

Kalamazoo County Veterans Affairs Committee
Meeting Minutes
September 9, 2015

- I. Call to order by Chair, Michael Quinn at 8:04 AM

- II. Roll Call:
Members Present: Bill Becker, Chad Dillion, Mike Quinn, Tom Burton
Absent: Mike Jones
Others Present: Lucinda Stinson, Mike Hoss, Brien Brockway, Beth Ridge, Courtney Davis

- III. Review of previous month's minutes from August Committee Meeting
Motion made by Mr. Becker to approve the minutes as presented from August 12, 2015
Second by Mr. Burton
Motion Carried by a unanimous voice vote

- IV. Citizen's Time
Chairperson Quinn opened the floor for citizen's time. No comments, questions, or issues were brought forward. Citizen's Time was closed.

- V. Financial Review
Office financial assistance programs were reviewed by Veteran's Service Specialist, Mr. Brockway, and Veteran's Service Coordinator, Mr. Hoss; September 1 is the official implementation date for the new Burial Benefit Policy. Committee discussed use of last names on burial benefit report as they were omitted at this time; Veterans Service Officers will look into appropriate information for inclusion in future reports.

Review of overall office financial report was completed by Sr. Financial Analyst, Ms. Ridge. Committee discussion of differences from previous month's report; overview provided of expense savings to be had from the repurposing of one room for storage only now – Veterans Service Office (VSO) doesn't have to pay for storage; overview of flag/marker reimbursement for gravesites. Office now has an inventory of markers for future years, VSO works with the City of Kalamazoo for storage and distribution.

VI. New Business

Veterans Service Office Report

General office updates provided by Mr. Mike Hoss, Veterans Service Coordinator. Vietnam Veterans Volunteer has been asked to no longer work at the VSO due to unprofessional conduct; no office backups or issues will result as other resources have already been established to meet service needs. Additionally, Mr. Hoss has found an earlier training for attaining his accreditation as a Service Officer; will complete this the week of September 21st

Future Office Planning:

Mr. Hoss shared office and county veterans needs for the future with the committee and led members in subsequent discussions. Questions and issues included:

- *How do we assist non-wartime Veterans as this is a large community issue and concern of the Veterans Service Office?* The federal government's definition of wartime veterans was reviewed. Current assistance venues must be used for wartime veterans only; there would be benefit to having a county funding source for peacetime benefits. Office is working to collect and locate demographic data for peacetime veterans. This will be a State level need to ultimately serve all veterans. Committee discussion of current process for assistance and confirmed consistent review of DD214 for all who present at the office.
- *Housing Crisis.* Many housing crisis issues among veterans; many are homeless (living at shelters, moving family to friend, living in cars, etc.); other veterans have enough monthly income for rent, but have a difficult time securing enough funds for the deposit and first month rent required for most apartments; this is an area where there are limited resources county-wide
- *Heating and Electric Bills.* Initial payments for payment plans are a hurdle; office is seeing large bills (5000+) – a result of a lack of Consumer's Energy (CE) program knowledge and CE willingness to appropriately check homes for energy use. Mr. Hoss shared an office experience of late: issues with CE not reading meters in certain neighborhoods in the community; he has been working with CE on behalf of the family. Committee discussion followed about raising these issues to State Representatives and Senators.
- *Gas Cards.* Funds are needed for purposes other than VA appointments alone (job interviews, School); Current practice requires that a veteran have a VA appointment within the next week to receive a card. The amount issued of \$25.00 is not enough for appointments in Detroit and Ann Arbor. Committee discussion about needs and current resources. VSO Office is recommending that gas cards be made available for legitimate needs and that the amount is raised to an adequate amount for a round trip. The VSO will write a draft policy to bring back to committee in the next month for this purpose.

Motion made by Mr. Burton to allow the Veterans Service Office to use up to 10 gas cards during the next 30 days, following today's meeting, to be used at the digression of the Veterans Service Officers and in amount over \$25.00 if appropriate need is determined.

Seconded by Mr. Dillon

Motioned passed by unanimous voice vote by all members present.

Millage Update:

Ms. Stinson, HCS Deputy Director – Community Services, provided an update on the veteran's millage timeline; the millage will be on hold for the fall as there are a number of other items and requests already on the County Board's Agenda at this time. Suggestion has been made to ask for funding for an administrative support position for the office for the time being from County General Fund Allocations. Committee discussion about desire to

have millage work continue for presentation at later date in 2016; extra time will be used to construct a good and well organized plan for helping County Veterans.

Committee discussion as to future planning needs ensued. Personnel support vs. direct assistance needs discussed between committee and service officers; there is a need for both, but most immediately a part-time Administrative Assistant would greatly benefit the office - need for phone support and consistent attention to veterans upon immediate visit to the office is critical. Another critical area would be for immediate and emergency needs of veterans; the MVTF can take a few weeks to have full approval and is not always the best response for emergency situations; Mr. Hoss plans to discuss this issue with the Trust Fund Committee and plans to request the ability to personally approve assistant needs in emergency situations; committee discussed the need for emergency assistant funding outside of the MVTF; request made to have service officers bring an outline of emergency requests received during the month to the next meeting. Homeless veterans are another area of concern; VSO is interested in looking into what it would require and if it would be possible to do a loan program for deposits and first month rent costs.

Committee discussed potential fundraising options for assistance support for veterans in need; Stand Down is an event that would be appropriate for further fundraising efforts or events such as a softball tournament.

Member Sharing

Mr. Dillon shared about VA Summit in Grand Rapids taking place the next day.

- VII. Adjournment. Motion made to adjourn the meeting; seconded and carried; Chairperson Michael Quinn adjourned the meeting of the committee at 9:35 AM.