



JAMES V. "CAPT'N JIM" MCMAHAN COMMISSION ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Meeting Minutes

From

March 3, 2022

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Robert Brown at 6:30 PM.

Attending: Bob Brown, Lisa Brown, Simon Ballard, Jennifer Button, Ryan Koch (representative for Councilman Johnson), Pam Silcox, Scott Kearby, Dennis Miller, Bill Montgomery

Excused: Hayden Anthony, Deacon Vic Petrosino, Mike Ray, Art Kaff, Denise Perry, COL Casiano, (APG Garrison Commander)

Pledge of Allegiance lead by Robert Brown

Opening Prayer read by Robert Brown (on behalf of Deacon Vic Petrosino)

Welcome & Opening Comments:

Chairman Brown – presented the HCCOVA Mission and Vision statements and welcomed members.

Mission: *To advocate for our veterans and their families and connect them to resources through outreach and education.*

Vision: *A Harford County community that is responsive to the needs of Veterans and their families.*

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Minutes from the February 3, 2022, meeting was approved. Jennifer Button made the motion to approve, and Scott Kearby seconded the motion. Ryan Koch will post the minutes and agenda to the website.

GUEST SPEAKERS: Melissa Huber, social worker with VA Maryland Health Care System

Presented information on her role as the Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinator (CEPC) covering Harford, Cecil counties and the Eastern Shore. 10-year program with a focus on building coalitions and increasing collaboration efforts within the community to support & provide services to veterans. Priority focus: Veteran suicide prevention.

Discussion on veteran suicide statistics and risk factors. Further discussion on VA efforts to counteract a veteran's sense of helplessness, hopelessness &/or sense of belonging. These include screening for suicide risk; improving care transitions & connectedness; crisis line; follow-ups from civilian care, encouraging activities; lethal means safety & safety planning (*988 coming – goes directly to Veterans Crisis Line) and animal foster care while veteran is receiving treatment. VA is looking for volunteers to help in this outreach effort.

Discussion on federal, state, county, and other organizations' efforts that the VA may be able to collaborate with including: the Governor's Challenge on suicide prevention, Harford County Veteran's Collaborative, crisis intercept mapping initiative and Serving Together. Further discussion how to tie assets together and minimize duplication of efforts. Offer extended to Melissa Huber to participate the Harford County Veteran's Collaborative and in future commission meetings.

OLD BUSINESS:

- **Donations for Homeless Project**

- County-sponsored, in conjunction with United Way, resource fair is planned to collect donations for homeless veterans
- Venue will be held at the Epic Center in Edgewood
- In process of taking vendor requests
- Pam Silcox contacting agency on behalf of HCCOVA to provide support for essential item bags for homeless veterans
 - Discussion on publicizing strategy to include HC Public Libraries & APG

NEW BUSINESS

- Legislative Issues – Robert Brown provided information on the Maryland Military Coalition 2022 goals, including:
 - Phase out for state tax on Uniformed Services Retired Pay
 - Other various bills are in the works to help veterans
 - Discussion on legislation session processes
- Legal Issues. None.
- Programs and Outreach
 - Maryland Joint County Veterans Organization Meeting Notes
 - The chairs from the different commissions discuss each counties' objectives, events, programs and focus of efforts.
 - Resource Fair is HCCOVA's major event – what additional events/programs would support our veterans?
 - VA VSO and Stakeholder Meeting Notes
 - Planning discussion on new CBOC's (Community-Based Outpatient Clinic) in MD to include Westminster, Baltimore-area & Bel Air as a possible location
 - CBOC is a mini hospital for many services
 - Further discussion on community-based services
 - VA has seen a decrease in patients
 - Discussion on private insurance vs. VA care
 - Priority groups and confusion on care and eligibility
 - Discussion on disability ratings and how they work
 - COPD & asthma now receives 100% disability rating
 - Discussion on veteran apprehension on using VA services and why
 - Some veterans believe VA mental health services can hurt current or future employment chances
 - Harford County VSO Information
 - Discussion on how improving VA enrollment numbers will result in more funding and services

- VAMHCS Request for Volunteers for Veterans Mental Health Council
 - Looking for volunteers that have previous experience in navigating the system
- Project Opportunity
 - Entrepreneur training for Veterans and family members
 - Connected with Harford County Office of Economic Development
 - Next course: spouses of veterans, active duty, NG or Reserve
 - Information meeting: March 23rd from 6-8:30 PM
- Assistance requests received during the past month
 - Requests for DD214's
 - VA claims
 - Elder care
 - Funeral support
- Public Events and Recognition
 - Marine Corps League is hosting a spaghetti dinner on March 12th
 - APG Retiree/Military Appreciation Events
 - Date is not confirmed
 - Location: APG Rec Center
 - Memorial Day Events
 - Event at Shamrock Park, Bel Air hosted by American Legion
 - HCCOVA will participate in wreath-laying ceremony & providing water and cookies to attendees
 - Will be asking for commission volunteers to participate.

MEMBER UPDATES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Simon Ballard discussed the Harford County Veteran Collaborative scheduled for April 12th from 1:00 – 2:30 PM. This is a local follow-up event to the Central Maryland Veteran Collaborative, held on February 8th. Program will include a survey to assess familiarity of Service Members, Veterans and Family Members (SMVF) mental health services available in Harford County, and housing and employment resources. Working to increase awareness of these programs within the community and other organizations.
- Bill Montgomery discussed new optional masking policy released by the APG commander, effective March 1st. He also attended the Pre-Retirement Briefing (for transitioning soldiers & spouses) held on March 2nd. The Soldier for Life/Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is starting again, with the next one scheduled for March 14th -18th at the APG-ID Card Building (Bldg 4305 – Susquehanna Ave). Bill plans to attend these programs.
- Pam Silcox confirmed that the armory has been reserved on November 12th for Veterans Resource Fair. Will work on producing and distributing a save the date flyer.
- Denise Perry announced the Women Veterans Forum will be held on March 9th from 6-7 PM.
- Bob Brown stated he has not received any feedback from HCC about a replacement for Janice Cassady who represented the college on the HCCOVA.

FINAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Next meeting scheduled is scheduled for April 7, 2022, at 6:30 PM.
- Meetings are scheduled for the first Thursday of the month unless otherwise announced. The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 pm.