

Maryland Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, October 21, 2020  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032

Chairman Tyler called the meeting to order at 10:30 am.

Vice Chairman Thornton gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Tyler called for a moment of silence to remember POWs and MIAs.

The Chairman asked for a motion to accept the July Minutes. Motion was made by Commissioner Reuter, seconded and passed.

Chairman introduced **Guests:**

- DAV State Commander Charles Clark
- DAV State Adjutant Bill Fisher
- Lamarr Couser, DAV National Service Officer
- Peter Stokes, Presenter, Fields 4 Valor
- Diane Millington
- Bernadine Blair
- Cynthia Cavalieri
- Kathia Mejia Chevez, Senator Van Hollen's office

**MDVA:**

- Secretary George Owings
- Deputy Secretary Robert Finn
- Denise Nooe, Staff to the Commission

**Commissioners Attendance:**

Attending:

Blair, Burtnick, Calvert, Collins, Fuentealba, Hanson, Hartman, Holcombe, Killebrew, Kimball, Kirk, Lane, Macri, Moore, Reuter, Rosas, Seidel, Shiffrin, Smith, Stem, Stokes, Thornton, Tyler, Welsh

Absent:

Green

Chairman Tyler called on Secretary Owings for MDVA report:

**Secretary Owings:**

*Good Morning. I hope everyone is doing well.*

*I will begin today with the update on the Department, and then we will have a presentation to the DAV State Commander and Adjutant.*

*Following the presentation, Deputy Secretary, Bob Finn will give you an update on the status of the second Veterans Home.*

**Service Program:**

- *This year, we have had three Benefits Specialists leave the Service Program*
  - *We just hired a new staff member for the Montgomery County office, who is currently in training*
  - *The Hagerstown and Charlotte Hall offices are being covered by other Benefits Specialists, until we can rehire*
  - *The Bel Air office was relocated to the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) in Bel Air last week, and on the first day had five appointments scheduled*
  - *Appointments are still required to visit the MDVA Benefits offices*

**Cemeteries & Memorial Program:**

- *We received approval to host in-person ceremonies for Veterans Day – up to 250 people, wearing masks*
  - *Cemetery & Memorial staff will provide assistance, such as printing programs, setting up AV equipment, and setting out chairs*
  - *Ceremonies are organized and run by the committees or service organizations that normally handle such events at each facility, and we have not heard from all of them about the plans for ceremonies yet*
  - *Denise will include updates on ceremonies in the November 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the MDVA e-newsletter*
- *As of October 1<sup>st</sup>, the federal VA raised the plot allowance to \$807, so the charge for spouses and dependents being interred or inurned at the state cemeteries has also been raised to \$807.*

- *Letters have been provided to Funeral Directors by the Cemetery Superintendents*
- *The United States VA Cemetery program staff have scheduled site visits to the Eastern Shore Cemetery in November and Crownsville Cemetery in December*
  - *These are the usual and customary site visits*

**Trust Fund:**

- *For the Fiscal Year that ended June 30<sup>th</sup>, the Maryland Veterans Trust Application Review Committee approved 43 grant awards totaling \$130,206.28 to assist Maryland veterans and their families*
  - *Since July 1<sup>st</sup>, the beginning of the state fiscal year, the Trust Fund has already awarded \$40,000 in grants to veterans*
  - *At the end of the fiscal year, the Maryland Lottery transferred funds to the Trust. We now have \$220,000 in the Trust and we need your help in getting the word out that veterans need to apply*

**Outreach & Advocacy:**

- *Dana and Denise are continuing at the fast pace we have come to expect from them. In addition to their regular duties -*
  - *Dana has been serving as Co-Chair of the Governor's Challenge for Suicide Prevention. If you haven't already read it, she wrote a Blog about the effort, which you will find on the Department website and in the last edition of the e-newsletter*
  - *Dana also plans to begin live briefings, using Facebook Live – so stay tuned for more on that*
  - *Denise is managing the Maryland Charity Campaign for the Department from now until the end of the year. This effort encourages state employees to combine efforts and contribute to Maryland charities. Our fellow Marylanders who have lost their jobs or are small business owners will need these charities more than ever this year*

- *O&A will be changing the name of the program, legislation will be introduced. Denise will tell you more about that in her report.*

### **Charlotte Hall Veterans Home**

- *We had many weeks of no new cases of COVID-19 at the Home*
  - *Outbreak status - Charlotte Hall remains vigilant as it continues to manage the COVID-19 Outbreak*
  - *Testing remains the top priority in effectively mitigating the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus*
  - *Residents and staff at Charlotte Hall continue to test weekly to ensure all asymptomatic cases are identified early*
  - *Charlotte Hall remains a leader in testing within long-term care facilities, having completed twenty rounds of universal testing*
  - *Visitation: Charlotte Hall is excited to welcome back family members under new guidelines released by the Maryland Health Department on October 1, 2020*
  - *Outdoor visitation began on October 12, 2020, while limited indoor visitation will resume soon, we hope*
  - *Census is currently 312 and new admissions are continuing*
- *As many of you know, the Disabled American Veterans celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the organization on September 25, 2020.*
  - *Coincidentally, an edition of the MDVA e-newsletter went out on that date, and that edition included a copy of the Proclamation from Governor Hogan declaring September 25<sup>th</sup> as Disabled American Veterans Day in Maryland*
  - *I would like to recognize several members of the DAV in the audience and ask them to come up while I present the original Governor's Proclamation to the DAV State Commander Charles Clark*
  - *Would the following DAV members here today join us for the photo?*
    - *State Adjutant Bill Fisher*
    - *Our own Commissioner Elton Stokes*

- *National Service Officer Lamarr Couser*
  - *Are there any other DAV members here today?*

Secretary Owings called on Deputy Secretary Bob Finn for an update on the second veteran's home:

**Deputy Secretary Robert Finn:**

- Proposed home to be located in Sykesville
- 80 – 100 acres
- 120-beds
- Plan to include dialysis, first state home to provide on-site dialysis
- Land transfer to MDVA not completed yet

**Questions:**

Chairman Tyler: How many beds?

- 120. We also want to make it as green as possible, using solar or geo-thermal power. The plan to attach a dialysis area will be important to the residents

Commissioner Reuter: Why wasn't a greenfield chosen rather than a brownfield? Also that area has no public transportation

- Have to obtain the land where we can find it. This is no cost to MDVA – land transfer. If we chose a location that already had been utilized, demo would cost money before we could start building. We have been working on this for years – this is the best alternative

Commissioner Stem: Carroll County does provide transportation for veterans

Secretary Owings: After Charlotte Hall was built, St. Mary's County established a transportation system

Commissioner Reuter: This plan is smaller than Charlotte Hall, which has 450 beds. Will it be worthwhile to establish transportation for a 120-bed facility?

Secretary Owings: We would love to establish a third home on the eastern shore. We had to let the Montgomery County location go because the County wanted a clause that the land would revert back to the County.

Commissioner Macri: Fantastic plan to include dialysis. Congratulations. I would be happy to help or provide input as a physician. I also agree that we need to help steer applicants to the Trust Fund. There are many health care issues and food insecurity in the veteran community

Chairman Tyler: It is good if we can acquire land at no cost. Transportation can be developed later

Chairman Tyler called on Denise for her report. Secretary Owings asked her to begin with the new name for Outreach and Advocacy program

**Denise:**

- Legislation will be introduced to change the name of O&A to “Communications” program. O&A does much more than outreach and staffing, to include public inquiries, public requests for information, press releases and other tasks. The new name will better reflect the duties of Dana and Denise. It will also reduce public confusion between the responsibilities of the Service program and what is currently the O&A program
- All meeting for next year have already been reserved at 100 Community Place on the correct Tuesday dates. Also, now that we have the capability for Commissioners to call in, we no longer have to schedule a back-up inclement weather day.
- Proclamations have been printed for Veterans Day. Please let Katie or me know if you need one.
- Veterans Day posters are available and please take them at the end of the meeting
- Veterans Day Ceremonies at the Cemeteries and Memorials have been approved, but decisions have not been made by the individual Committees yet
- Reminder, as we begin the Round Robin portion of the meeting, please use the microphones, so that Commissioners and guests on the phone can hear you

The Chairman called on Commissioner Seidel to introduce the next Presenter:

Commissioner Seidel introduced **Mr. Peter Scott from Fields 4 Valor**

Mr. Scott gave a presentation of Fields 4 Valor and the effort to grow food, seeds and honey to feed veterans in need. Also how the program provided training to veterans. The program has received a grant from the Wounded Warrior Foundation.

Questions:

Secretary Owings: May Commissioners visit Fields 4 Valor. Yes

Commissioner Collins: Have you approached Prince George's County government? Mr. Scott stated he had met with Dr. Dula, but had not asked for any support from the County

Commissioner Stokes: What is the thing you need most? People to work at the farm. Need consistent help to do the tasks necessary to keep the farm going. There are four tillable acres and help is needed

Commissioners Shiffrin and Reuter: Where is the farm located: Brandywine in Prince Georges County

Lamarr Couser: How far away from the farm are deliveries made? The farm currently serves 25 families, mostly in Montgomery County, two in DC, one in Brandywine and one in Alexandria

Deputy Secretary Robert Finn – suggests he join the Veteran Farmer Coalition. He does want to participate and he has already spoken to Rob

Commissioner Reuter asked about gleaning: He does not glean. Farmers deserve the best produce. Diabetes is a big problem in the Veteran community and he hopes fresh, good quality, healthy vegetables will help them

Commissioner Moore: John Killgallen is the American Legion County Commander for Prince Georges County – Commissioner Moore will bring the program to his attention. Also, TerpVets at the University of Maryland might be a good resource for volunteer labor – he will share information with TerpVets also

Commissioner Seidel commends him. Many programs and agencies contracted during the pandemic. Mr. Scott's program did not. It expanded

Chairman Tyler called on the Sub-Committees for reports:

## **Subcommittee on Combating Opioid Abuse Impacting Maryland's Veterans and Families**

Commissioner Stan Seidel gave the report:

- Three documents were sent out to the Commissioners prior to the meeting
- The Sub-Committee met with Steve Schuh, and talking points were provided
- Most important need is for marketing
- Also mentioned the Before It Is Too Late website – it does not have veteran focus or links to resources for veterans
- Commissioner Lane added that he connected with the VA Medical Center in Baltimore and Dave Edwards said VA services are disjointed
- The Commissioners also spoke with Carol Boyer who suggested that marketing was not the role of the Sub-Committee
- Commissioner Macri stated people are home alone with their medicine cabinets. This feeds substance abuse disorders. Non-profits which can help veterans and a way to connect them should be identified. Problem is accelerating

The Chairman asked if there were any questions for the Sub-Committee. There were none.

Commissioner Reuter invited Commissioners to join the Homeless Sub-Committee

The Commissioner was reminded of the need to accept the Subcommittee on Combating Opioid Abuse Impacting Maryland's Veterans and Families report

Commissioner Reuter made a Motion to accept the report. It was seconded and passed. None opposed

Commissioner Collins made a Motion to reconstitute the Sub-Committee. Motion was proposed and seconded. Discussion regarding the continuation of the Sub-Committee took place. Commissioner Reuter suggested tabling the Motion until the January meeting.

Chairman indicated the Motion would be considered at the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Macri stated she did not understand the objection to the Sub-Committee continuing.

The Chairman stated the Sub-Committee had given their final report, which concluded the work of the Sub-Committee. The continuation of the Sub-Committee would be discussed at the next meeting.

Commissioner Macri noted that she opposes that decision.

## **Incarcerated Veterans Sub-Committee**

Commissioner Penny Collins gave the report:

- Invited more Commissioners to join, if they have interest
- Current members are: Penny Collins, Cynthia Macri, Thomas Kimball, KT Tyler, although the Chairman would probably leave the Sub-Committee now that he is serving as Chair
- Received an email from Warden Gang that the most serious need for incarcerated veterans is mental health services. Warden Gang was leaving and directed her to an employee with Public Safety and Corrections, but she did not receive a reply to her email

Commissioner Reuter made a Motion to accept report. It was seconded and passed.

### **The Chairman then invited those calling in on the phone for any comments:**

Commissioner Hanson commends the Maryland Veterans Cemetery on the Eastern Shore for keeping operations running

Cynthia Cavalieri – spoke about National Take Back Day and will send information to Denise

Commissioner Kimball said the VFW Post 194 in Salisbury was holding a Stand Down. He would email the flier to Denise

Commissioner Fuentealba stated there is a new Commander representing the Military Order of the Purple Heart – the first female Commander,

Commissioner Killebrew is working on the legislation once again to designate a day of Remembrance for the Tuskegee Airman. He will be presenting to the Maryland General Assembly and asks for Secretary Owing's support

Commissioner Macri, who also serves on the Montgomery County Commission is doing a presentation on complementary and alternative medicine available under the Mission Act. Also she will be speaking at the Linthicum Veterans Memorial for Veterans Day and for the WWII Memorial Foundation on Japanese Americans during WWII

Kathia Mejia Chevez from Senator Van Hollen's office said that Austin is currently out on leave, but if there is anything Senator Van Hollen can do to help, please contact her

## Open Discussion

- Chairman Tyler – proposes that we communicate more with the County Veterans Commissions. There is a joint meeting of the County Commissions on 12/12
  - Also important to get the word out about the Trust Fund
  - MDVA newsletter is a good way to share information with veterans across Maryland. Make sure you are sending info on your organizations to Denise
- Commissioner Reuter – next meeting will be after the General Assembly has convened, requesting an update on proposed legislation related to veterans at that meeting
  - VA hospital in Baltimore is looking for donations for veterans hospitalized over the holidays – contact Susan Kern
  - Wreaths Across America has started for this year
  - PVA held annual Walk, Run and Roll virtually this year
  - PVA is donating food orders to help those in need
  - Colonial Chapter has lost four members to COVID
- Commissioner Blair – Pearl Harbor Remembrance will be held on the USCG Cutter Taney on 12/7, Pier 5 next to the Marriott. He will be in Color Guard
- Chairman Tyler asks that Commissioners invite him to their events. He would like to attend if possible
- Commissioner Burtnick – Jewish War Veterans just had convention
  - JWV is losing membership to age, no younger members joining
  - Prospective members come for the organization business, presentations and comradery
  - When you talk to a perspective member about applying for disability, money motivates
- Commissioner Thornton asked if Maryland's Commitment to Veterans was still operating.
  - Commissioner Seidel said yes and MCV has money for veteran transportation.
  - Denise will ask MCV about presenting at a future Commission meeting, but stated that MCV no longer provides transportation \$\$
- Commissioner Shiffrin introduced a Motion to move meeting time to 9:30, as lunch is no longer being provided due to COVID restrictions
  - There was some discussion, but no second to this Motion

- Commissioner Moore – the American Legion Post in Greenbelt along with the Maryland National Capital Commission and other organizations are working to raise funds to restore the Peace Cross in Bladensburg, after the historic Supreme Court landmark decision
  - Both Governor Hogan and Secretary Owings have visited the Peace Cross
  - Secretary Owings – MDVA cannot support the fundraising directly, but we can get the word out in the newsletter
- Commissioner Stem – Marine Corp Toys for Tots is working on annual toy drive and needs help. Contact her for more info
- Commissioner Seidel – said that MCVET was open and still accepting veterans. Also the Virtual 5K/10K fundraiser was coming up
- Commissioner Lane – the Baltimore City Veterans Day ceremony will be at 10:00 am at the War Memorial Building in Baltimore
- Commissioner Stokes, who volunteers at Charlotte Hall Veterans Home reminded the Commissioners that donations were needed for the residents at Charlotte Hall, such as sweat pants and socks. Also needed are snacks/comfort foods. The residents did not have visitors for several months due to COVID
- Commissioner Reuter – PVA has funds for assisted devices for veterans in Maryland. Contact Jo Ann at the chapter office for details on filing an application
- Commissioner Collins – City of Annapolis will not be holding a Veterans Day ceremony this year, so the Fleet Reserve will have a smaller ceremony at the FRA hall.
  - She completed a four-day Service Officer training offered by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Maryland should offer a virtual training to certify Service Officers
  - Secretary added that only the VA certifies Service Officers and you must pass VA tests and we will look into providing training

#### Chairman Tyler

- Please remember to respond to Denise and RSVP when she sends out the notice for the January meeting
- He called on Dana Burl, MDVA who arrived at the end of the meeting to talk about MDVA website, newsletter and social media

- Thank you to everyone attending today

Vice Chairman Thornton gave the Closing Prayer and led the Commission in the Salute to the flag

Meeting was adjourned at 12:55 pm