**Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs**

August 5, 2022

Routt County Administrative Building

522 Lincoln Avenue

Steamboat Springs, CO 80487

**Opening**

Ms. Hammon called the meeting to order at 0900. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was held for POWs, MIAs, those deployed, their families, and all those killed in the line of duty.

**Members Present**

Pat Hammon, Chair

Sheila Scanlon, Vice-Chair

Lacey Golonka, Secretary

Longinos Gonzalez, Member

Sean Maday, Member

Jasmine Motupalli, Member

Raymond Taylor, Member

**Staff Present**

David Callahan, CDVA Director

Deborah Salerno, DMVA Strategic Planner

Parker White, DMVA Legislative Liaison

Angela Ingalls, VMC Director

Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants Administrator

James Poteet, CDVA Appeals Specialist

Debra Antista-Bianchi, State Veterans Service Officer – Northeast

Drew Stem, State Veterans Service Officer – Front Range

Dan Coulter, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Beth Maxwell, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Carissa Snyder, CDVA Program Assistant

**Guests Present**

Dana Berry, Office of the State Auditor

Monica Bowers, Office of the State Auditor

Marshall Bosworth, El Paso County Veterans Service Officer

Michele Colin, Office of the State Auditor

Mary Cornum, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

Don **Fontainebleau**, American Legion Post 44, VFW Post 4264

Nina Frant, Office of the State Auditor

Adrien Kordas, Office of the State Auditor

Josh Medina, Arapahoe County Veterans Service Officer

Elizabeth Mullins, Division of Veterans Community Living Centers

Richard Nagley, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

Jeff Steck, American Legion Post 44, VFW Post 4264

**Approval of Minutes**

Ms. Hammon asked if there were any corrections to the draft of the minutes. Mr. Maday provided a correction on page four. Ms. Scanlon moved that the minutes be approved as corrected. Ms. Golonka seconded. The motion carried.

**Public Comment**

Mr. Steck said that he has observed that veterans services organizations do not coordinate with one another or with local veterans and he hopes that can be improved. Ms. Hammon agreed and said that Board has just resumed in-person meetings, and they will work on communicating with local veteran communities. Ms. Hammon and Mr. Taylor said that local coalitions can also be helpful. Mr. Steck said that one is currently being formed in Routt County.

Mr. Fontainebleau said that local veterans organizations have a story recording program that capture the first-person accounts of local veterans. Ms. Hammon encouraged them to forward those to the Library of Congress and/or to local media.

**Old Business** – none

**New Business**

Ms. Mullins reported on behalf of the Veterans Community Living Centers. She thanked the Board for the VTF grant awards made to community living centers. Staffing difficulties continue, including some large vacancies. The administrator at Fitzsimons has relocated to another state and an interim is in place. That facility also has a vacancy in the Director of Nursing and is recruiting nationwide. Outbreaks continue in all five locations. Employees who do not meet CDC guidelines for vaccination for public health workers are required to test daily. The Division is continuing to consider the need for community-based services. Ms. Hammon asked if the CLCs are taking admissions and Ms. Mullins said that they are, as possible according to staffing requirements. Mr. Maday asked if visitors are now permitted and whether volunteer organizations are permitted to assist with functions. Ms. Mullins said that visitors are allowed and that some local organizations and hospitals do assist. Internal cross-training has also been helpful.

Mr. Maday said he has been considering how veterans become aware of available services. He has observed the use of trifolds and billboards in other states and he shared a photo of a billboard seen recently in Minnesota. He and Ms. Hammon acknowledged that Colorado has different laws in regard to billboards, but the image helps to underscore how essential visibility is in the marketing of services. Mr. Callahan said it would be possible to use VTF funding for this type of campaign, and that a prospective increase in spending authority could be helpful. Ms. Hammon asked Mr. Maday if he would head a committee to consider marketing strategies. Ms. Golonka offered to assist.

Mr. Callahan presented the current draft of the Division’s training plan for new county veterans service officers. The plan has been developed by the state veterans service officers and features a curriculum that follow a 30-60-90 day timeline. The curriculum and a slideshow presentation were shared among the Board members. Recommendations from the Board were to be used to update the plan and curriculum, with the revised version to be presented to the Board upon completion. Recommendations provided at the meeting were: updated grant allocations for FY22/23, add VA medical contact information including CBOCs, add links to VSO Reference Book and Veterans Handbook, add how to request a DD214 and how to verify one, add a link to the wartime era chart, incorporate a shadowing plan, and to expand on C&P expectations and processes.

Mr. Callahan said that DMVA and DVA are seeking an increase in spending authority for the Veterans Trust Fund and the Veterans Assistance Grant to maximize the use of available funds. Both accounts have funds that are currently not utilized. Ms. Golonka asked if additional funds are available, whether grant awards could be made in smaller amounts outside of the current fiscal year cycle. Mr. Callahan said that Ms. Stamm could address the question. Ms. Hammon said that would probably require additional staff. Mr. Callahan said that DMVA is also pursuing a statutory change to allow each grant to spend up to 10% on administration rather than the current five percent. Ms. Scanlon said that the Board should have been consulted in advance on both topics. Ms. Hammon asked if a letter of opinion on either topic would be helpful at this point. Ms. Hammon invited a motion regarding a letter of support to be sent to OSPB on behalf of a statutory change to increase the allocation from the VTF for administrative costs from five percent to 10 percent. Mr. Taylor so moved. Ms. Scanlon seconded. The motion carried. Ms. Scanlon suggested that the letter to OSPB also express support of the increased spending authority. Mr. Taylor moved that both items be included in one letter. Ms. Scanlon seconded. The motion carried.

Ms. Stamm said that she support the requests for increased funds to support the VTF Grant program. She said she would like the Board to consider allowing limited administrative costs to be allowable for recipients of the VTF Grant. She is in conversations the state Grant Management Office on suggested language if this is something the Board would like to pursue. She said that some of last year’s grantees did not apply for the current cycle due to the burden presented by administrative expenses. Regarding gift cards, she has receive requests to raise the limit per card from $50 to $100 due to inflation and fuel costs. They are vested in keeping the gas cards available as they are often the only available method to assist veterans with food and fuel expenses. Ms. Scanlon asked if administrative costs would be on top of the grant request. Ms. Stamm said it would be included in the total request and that grantees would have to request reimbursement and document each expenses just as they do with other grant expenses. Ms. Hammon said it would be of assistance to the grantees. She said grantees would need to be informed on allowable costs. Mr. Medina addressed the Board and also spoke in favor of allowing limited administrative costs to grantee. Their local American Legion post has withdrawn from the VTF grant program due to the administrative burden. Ms. Stamm said that she will work on specifics of the proposal for the Board to consider at the next meeting. The Board considered the question of gas/gift cards. The consensus was that a higher limit might prove helpful, perhaps requiring receipts from veterans. Mr. Taylor and Ms. Stamm will draft a proposed rule change. Ms. Golonka asked if grantees who have unspent funds can roll them over to the subsequent year. Ms. Stamm said they are limited to the state fiscal year but lack of expenditure is something the Board can consider when evaluating applications.

**Reports**

Mr. Callahan said that DMVA’s new Deputy Executive Director has been visiting DVA sites and plans to attend the Board meeting in September. DMVA has also appointed DeeDee Salerno as the new Strategic Planner. Parker White is now the Legislative Liaison and Public Relations Officer. DMVA expects to announce for a Chief Operating Officer as well. The Division has received a required from the Southern Ute Mountain tribe to be included on the Board and he has meeting scheduled with the Ute Mountain Tribe at the end of August. Ms. Scanlon asked if the issue can be considered at the next meeting after that meeting has taken place. The Division is also seeking advice from the Board regarding implementation of the Veteran Information Resource Clearinghouse requirement. The National Resource Directory has been fulfilling this purpose to date. The Division is also asking the Board to advise on vouchers for CVSO payments, and whether the current full time and part time division is the most efficient and uniform utilization of those funds. Ms. Hammon asked if Marshall Bosworth could consult on this topic and Mr. Bosworth agreed. Mr. Maday asked in DMVA has an internship program that could assist and Mr. Callahan said there is not one at this time. Ms. Hammon asked if Ms. Salerno could address the Board’s strategic plan at the October meeting. Mr. Callahan said the state VSOs will attend the NACVSO virtual basic benefits course in August. He will join ECHCS Director Michael Kilmer at town hall events in August in Burlington, Lamar, La Junta, Alamosa, and Salida. The Division has received the eligible list for the Womens VSO and will schedule interviews. The VSO Supervisor position is currently open for applications. The final audit report will be available in September.

Mr. Bosworth said the CCVSOA has been working on their bylaws and updated processes for the annual CVSO awards. They have received eight nominations for the Nardini award and four for the Conroy. The two awards are for full time and part time county veterans service officers. They will hold their annual meeting in conjunction with the training conference in September. Ms. Hammon asked if retiring county VSOs could be recognized by the association at the conference and Mr. Bosworth agreed. He also attended the NACVSO conference in June.

Ms. Cunningham said that there was a veterans resource event in Hinsdale County in July and there will be another in San Miguel County in August. One is being scheduled for Dolores County. Senator Bennett hosted a recent roundtable to hear veterans’ concerns. She and Mr. Callahan met with the Ute tribes and look forward to an increased partnership. In success stories, the collaboration among VSOs throughout the state has been working well. The recurring Wednesday meetings have been helpful.

Ms. Antista-Bianchi thanked the three VSOs in her region who are retiring, including Monty Kinder in Morgan County, Jim McCracken in Washington County, and Karen Townsend in Boulder County. Two new VSOs have been hired: Ricky Arellano in Morgan County and Sasha Mathews in Boulder County. A six-week education series on caring for veterans with dementia sponsored by the Alzheimer’s Association, CDVA, and VHA began on June 30. The Boulder County AAA has started a series of focused conversations regarding veterans. In success stories, VSO Joy Johnson in Lincoln County has been conducting outreach to incarcerated veterans and Angel Flight West attended one of the Wednesday VSO meetings to help make VSOs aware of their service.

Mr. Stem and Mr. Edginton had to leave to attend veteran appointments. Ms. Snyder will share the slides from all the VSOs with the Board.

Ms. Hammon referred to Board to the written report from the Western Region One Source.

Ms. Ingalls referred the Board to her written report. They currently have a vacancy for the stipend manager. Jennifer Lesko from the grounds crew is assisting, although that leaves a vacancy on the grounds crew The VA Back to Work program may be helpful to temporarily cover vacant positions. The issue of slow reimbursements from VA is resolving, with only 1-2 reimbursements delayed at the FY 2022. The Honor Guard stipend program has spent $5,625.00 of the $20,000.00 appropriated. Saluting Branches will be in September. Mr. Maday asked if the cemetery staff had received a thank you letter from the Board and Ms. Ingalls said she has not seen it.

Ms. Stamm had no additions to her submitted report.

**Remarks**

Ms. Scanlon said she completed the Army War College course she was instructing. She said the Women Marine Association has seen an increase in the number of people seeking assistance and the amount of need has increased also.

Mr. Gonzalez said on 11 July he attended the meet and greet for the outgoing and incoming commanders at Space Base Delta 1. On 23 July he participated in the Korean War Ceremony at Memorial Park and reread the city’s proclamation. On 25 July he attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Visitors Center at the Air Force Academy. On 26 July he was the keynote speaker at the commanders’ dinner at the annual American GI Forum.

Ms. Golonka said that Xcel Energy has posted its consultant job position and she will share the link. Xcel is sponsoring the Veterans Day parade in Denver.

Mr. Maday said he had training with Michigan Guard in July and attended the annual conference of the National Guard Association in August.

Mr. Taylor said he has had military funeral every weekend since before Memorial Day. Their veteran coalition has a flying squadron that attends at most funerals and was also at the 4th of July parade. Veteran continue to experience problems with Community Care and travel and he has been working with Albuquerque VAMC to try to resolve the problems. He complimented Ms. Stamm’s customer service, saying he has heard positive feedback from grantees.

Ms. Motupalli said he has observed economic indicators of an approaching recessions and is concerned about the possible impact in the veteran community. It might be helpful for the Board to consider possible service and support that could be needed. She has also been thinking of ways for grantees to demonstrate the impact of their service programs and suggested the Board assemble some information and education for grantees to assist them with this process.

Ms. Hammon said that housing and transportation continue to be significant issues for local veterans. She has been working with ASCEND, a program that focuses on suicide prevention among veterans who are not enrolled in VHA.

**Upcoming Meetings**

The next stated meeting is scheduled for September 9 at the Mount Carmel Veterans Service Center in Colorado Springs. The October meeting will be at the WROS.

September 9, Colorado Springs

October 7, Grand Junction

November. Northeast Colorado.

**Executive Session**

The executive session consisted of information confidential to the Board by the Office of the State Auditor, pursuant to 2 C.R.S. § 3-103(3) and 2 C.R.S. § 103.7.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.