**Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs**

September 10, 2021

Ambulance Shed

1576 Lowell Ave, Burlington, CO 80807

**Opening**

Ms. Hammon called the meeting to order at 0907. 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

**Staff Present**

Joanne Iglesias, CDVA Interim Director

Gail Hoagland, CDVA Grants Administrator

Diana DeBor, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Elizabeth Maxwell, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Jessica Quackenbush, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Carissa Snyder, CDVA Office Manager

**Guests Present**

Marshall Bosworth, El Paso County Veterans Service Officer

Mary Cornum, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

Jim Kliesen, Cheyenne County Veterans Service Officer

Glen Marciniak, Kit Carson County Veterans Service Officer

John Haynie, Logan County Veterans Service Officer

Tim Hutchinson, Broomfield County Veterans Service Officer

Joshua Medina, Arapahoe County Veterans Service Officer

Cindy Meyer, Teller Count Veterans Service Officer

Richard Nagley, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

Ray Odom, Las Animas County Veterans Service Officer

Jay Scott, Otero County Veterans Service Officer/President Colorado County VSO Association

Roxie Smith, Crowley County Veterans Service Officer

Adam Sutton, Boulder County Veterans Service Officer

Raymond Taylor, Archuleta County Veterans Service Officer

**Approval of Minutes**

Ms. Scanlon said the word “Marine” should be capitalized on page one. She then moved that the minutes be approved as corrected. Ms. Golonka seconded. The motion carried.

**Public Comments**

Mr. Scott complimented Ms. Hoagland’s administration of the grant program, particularly the streamlined application process. He said the program provided by American Legion 009 in La Junta that provides transportation for veterans to medical appointments. He said that payments during this grant cycle have been slow and this has affected service delivery. The post requested an advance in mid-July that has not yet been received. He asked that this issue be addressed. Other matters affecting veterans in southeastern Colorado are the withdrawal from Afghanistan and difficulties with Community Care. Community Care has been recertifying their providers and the process has left many veterans with a gap in care. The La Junta CBOC does not have a medical provider on staff. School loan repayment programs have helped assuage this problem in the past. Ms. Hammon thanked Mr. Scott for his comments. She said the Board will take his comments under advisement and act when possible.

**Old Business**

Conflict of Interest Form

The new conflict of interest form is complete.

Bylaws Committee

Ms. Hammon said that the Bylaws Committee has not met to discuss the member absence policy. Mr. Dailey has resigned from the Board and that has left a vacancy on the committee. She asked Mr. Maday if he would be willing to serve and Mr. Maday agreed that he would.

Ms. Scanlon said that DACOWITS is the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the services. It was created in 1952 to advise the Secretary of Defense on matters and policies relating to the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of servicewomen in the Armed Forces. In January 2021, the Secretary disbanded the committee and relocated its responsibilities under Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. There is an effort underway to encourage Congress to reinstate the committee. UVC is one of many organizations considering the issue including several national groups. She asked that she be permitted to draft a letter for the consideration of the Board that could be if approved be sent to the Governor’s office. The Board members agreed.

Honor Guards

Ms. Snyder said that county veterans service officers across the state have provided information on local honor guards and a comprehensive list is available. Ms. Hammon asked that the list be distributed to Board members. Ms. Hammon said that Mr. Maday has completed a draft of a letter of recognition to be sent to the staff at the Veterans Memorial Cemetery and that same draft could be appropriate to also use for honor guards. Mr. Maday distributed a copy of the letter to Board members. He suggested that the Board might establish a formal recognition program.

**New Business**

VMC Recognition Letter

Ms. Scanlon moved that the Board adopt and distribute the letter drafted to recognize the staff at the Veterans Memorial Cemetery and Honor Guards. Mr. Gonzalez seconded. The motion carried.

**Reports**

Ms. Hammon provided the report on behalf of DMVA in Mr. Dorman’s absence. Interviews are underway the CDVA Director. DMVA continues to monitor potential legislation in anticipation of the next General Assembly.

Ms. Iglesias said that the Veterans Memorial Cemetery continues to execute triple the usual number of interments, which has been the case for the past quarter. This places continual pressure on the staff and h0onor guards. A groundskeeper will be leaving within the next few months. The capital construction project is nearly complete with a water feature to be added after 01 November. The triannual compliance review by NCA is also complete. There were some corrective actions issued attributable to the increased number of interments and new grounds crew. The cemetery is participating in VA’s Compensated Work Therapy program and has a temporary employee through that system. One groundskeeper is departing within the next few months. The cemetery participated in Beaconfest in Grand Junction and was able to outreach to approximately 300 attendees. The WROS will lose it DEERS operator in September and that position has been announced. The Property Administrator position has not been announced. A temporary employee is filling that role part time. There are two new prospective tenants. The Mental Health Summit will be held at the WROS in September. The Colorado Boulevard office for the Denver DVA is now closed to the public and there are no staff there. Administrative staff have been relocated to the VA Regional Office in Lakewood. The Denver phone number has been forwarded so anyone calling the published telephone number will still reach the DVA office. The hiring process is underway for both the Appeals Specialist and four state VSOs. Office space for Durango should be finalized next week. Office space has been secured in Pueblo beginning 01 October. The Division is still seeking office space in Greeley. The annual training conference begins on 21 September. There are approximately 50 people scheduled to attend in person, with more than 30 planning to attend virtually. Ms. Scanlon said that she appreciated the detailed monthly reports provided by Ms. Iglesias’ office. Ms. Hammon suggested that the Board send a letter of acknowledge to departing DEERS representative Jessica Olsen, who was also integral in the opening of the WROS.

Ms. Hammon said that she had no new information regarding the CLCs but she will check with Mr. Robinson. Increased hospitalizations due to COVD continue to impact admissions. She said that the new UVC president has created regional vice presidencies to help expand UVC’s reach statewide. UVC would like to work more closely with the Board, particularly regarding prospective legislative efforts. Ms. Scanlon asked if the Board members could receive UVC newsletters and updates and Ms. Hammons aid she would see that they are added to the distribution list.

Ms. Hoagland said that payments to grantees continued to be significantly delayed. Within the past two weeks the final payments were issued from the 2021 grant cycle. She is receiving daily complaints from grantees awaiting funds. Many grants are seeing a marked increase in requests from veterans and the slow payments are impacting service delivery. The grants office processes reimbursement requests immediately, but staffing issues in DMVA accounting are holding up the release of funds. Ms. Hammon proposed that the Board send a memo to Mr. Dorman and TAG expressing concern over the impact to the grant program and the Board members agreed.

**Remarks**

Ms. Hammon asked the Board members provide their place of work and Congressional district for the benefits of the audience.

Ms. Scanlon is in the 6th congressional district. She said that the Women Marines Association is still assisting veterans and has also seen an increase in requests. Last weekend she attended a memorial service for a 90-year-old WW II woman Marine. She was a sergeant in the Marine Corps. There is now one remaining WW II woman Marine. Ms. Scanlon works for the Colorado Division of Homeland Security.

Mr. Maday is in the 2nd congressional district. He attended a memorial service for an Army veteran last week and it underscored the effort put forth by honor guards. In August H.R. 1448, the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy Act (PAWS) became law. This law requires the VHA to implement a five-year pilot program to provide service dog training to benefit eligible veterans who are diagnosed with PTSD.

Ms. Golonka is in the 4th congressional district. She said that invitations will be forthcoming for Xcel Energy’s November 05 signing ceremony to celebrate their partnership with the Army’s Partnership for Youth Success.

Ms. Motupalli is in the 6th congressional district. She said that for the past several weeks she has been volunteering with nonprofit organization Allied Airlift, which is working to evacuate US passport holders, permanent residents, green card holders, and their families from Afghanistan. Most have young children and are in difficult circumstances. She is the head of financial experience data team at Gusto, a tech startup, and co-chair of the organization’s veteran affinity group.

Mr. Gonzalez said he attended Mount Carmel Patriot Day, a food and services drive, in Colorado Springs on 03 September. El Paso County honored 2021 Veteran of the Year Skyler Nelson at a ceremony on 09 September. He will attend the 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony at Peterson Space Force Base. Mr. Gonzalez serves as an El Paso County Commissioner.

Ms. Hammon is in the 3rd congressional district and serves as the VSO for Eagle County. She is looking forward to the annual training conference. UVC and other advocates continue to encourage the addition of a women’s veterans service officer for CDVA. She asked that Ms. Iglesias report the concern to Mr. Dorman. Ms. Scanlon encouraged the Board, the Division, and UVC to present a unified effort and Ms. Golonka agreed.

**Upcoming Meetings**

Ms. Scanlon suggested making the next meeting virtual due to increased COVID cases and the other Board members agreed. Ms. Hammon said that it would be also be helpful to wait to do the annual training once a new board member is appointed to fill the current vacancy. The annual training is now planned for November in conjunction with the meeting, still scheduled for Steamboat Springs.

Upcoming Meetings

01 October Virtual via WebEx

05 November Steamboat Springs (annual training 04 November)

03 December VAMC Aurora

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, Mr. Maday moved to adjourn. Ms. Golonka seconded. The meeting adjourned at 10:59 a.m.