

**Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs Minutes
Friday, February 7, 2020
Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center
530 Communication Circle
Colorado Springs, CO 80905**

Members and Guests

Members Present:

Pat Hammon (via Phone), Vice Chair
Norm Steen, Member
Longinos Gonzalez, Member
Duane Dailey, Member
Hollie Caldwell, Member
Sheila Scanlon, Secretary
Jack Rudder, Chair

DMVA Staff Present:

Gail Hoagland, Grant Administrator
Greg Dorman, DMVA Resource Director and Legislative Liaison
Joanne Iglesias, Director CDVA West, via phone

Guests Present:

William Robinson, CO Board of Commissioners
Bob McGlaughlin, Mt. Carmel Director
Aaron Tremain, Mt Carmel
Dan Williams, American Legion Post 1980, VFW 6051, Teller County
Post 19 Commander
Robert Lourt, COO at Mt. Carmel
Ric Morgan, Elbert County VSO
Marshall Bosworth, El Paso County VSO
Tom Weyer, AL Post 9-11

Opening

Mr. Rudder called the meeting to order at 0915 hours. Proceedings began with a recitation of the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence for POWs, MIAs, and troops overseas. Mr. Rudder invited introductions from Board members, staff, and guests.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Dailey motioned to approve the minutes as presented, Mr. Steen seconded. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

Aaron Tremaine Presentation

Mr. Tremaine presented a short brief on constructing a new Veterans living center in the Pikes Peak region. A facility for Long Term Care, In Home Care, Assisted, and Memory Care is what is being considered. He would like to gain the Board's support for a new VCLC in the area. It should be something similar to Fitzsimmons in Aurora. The approximate cost for the proposed VCLC is: \$300/sqft, totaling \$37-42 million. It is anticipated the construction will take five years to complete. The approximate cost provided does not include the land. The goal is to develop a home with public/private partnership that will provide long-term care for veterans and their gold-star family members. It gets the state out of the nursing home business. VCLCs are enterprise funded and the state would not be part of the hiring/firing at the new facility.

Minnesota, Oregon and Michigan are all examples of good VCLCs. There is a federal code specifically detailing financing these veterans homes. The states' cost for this VCLC will be 35% of the total cost, the VA will be 65% of the total amount *plus* they will take on the burden of the price increase (est. 12-15%) over time. This home would be in the second largest concentration of veterans in the nation.

The Colorado veteran population is estimated at 430,000 – 480,000. Colorado Springs is rated number one for all military assignments. The projected increase over next X years is a 17% increase in veterans who will need VCLC care. Most veterans are located – or projected to be located - in the I-25 corridor within that time period. There has been a review of the 5 existing VCLCs in the state, the most recent was built in 2002. The labor forces don't always exist in an area to support the VCLC in the area. Greeley and Ft Collins have another large concentration of veterans and should be kept in mind as a future location for another VCLC.

Mr. Tremaine invited the board members to participate in a working group regarding the proposed VCLC. He identified the next steps as formalizing the working group and identifying land where the facility can be built. Meetings with developers and architects have already begun. The VA needs to know what land will be built on in order to agree to fund it.

Board members made inquiries.

Mr. Bosworth introduced Bill 1220, the 'Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act'. It requires DHS to conduct a statewide needs survey. The state demographer had very little Veterans information. There is no money needed for this, and accordingly, there is no fiscal note attached to the bill. The funding will come from the general fund - the department is already pursuing this. The Board of commissioners is supposed to participate in any RFP or any contractual stuff and they haven't been doing that.

CDHS sold land to the Ft Logan cemetery. That money was earmarked for projects like these. Also \$25 million in central fund. The DHS thinks they need to spend that money down. That money can only be used for operation, construction and improvements at CLC's.

The Board made inquiries for clarification.

There is a need to ascertain that they are using the right business models for the VCLCs. MI, OR and MN need to be more fully examined as to how and why they are succeeding.

Ms. Scanlon put a question on the table to have Michelle Barnes or someone from her staff to come and talk to the BVA at the next meeting. Ms. Hammon concurred.

Ms. Hoagland recommended extending the time of the March meeting in order to allow for two guest speakers and the grant training. Mr. Rudder inquired how much time each guest speaker requires. The Board unanimously determined to add one and a half hours to their normal meeting time in order to allow for all necessary items on the schedule.

Guest Comments -

Mr. Williams from Teller County spoke about a challenge they have been having. Two fires have destroyed two veteran's homes in the last few weeks. 1 out of 4 men in Teller County is a veteran, one out of ten women is a veteran, many don't want to be found. The challenge with the VTF, is that the turnaround is too long for veterans in crisis. Having to return \$5k of grant monies last year was not helpful. He is imploring the board to pay attention to these real needs as they consider their funding disbursement. This organization took a vote as to whether to stay with the VTF or not due to the issues they have been having with it. They are staying but did want to bring their concerns to the board.

Mr. Williams American Legion Post 1980 wants to be able to use funds for paying for expenses incurred in the previous years. They are requesting to see all laws pertaining to the disbursement of the VTF funds; specifically the regulation that prevents using funds for capital improvement of house. A vet wanted to make a wheel-chair ramp for their house which they couldn't do because that was a capital improvement. At the end of quarter, they have to return any unused funds and then asked for an advance on the next quarter, that is a duplication of effort. They would also like the funds to be able to be used for cremation efforts – this was requested by a family of a vet and was denied because it was a ceremonial expense – cremations are not ceremonies. Additionally, they would like to be able to use VTF funds on a down payment for a house or a car and to be able to get approval/disapproval for every expense prior to making that expense – last year they lost \$6k on non-reimbursable expenses. Mr. Williams understands that this involves changing laws. He would like to thank Ms. Hoagland for all of her assistance. Board members engaged in brief discussion on this topic. Mr. Rudder assured Mr. Williams that he had been heard. Mr. Dorman requested to be able to staff out this issue before the Board addresses it. The Board members thanked the guests for their professional demeanor and their presentation. Ms. Hammon shared that the VA will assist with cremation costs if the veteran had a service – connected death and will also assist with installation of a wheel-chair ramp. Mr. Dailey stressed the timing difficulties when trying to assist veterans in urgent need.

Mr. Rudder recognized the guest, Mr. Morgan of Elbert County. Mr. Morgan is the sole County Veteran Service Officer in a county with 22,050 veterans and 400 active cases. 9 years ago they only had 900 veterans total. VA expenditures during that time have increased from 900,000 to 11.3 million dollars in Elbert County alone. This means that veteran numbers tripled while VA money multiplied by eight during the same nine year window. Mr. Morgan used to be a volunteer. Since 2018 he has been receiving g \$1250/month towards expenditures. He is the only VSO there, and he works the hours that are needed. His county is sandwiched between the Greater Denver area and Colorado Springs. He expects to see continued increase in number of vets, and is grateful for the money that is coming in now. Mr. Rudder recognized him as the greatest silent asset of CVSOs and stated that Mr. Morgan is the most under-utilized VSO in the state. Mr. Morgan used his GI Bill to go to law school. He set up a group of 7 attorneys to provide free legal clinics across the state of CO, they specifically invite veterans to come in. He built the checkerboard.co website which is the mother lode of free legal advice for the state of CO. It covers law in 60 different areas. The website is all privately funded. They received a generous grant from the Free Masons in Denver. Over the years they have seen approximately 7500 individuals with various issues across the state. The Board thanked him for his service.

Mr. Bosworth spoke of the bill at federal level – CVSO Act – this is for federal grant funding for county veteran service offices. He is requesting a letter of support from the board. The CVSO Act is a 15 million dollar grant over 5 years that CVSO offices can use and can be used to hire staff and pay staff to do VSO work. Counties of all sizes need more funding to meet their needs. It can also assist with program funding to meet veteran’s needs. This bill has received support from many veterans’ related groups. HR 5516, S 3002 are identical bills with two different titles. Commissioners Steen and Gonzalez will both be in D.C. in a few weeks to support in their roles as county commissioners. Mr. Dorman okayed the Boards vote however he requested they wait to send a letter. Motioned by Mr. Steen, seconded by Longinos Gonzalez. It received unanimous approval by the Board.

10 minute break

Ms. Hoagland reported that it is now halfway through the grant year and she has accordingly reached out to those grantees that are slow spending and some have sent some of their funding back, which she says is better for veterans in the long run. She has other grantees who need funding increased because they have no money left. She provided this information to the board in a handout broken down by each grantee. This is being done as a modification to the existing grant. Those who have spent 65% of their award or more, which are in compliance and have a need to access additional funds are eligible for increases. She requests the board votes on each increase in award individually after the Board members make any inquiries they have. The Board members made inquiries for clarification.

Mr. Dailey moved to approve the \$8k raise in grant money to AL 9 in La Junta. Second by Mr. Gonzalez. The Board approved the funding increase unanimously.

Mr. Dailey motioned to approve VFW Post 12063 Westcliff for \$5k, Mr. Steen seconded the motion. The Board approved the funding increase unanimously.

Mr. Dailey motioned to approve VFW 5231 Cortez for \$18k. Brief discussion ensued. Ms. Caldwell seconded. The Board approved the funding increase unanimously.

Mr. Dailey motioned for AL post 22 North Glen for \$9k, Mr. Gonzalez seconded. The Board approved the funding increase unanimously.

Bylaws

Ms. Hammon says the bylaws subcommittee is behind, she will be sending things to Mr. Dorman so it can be reviewed by attorneys. This will be postponed until the next meeting.

CCI Letter

Mr. Rudder signed, it went to Ms. Fraser to give to Mr. Tremaine. Neither Ms. Fraser nor Mr. Tremaine are present to make inquiries of.

Task Force

Ms. Hammon reported the task force met again and has produced a revised list of their thoughts for the purpose of the group. They would like to suggest forwarding this list to the TAG. She clarified that TAG isn't just after the number of vets in the state but also the numbers of the subset groups of veterans in the state. Mr. Robinson pointed out that finding the subset groups of vets will be difficult if not impossible, that even the VA has to guestimate their numbers. Further discussion ensued. Ms. Hammon asked the board to approve the white paper put forth by the subcommittee. Seconded by (no audible second). Unanimous votes.

Upcoming meetings

March - RMVAMC – Ms. Hammon will call them to extend the amount of time the room is reserved.

April – Aurora Chamber of Commerce for Grant Decisions

May – Cortez, Ms. Hoagland is arranging

June – Commissioners Hearing Room, Steamboat Springs, Routt County.

August – Burlington, Kit Carson County

New Business

Ms. Scanlon – requests to hold her new business until after Mr. Dorman speaks

Reports

Mr. Dorman reported that the Joint Budget Committee analyst pitched that the COLA provider rate goes to the CVSOs as well. Right now that amount is 30k for the entire state. DMVA will not push back against that initiative. The Governor's office may direct them otherwise.

Brey Hopkins is the new deputy executive director. He is doing a system-wide assessment. The Director of Purchasing and Contracting announced her retirement approximately one week ago.

Ms. Scanlon inquired as to Mr. Rich Tremaine's email proposal regarding the change of function of DMVA East. Mr. Dorman said that Mr. Tremaine's "intent was good, his wording was horrible" in regards to the letter he sent to the County Commissioners. He reinforced that the state and counties are in a partnership. Mr. Dailey wanted to verify that he was instructed by DVA West to ~~then~~ not present this letter to the county commissioners. Mr. Dailey had already presented it. Mr. Dorman agreed with DVA West that they should not present it to their commissioners.

Mr. Steen inquired about other bills that relate to veterans that are being considered in the state government. Mr. Dorman says the DMVA is not taking a stance on other current bills in the state government related to veterans. Mr. Robinson assisted in providing updates on bills currently under consideration.

Ms. Iglesias reported there is a vacancy open for a property administrator that has not been posted yet. The monies granted by the BVA earlier this year for special projects at DVA West are being put to use as those projects are moving forward and should start next week. The concrete project started in the fall, it was shut down for the winter and will shortly resume. Western Region VSOs are attending the webinars that they are holding. Shawn Martinez, Mesa County VSO, resigned two weeks ago and the county has posted the position for hire. Ms. Iglesias will be attending the National Association of State Directors Conference at the end of the month. She will be in D.C. Feb 22 – 27th.

Ms. Hoagland shared that DVA East is completing interviews for the two new State Veteran Service Officer positions. The board inquired as to who is current staff at DVA East.

Regarding grants, Ms. Hoagland shared that they are getting some applications in from very rural areas that had not previously submitted applications. She is anticipating many veterans' assistance grant applications this year. The Board members made inquiries regarding grants.

Mr. Dailey reported that in the state of Colorado there are 150 active American Legion posts, 93 active VFW posts, and 14 active DAV posts. Mr. Steen asked if the VTF is meeting its legislative purpose when there are 300 possible VTF recipients and yet they only handed out 20 grants last year. Ms. Hammon commended Ms. Fraser for acquiring contacts at veterans' organizations that the board can reach out to; she also voiced how thrilled she is that the county veteran service officers attended the meeting.

Board member comments

Ms. Hammon appreciated getting to go back to the Capitol and being confirmed by the Governor for another term on the Board. There have been many funerals recently in Eagle County. She thanked Mt. Carmel for putting together the conference call allowing her to attend remotely.

Ms. Scanlon attended the January UVC meeting, they are requesting the CCI letter. She inquired if the other board members will be attending a dinner that is coming up. The security level at BAFB has been increased.

Ms. Caldwell is monitoring the new program with Centura regarding tracking if patients are veterans. They are making progress on providing appropriate care for veterans.

Mr. Steen is focusing working on suicide and homelessness with veterans. Last month El Paso County hosted a suicide prevention workshop. In El Paso the suicide rate is 32 per 100,000, in Colorado 20 per 100,000 the national average is 14 per 100,000. He would like to board to discuss how they can get engaged more aggressively in suicide prevention. Regarding homelessness, the Pikes Peak Council of El Pomar Foundation has taken it on as their number one issue. They are forming a task force to address homelessness in a unified manner, bringing together 12 different groups that have been working individually to tackle the problem in the area. There is a veteran's exemption for state taxes.

Mr. Gonzalez met recently with his County VSO regarding the VTF. He was notified about a veteran who passed recently and they got out the news to local groups about the funeral in hopes that people will attend despite the weather. He was unable to attend the funeral himself because the funeral was this morning at 9am.

Mr. Dailey thanked everyone for attending despite the weather. Next week the Warrior Bonfire is going to be in Grand County.

Mr. Rudder reported that three WWII veterans died last week. After his Christmas vacation he had two inches of standing water in his office at Homelake. He is now trying to get caught up.

Adjournment

Mr. Dailey motioned to adjourn.

Mr. Rudder seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously voted to adjourn.