**Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs**

March 01, 2022

WebEx

**Opening**

Ms. Hammon called the meeting to order at 0900. 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.

**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

Joanne Iglesias, WROS Property Administrator

Angela Ingalls, VMC Director

Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants Administrator

James Poteet, CDVA State Veterans Service Officer Supervisor

Debra Antista-Bianchi, State Veterans Service Officer – Northeast State VSO

Kristy Cunningham, State Veterans Service Officer – Southwest State VSO

Eric Moncibais, State Veterans Service Officer – Southeast State VSO

Drew Stem, State Veterans Service Officer – Northwest State VSO

Beth Maxwell, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Carissa Snyder, CDVA Office Manager

**Guests Present**

Marshall Bosworth, El Paso County Veterans Service Officer

David Girard, Arapahoe County Veterans Service Officer

Eric Winterrowd, Arapahoe County Veterans Service Officer

John Haynie, Logan County Veterans Service Officer

James Leist, U.S. Navy Veteran

Cindy Meyer, Teller Count Veterans Service Officer

Elizabeth Mullins, Veterans Community Living Centers

Richard Nagley, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

Robby Robinson, CBVA Liaison to VCLC Commission and Veterans Monument Trust Committee

Roxie Smith, Crowley County Veterans Service Officer

Sheldon Smith, Montrose and Ouray Counties Veterans Service Officer

**State Veterans Service Officer Reports**

Kristy Cunningham said that in Archuleta County Veterans for Veterans continues to hold weekly breakfasts for the veteran community. In Dolores County VSO Rick Brown is assisting with transportation to medical appointments. In Gunnison County VSO Steve Otero is now preparing for OGC accreditation and has applied for a Veterans Assistance Grant. In Hinsdale County VSO Erin Cavit will be working with the winter sports clinic the week of March 28. In La Plata County, she and VSO Greg Dotson recently met with the DAV regarding reactivation of the DAV Outreach Center. In Montezuma County, VSO Sarah Kuhn has been working with the suicide awareness team and they are planning an outreach event for 2022. In Montrose County, she and VSO Sheldon Smith will attend two resource events in March, one sponsored by the Montrose Center and one by the VA. In San Juan and San Miguel, the VSOs know all of the veterans in their respective counties.

Debra Antista-Bianchi said that Lincoln County VSO Laurrie Rogers is retiring. In the northeast portion of the region they have been conducting TRIP training and the collaborative approach is proving helpful. They are creating a vanpool plan for fingerprinting. She and the division director will visit 15 counties in her region in March and that prospective outreach is highly anticipated. She attended a meeting of the Summit-Grand regional transportation committee and Dominic has been assisting with this committee as well. She has been working with the Caregiver Support Program contact in Aurora and Cheyenne. She is participating in the Governors Challenge and working on resources for suicide prevention. The NECO collaborative chaired out of the Cheyenne VHA will hold a family fun day in the near future.

Eric Moncibais said that outreach is going well and he was able to be featured on the CSU-Pueblo radio station. He has been asked to return and make his address into a series. He has been working with Volunteers of American and the Rescue Mission regarding homelessness and has been successful assisting veterans who are unaware of their eligibility for VA health care. He is seeing a large number of veterans with mental health conditions who have been hesitant to file a claim for service connections due to misinterpretations of the Brady laws. ECHCS Director Michael Kilmer has been making visits to southeast Colorado and Eric’s office has been helping to communicate these events to veterans. The VSO in Saguache County has given notice and new County VSO has been appointed in Crowley County.

Drew Stem said that he has been connecting with the substance use coordinator at the RMR VAMC; their office was unaware that a VSO was available on site. He has also connected with members of the social work team to make sure they know that his office if available on the campus. The office has a high volume of appointments and walk ins. He shared a story of a Blue Water Navy veteran he was able to contact thanks to a hospital social worker who wouldn’t have sought out a claim but was willing to consider it when Drew came to see him. He has observed that many older veterans who are hospitalized are not accessing service connected benefits and that many are socially isolated. Cooperative efforts with the Arapahoe County service office have been successful. Adam County is proactive on outreach events including a recurrent bowling night for veterans.

**Approval of Minutes**

Regarding the draft of the February 2022 minutes, Ms. Hammon clarified that the Center on Colfax is the name of the organization. She corrected a grammatical errors under Reports and committee assignments. Mr. Taylor corrected spelling errors under Public Comments and Upcoming meetings and a grammatical error in Reports. He corrected that Veterans for Veterans of Archuleta County was nominated as Nonprofit as the Year. It was moved by Mr. Maday and seconded by Mr. Gonzales to approve the minutes as corrected. The motion carried.

**Public Comments**

Mr. Bosworth said he attended the NACVSO Legislative and Leadership Summit in Washington DC. Significant items include the CVSO Act, which would provide federal grant funds for CVSO support and it has passed the House. The other is the PACT Act, which would add additional toxins to the presumptive lists for Agent Orange and burn pits. Michael Kilmer was in Colorado Springs providing a community brief on VA health care. Mr. Gonzalez and Mr. Callahan both attended. The CCVSOA will meet to consider training needs in the near future.

**Old Business**

Restoration of Honor: Mr. Callahan said that the media release has been distributed and no applications have been received. He learned at the NASDVA conference that some states include other types of discharge in their Restoration of Honor efforts, which can be discussed at a later date. Ms. Hammon thanked Mr. Callahan and his office for the media release and trifold.

**New Business**

VCLC Update

Elizabeth Mullins is the Director of the Division of Community Living Centers. She has worked for VCLC division for two and half years, now emerging from an extended period of pandemic management. There are five state VCLCs in Colorado, all managed by state Human Services except for Spanish Peaks, where the state has an oversight role. The other locations are Fitzsimons, Homelake, Rifle, and Florence. Eligible persons are veteran, spouses, and Gold Star parents. VA payments cover some veterans but not spouses. Neither service connection nor service in a conflict are eligibility requirements. An Honorable or general discharge is required. The active duty requirement is 180 days prior to 1980 and two years after. The VCLCs accept Medicaid. The pandemic has created difficulties with patient census and staffing, and the centers are now rebuilding their capacity. They are working on building community partnerships and adding behavioral health and telehealth capabilities moving forward.

Ms. Hammon asked which VCLCs have secure memory units. Ms. Mullins said they are at Fitzsimons, Florence, and Spanish Peaks. Rifle has one but it is currently not open. Ms. Scanlon asked if the JBC has provided any additional funding this year for the VCLCs. Ms. Mullins said the division is included in a request for wage increases by CDHS but nothing final is known yet.

VTF Application Training

Ms. Stamm said that the Grant committee will meet in April and funding decisions will be made at the May meeting to allow for more time for the applications to be reviewed and scored. At the April meeting the Board will receive training on how to score the applications.

HCR 22-103

Ms. Hammon invited Mr. Gonzalez to address this issue. Mr. Gonzalez said this resolution would provide a ballot item to extend the property tax exemptions for qualifying veterans to Gold Star spouses. He suggested that the Board might consider a statement of support. She asked Mr. Callahan to clarify whether the Board can express support. Mr. Callahan said the Board can support the resolution but the Department cannot take a position. Ms. Hammon said any statement from the Board will be reviewed by the Department before being sent forward. Mr. Gonzalez moved that the Board write a letter is support. Ms. Motupalli seconded. The motion carried.

Spending Authority Request from Western Region One Source

Ms. Hammon said this would be considered in conjunction with the grant application review.

Bylaw Review

Ms. Hammon said that the current bylaws are in effect but need to be signed. She asked if there was any feedback from the Board members in regard to the bylaws. Hearing none, the bylaws will be signed and posted.

**Reports**

Mr. Callahan said that all of the Board members have now been confirmed by the Senate. He thanked the Board and the VSOs across the state for their work on behalf of Colorado veterans. There is no date available to continue with the JBC figure setting but it will be provided as it becomes available. He said that HB 4673 would establish that departing service members would have to opt out of VA rather than leaving it to the veteran to voluntarily enroll. Mr. Callahan said he enjoyed his visits to the counties in the Southeast and Southwest regions and appreciated the diversity of VSO offices and approaches. The WROS has hired their triage position and the Division is now fully staffed. Spring training for VSOs will be March 28-29.

Mr. Edginton said he is in the process of acquiring his PIV card but it was otherwise ready to commence his new position as the Northwest Region Veterans Service Officer. He has been in contact with Mesa University and the Women’s Coffee Club at the WROS. He will attend the Veterans Resource Fair that will take place in Grand Junction on 22 March.

Ms. Iglesias said the new triage specialist at the WROS is Army veteran Dan Coulter. His first day will be March 21. They also have Hannah, the new VA work study, who will be on board part time until May. The audit is still underway; auditors will visit the WROS in person in May and attend the meeting of the advisory committee. Comfort Keepers has terminated their lease due to changes caused by COVID. The VA plans to lease three additional offices, possibly as soon as April. Classes and groups have increased. New events are yoga, a moms’ support group, a men’s health support group, and veterans’ wellness classes. The Women Veterans Coffee Hour just resumed after a pandemic hiatus with great attendance at their first event. The WROS will attend upcoming outreach events in Grand Junction and Montrose. The Paralyzed Veterans Association will have an event out of state at the end of March which the WROS will stream for the benefit of local veterans.

Ms. Ingalls, Veteran Memorial Cemetery Director, said the stipend program is going well. Seven groups are participating and six more are signing up. 41 requests have been submitted to date. Several have needed assistance setting up the vendor ID with the state. Ms. Hammon thanked Mr. Edginton and Ms. Ingalls for their work establishing and executing the program. Mr. Taylor asked if an organization had to be a registered vendor before providing services. Mr. Edginton said requests have to be made within 15 days of the date of service. At the VMC, renovations continue on the committal shelter. The shelter will be closed for two weeks in May to accommodate some of the needed repairs. Direct interments will continue while the shelter is closed and military honors for those interments will be provided at a later date. Interment numbers are still restricted due to staffing. The VMC has a new work study but has lost their CWT participant. His contract attended and the VA had suspended the local program. The VMC will attend Beaconfest this year and will try to participate in the Montrose event as well.

Ms. Stamm, Grant Administrator, said that the application webinars have concluded and she thanked Mr. Taylor for his attendance and feedback. The grant application deadline was 01 March and they are currently being processed. 57 payments were entered in February, each pre-audited and desk reviewed. She reported on budget modifications. American Legion Post 44 returned funds due to not receiving as many requests as anticipated. The MISSION Act has helped with health care access in their area. The Veterans Memorial Cemetery has not needed all of its allocation due to a rescaling of the project as a result of increased material costs. American Legion Post 62 requested additional funds as theirs are nearly expended. The Pikes Peak Workforce Center returned funds due to pandemic-related changes to their outreach. Douglas County has returned funds due to increased community partnerships. The City and County of Broomfield returned funds due to a smaller number of requests, likely related to pandemic-related lack of outreach. The Columbine Women Marines History Chapter requested an increase; they have expended their grant and have a wait list for funds. Costilla County requested additional funds. Their grant is 95% expended as they have seen an increase in requests for heating assistance.

Mr. Robinson member of and CBVA representative to the VCLC Board of Commissioners, said that he had nothing to add to Ms. Mullins statements. He reminded everyone that the Commissioners’ meetings are public and attendance is encouraged. In regard to the Veterans Monument Trust, a plaque is being added that rededicates the new name of the park as Lincoln Veterans Park.

Ms. Hammon said that UVC will hold two events this year rather than one. The Accolades and Remembrances Luncheon will be held on May 18 in Littleton. The banquet will be a fundraising event held on October 15 at the Gaylord Convention Center in Aurora.

Ms. Hammon reminded the WIG committees to attempt to meet in March. The meetings must be open and minutes taken. She advised that Mr. Callahan be invited to the meetings due to his experience in strategic planning.

**Remarks**

Ms. Scanlon said that the Colorado Women Marines Association celebrated 79 years of women in the Marines on February 12. The guest speaker was Lieutenant General Lori Reynolds, USMC Retired.

Mr. Taylor said transportation assistance has been in great demand and road conditions have been challenging, adding significant road time. The Durango clinic is open again as of March 1. The Farmington clinic needs a doctor. Veterans for Veterans has been inviting political candidates to speak at their meetings. They will hold an event for the Vietnam Commemorative and provide a coal train event for Gold Star family members. Ongoing VA assessments could result in some realignment of VA health care resources.

Ms. Golonka said Xcel Energy is considering future support for Veterans Day Parade as events resume.

Mr. Maday thanked Mr. Dorman and Mr. Callahan with the assistance in regard to the Senate confirmation. He met this week with Lieutenant General Michael Loh, former Adjutant General of Colorado and currently Director of the Air National Guard.

Mr. Gonzalez said on February 23 he participated in a veterans community roundtable at Mount Carmel presented by Congressman Lamborn. Yesterday he attended the town all the ECHCS Director Michael Kilmer.

Ms. Hammon said her new hire is in training and her office is very busy. Transportation requests to the Grand Junction hospital and the Glenwood Springs clinic have been at a high volume. Homeless is still of great concern and resources are stretched thin. Home Depot has a program that allows them to provide materials and sometimes labor to provide modifications to veterans homes and a local construction company is partnering with them to help make those services available.

Ms. Motupalli had provided her remarks in the meeting chat. She said that the Veterans Affinity Group at Gusto is planning to host some mindfulness, resilience, and inclusion events during March and April.

**Upcoming Meetings**

Ms. Hammon said that Boards and Commissions can now meet in person. The April 1 meeting is currently planned as virtual and will have grant training. She asked if the Board would like to meet in person or virtually. She recommended meeting in person in May for the grant decisions.

Mr. Taylor suggested holding the April meeting virtually and the other Board members agreed. Ms. Hammon said she would work on finding a location for the May meeting. She said that while the Board does like to travel, she recommended the May meeting be held in the Denver area as it is someone central. It is usually a long meeting.

Mr. Taylor asked if that would leave sufficient time in the fiscal year to meet the meeting location requirements set forth in the bylaws. Ms. Hammon said that grace is extended on those requirements this year due to the pandemic restrictions on face to face meetings.

06 May 0900 Denver – VTF grant decisions

03 June 0900 TBD

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:08 a.m.