



Kent County Veterans Services

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DRAFT minutes 6-20-19

Present: Mel Bauman, Mary Johnson, Harold Mast, Trisha Sexton, John Baxter, Randy Tharp, Shane Scherer

Absent:

Guests: Wayman Britt, Matthew VanZetten, Susan Cervantes, Mary Sumner, Theresa Robinson, Dan Ophoff, Paul Ryan, Jerry Dennis, Anthony Torres

1. Meeting called to Order – The meeting was called to order by Veterans Services Committee Chair Mel Bauman at 8:30am
2. Pledge of Allegiance – Committee Vice Chair Mary Johnson led those in attendance to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. Approval of Minutes –
 - a. Committee Member Harold Mast made a motion to approve the minutes. Committee Vice Chair Mary Johnson seconded. UNANIMOUS
4. Introductions-

Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett introduced Mary Sumner with Kennari Consulting, and Susan Cervantes with Kent County Community Action
5. Managers, Monthly Operational Update Reports – Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams went over the Monthly Activity Report
 - a. Committee Member Harold Mast commented on the new layout for the budget and what should be spent and how much; Assistant County Administrator, Matthew VanZetten also commented on that, speaking to the many meetings with Martha, and the reason Kennari Consulting is present is to make sure there is alignment to program development, so that the committee and the staff are on the same page with roles and moving forward. County Administrator Wayman Britt added that when the mileage was passed there were conversations on how the money would be spent, whether that be on programs and services versus staffing. The hope from Wayman is that you spend what you need to have the appropriate amount of staff to increase your outcome.
 - b. Committee member John Baxter inquired about when the mileage previously passed, was it because they were going to have programs, or because there was an appropriate amount of staff. County Administrator Wayman Britt replied with the reason it passed is there was a 2 year study done, and during that time there was a recession and the County was making

cuts in different departments. It started as a subcommittee from the Board of Commissioners and the Soldiers and Sailors Relief committee was started. And over time it was decided then to bring it to the citizens to bring in the money for staffing because of the need of services for veterans. After a period of time it was proven with the staff put in place, they were able to pull in more dollars from the federal government and meet more needs of veterans for support. Committee member John Baxter then asked Wayman if there would be any sort of pushback, because of the recession being over, if Veterans Services did ask for more money, to employ more staff. County Administrator Wayman Britt responded that he does see there is a need, and if Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett and the staff can prove the need is continuous, there shouldn't be a problem, however Britt wanted to make sure he clarified that he cannot speak for the future of the county or for the Board of Commissioners.

- c. Committee member Trish Sexton wondered if there were needs that Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett saw that she could not fulfil currently because of the amount of staff. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett responded that she had just passed her 6 month mark of being employed with the County and she is making sure she was building relationships and really understanding her role. Burkett thought that in another 6 months, when the department was fully staffed, she could get a really good picture of where the department could go and more of what needs were out there.
 - i. Also while Burkett was on the topic of staffing, she wanted to share that Andrew LaPres, the Clerk II at Veterans Services was promoted to a Veterans Services Representative, so in turn there is an additional opening for a clerk, as well as 2 Veterans Services Representative positions. Burkett has been working with HR on initial interviews, and will be doing 2nd interviews with Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams in the near future to get offers put out.
- d. Committee Member Randy Tharp had a question about the amount allotted for salaries in the budget. Tharp noted that there was approximately 65% left in the amount budgeted for salaries, which he thought would get the department close to being able to become fully staff. He then wondered if there was a need to increase the amount budgeted.
- e. Tharp then also inquired about the lines of budget that went over the allotted amount, and asked if Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett could speak to those. Burkett said that she was not able to speak to those line items, but would be willing to look over them and get back with him.

6. Old Business –

- a. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett introduced again Mary Sumner with Kennari Consulting. Burkett gave a brief background on how she had been speaking on learning more about the role of the Veterans Services Committee, and other committees within Kent County. Sumner briefly introduced herself and Kennari and how they work with non profits and some government agencies. shared her thoughts that getting the staff, and committee, and members of the county all involved moving forward she could foresee explosive growth for this department. Sumner also shared that the past Strategic Plan was put together back in 2015, and the future is not about things that went wrong, but instead aligning what everyone's role is in the process and creating a visual of where Veterans Services wants to go. The next 12 months will be a gathering phase. Sumner reiterated that her goal is to have everyone involved give input and give her recommendations and have everyone collectively say yes, that is the direction Veterans Services should be going in.

7. New Business-

- a. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett reintroduced Susan Cervates from Kent County Community Action. Susan gave a brief overview of her department. They have vehicles to help with transportation. They also help with food. They provide case management with housing through HUDvash with approximately 30 vouchers a year turned over. They have assistance programs with utilities, foreclosures, food, home rehabilitations, and through the Senior Mileage there is assistance as well. 121 Franklin provides meal programs as well. They service approximately 160 meals a day, they even offer a home delivery program too. Committee member Randy Tharp wanted to share that he thought it was great we are working together and this is exactly what we need to be doing. Committee member Trish Sexton wondered specifically about the transportation. Kent County Community Action has all of their drivers vetted and they need about 20 more driving hours. Cervantes is working with Human Resources to get those 20 hours approved so they can start incorporating with Veterans Services. Cervantes did want to make sure that everyone was aware that as it stands right now, if there is a veteran that is 60 or over, they would qualify for rides through the Senior Mileage or the Michigan Department of Transportation Services.
- b. Committee member Randy Tharp wanted to an update on our programs, as he was going through the process with us and has a possible contractor willing to work with us. Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams shared that at the National Conference he was able to sit down with a company called Micropact, which was a demo that Tharp had sent over. Ryan spoke with them about the issues. The rep said they have the ability to rebuild to what our department is looking for, but it will still come down to what the VA is willing to release, which is what is being worked on now. They atleast have the ability to rebuild, they are just waiting on the VA. Randy will connect Ryan with the contractor.

8. Survey Responses – 24 for June

9. Around the Table

- a. County Administrator Wayman Britt wanted to thank everyone for having him to the meeting.
- b. Committee Chair Mel Bauman wanted to add on to Britts sentiments saying he is thankful for the Count and this committee and the public that attends these meetings and the work that they are doing for veterans in Kent County. Britt in turn thanked Chair Bauman for his leadership.
- c. Committee member Trish wanted to share that she and Anthony Torres helped a veteran in Ottawa County, she wondered if they had a Veterans Services Department. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett said we would get the information for her.
- d. Committee member John Baxter wanted to share that he called in on June 6th and did not receive an answer, and was routed to a system. Baxter would like to know if we can have someone always available to answer the phone. Baxter also appreciated getting an up to date budget report.
- e. Committee member Harold Mast gave a brief update on the 65 page report that came out regarding the new Home for Veterans. There was quite a few discrepancies in what was owed to the veterans and what was reported and had nothing to do with anything being taken from current or past residents, just dealing with the County and reconciliation. Mast also wanted share that he met the new Director that has been hired for MVAA, Zenata Adams. Mast would like her to attend one of our meetings.

- f. Committee Vice Chair Mary Johnson wanted to share how great the Womens panel was at the Hidden Wounds of War, she shared she really enjoyed being a part of it.

10. Public Comment –

- a. Theresa Robinson had no comment.
- b. Dan Ophoff wanted to speak on a claim that was going to be spoke on during closed session. No claims for closed session for this months meeting. Dan also would like customer service surveys to look over. Administrative Specialist Rachel Wustman had some printed out. Dan also wanted to thank the committee for their support in the Golf Outing for the Friends of the Veterans Treatment Court.
- c. Jerry Dennis wanted to comment that he liked the new layout of the finance report that was handed out. Wants to attend next years golf outing.
- d. Paul Ryan attending on behalf of the West Michigan Veterans Coalition and wanted to comment that the VCAT region 4(Veterans Community Action Team) has 4 pillars- Health, education, employment, and quality of life. They have been focusing on employment, but are working on quality of life and have recently established a quality of life committee. Working on putting together a resource fair, Sunday September 22nd with the Freedom Cruise. Still working out the details. Also met Zenata Adams, she is connected with the formation of WINC (Women injured in Combat)
- e. Anthony Torres, treatment court has been up and running for 4 years, West Michigan is the largest treatment court in Michigan. Huge graduation on July 12th at American Legion Post 179. 23 veterans in treatment now with 7 pending. Already wrote the grant for next year. Also wanted to thank the committee and county as a whole for all of the support.

11. Adjournment –Veterans Services Committee Chair Mel Bauman moved to a closed session at 10:02am

12. The next Veterans Services Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, August 2nd, at 8:30am in the Veterans Services front conference room.