay Bobick: I am opposed to that.

General discussion of proxy vote.

Robby Robinson: Next, what about member approval? The Board is created in statute and statute does not say we can have emeritus members. Also, on conflict of interest, we have to publically disclose any memberships. If you are a member it is not a conflict of interest unless you have a position of leadership. Is there any discussion on that? Okay, I also put in that when we vote and decisions are not unanimous then the votes need to be publically recorded in the minutes. We now have three standing committees since we added a committee. We also need to look at when we can make amendments to the bylaws.

General discussion of the amendments to bylaws.

Robby Robinson: There is a motion on the table to approve the amendments to the Bylaws. It sounds like we are ready to vote on the amendments. All in favor? Is there any opposed? Okay, that was **unanimous**.

Future Meetings

10 July 2014, 9:30am, American Legion HQ, 7465 E. 1st Avenue, #D, Denver, CO 80230

There is no scheduled meeting for August 2014.

11 September 2014, 9:30am, American Legion HQ, 7465 E. 1st Avenue, #D, Denver, CO 80230

Draft 06-25-14

Old Business

Mickey Hunt: The Director of Boards and Commissions wants to set up training for the Board Members in July.

Robby Robinson: July would be a good time to do that training.

Mickey Hunt: The General's visit the State Veterans Community Living Centers is tentatively scheduled for 5-6th September. If any of the Board Members would like to go on that trip, please let me know.

Jay Bobick: As chairman, I would like to go.

Discussion of SVCLC visit.

Mickey Hunt: We will follow up on Audit concerns and there will be a review in 6 months to make sure recommendations are being followed.

Discussion of integrating the Audit Committee recommendations.

Robby Robinson: Motion to adjourn.

Dana Niemela: I second that motion.

Robby Robinson: All in favor say aye. Any opposed? That makes it **unanimous**.

The Board adjourned at 10:26am.