



Kent County Veterans Services

836 Fuller Ave NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Phone: 616-632-5722 Fax: 616-632-5723

KCVS@kentcountymi.gov

DRAFT minutes 10-8-2020

Committee Present: Mary Johnson, John Baxter, Harold Mast, Mel Bauman, Shane Scherer

Committee Absent: Trish Torres

Staff Present: Martha Burkett, Ryan Grams, Rachel Wustman, Jacob Calvert

Guests: Eric Nelson

1. Meeting called to Order/Introductions –
 - a. The meeting was called to order by Veterans Services Committee Chair Mary Johnson at 8:30am
2. Pledge of Allegiance – Committee Member Harold Mast led those in attendance to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. Approval of Minutes –
 - a. Committee Member Harold Mast had a clarification regarding the minutes. There was confusion concerning the attendance of Committee Member Shane Scherer at last month's meeting. It was clarified that Committee Member Shane Scherer was present.
 - b. Committee Member Harold Mast made a motion to approve the minutes. Committee Member Mel Bauman seconded, UNANIMOUS
4. Success Stories –
 - a. During the WINC Kayaking Retreat Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett connected with a veteran that was new to the area and was struggling to find housing. Though Kent County Veterans Services was unable to assist directly, by connecting the veteran to several local organizations Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett was able to assist in solving the veterans housing crisis.
5. Monthly Impact Reports
 - a. Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams provided an update for the monthly numbers. While the office is still closed for face to face appointments, the VSOs are still able to start and complete claims virtually. During this month the number of awards and retroactive awards have been higher than last year at this time. Phone call numbers are slightly higher than last year at this time. Soldiers and Sailors Relief applications are slightly lower than this time last year.

- b. Over the month of September, \$5400 in the form of Meijer food vouchers were issued to veterans in need. There is currently \$30,000 allocated toward Meijer food vouchers which, once exhausted, can be replenished.
- c. Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams noted that there was a discrepancy on last year's report concerning face to face interactions and corrected the number as 197 as opposed to 185197.

6. Manager's Report

- a. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett gave an update on Veterans Services Budget
- b. After speaking with Christopher Wilsons in the financing department, Martha Burkett was able to have the errors that had previously been on the report corrected.
- c. Martha Burkett reported on the recent activity in the General Administration category stating that it was due to purchasing cell phones for the staff members and office supplies but overall, the account is in favorable standing.
- d. Martha Burkett shared that the grants for Degage Ministries and the Kent County Veterans Treatment Court had been paid out, with 42.59% of the total funding remaining to be spent this year with the expectation that both organizations will continue to send invoices to be reimbursed.
- e. Martha Burkett stated that the recent travel expenses were a result of sending Veterans Services Representative Reginald Farris, Veterans Services Representative Bradley Langerak, and Clerk II Jacob Calvert to receive Veteran Service Officer Accreditation training from the NACVSO in Peoria, Illinois.
- f. By sending Reginald Farris, Bradley Langerak, and Jacob Calvert to receive accreditation training 100% of the current staff will be accredited. It was also noted that Jacob Calvert had received the highest final test score of the testing group.
- g. Martha Burkett reported that there had been no building repair or maintenance expenses.
- h. Due to additional expenditures having been added to this years budget in the spend plan conducted in June there is no line item on the report to show the grants funds for Community Rebuilders, Kent County Disability Advocates, Senior Neighbors, and the Veterans Services building renovations. Martha Burkett reported that, as such, the expenditures will be deducted from the Soldiers and Sailors Relief Fund.
- i. Committee Member Harold Mast inquired about if building renovations had begun. Committee Chair Mary Johnson confirmed that building renovations had indeed begun.
- j. Harold Mast stated that it appeared that spending had increased, Martha Burkett confirmed that it had.
- k. Martha Burkett reported that building renovations are projected to conclude ahead of schedule at the end of November and the staff members have been successfully able to work from home with the aid of the recently issued cell phones and laptops when working conditions have been unfavorable in the office.

7. Old Business

- a. The Clerk II position had 38 applicants; four Veteran applicants have been interviewed. The references of one of the applicants are being verified, with the expectation that an offer of employment will be made this week.
- b. As of September 30, the 2 open advisory committee member positions have closed. Seven candidates have applied. There have not been any updates yet as to the progress on the selection process.

- c. Confirmation was made from the state that governor Whitmer had signed off on the budget for the MVAA grant. Funds are on track to be made available much sooner than they were for last year's grant.
- d. Events approved in the grant include the Grand Opening Gala at Grand Valley's Eberhard Center on June 11, the Grand Opening for the general public on June 12, bus advertisement, radio advertisement, and the Equine Therapy Retreat which together maxed out the budget request.
- e. Efforts are being made to connect with an equine therapy provider that is local.

8. New Business-

- a. Manager Martha Burkett shared that both Administrative Specialist Rachel Wustman and herself had spoken with two dentists from the Michigan Dental Association and have begun planning for next year's Free Dental Day. Additionally, talks are underway to connect with additional groups that may match Kent County Veterans Services funding in order to provide dental care to the dependents of veterans that currently do not have access to dental care.
- b. GR Outdoor has been selected to provide billboard advertising in 2021. Martha Burkett stated that in addition to the paid services they will be providing, GR Outdoor will be including additional billboard digital advertising in the month of November around Veteran's Day free of charge.
- c. Proposals are being put together for radio and signage advertising with the intent of having all necessary information submitted to the Purchasing Department by the end of November.
- d. Proposals have been submitted by all three television stations that Kent County Veterans Services plans to advertise on for 12 months of advertising. Advertisements will consist of online advertisements, news segments, and standard commercials.
- e. Martha Burkett shared that with the assistance of Intern Lucretia Dunlap she has been putting together a suicide prevention program. Martha Burkett has been in contact with 92 for 22 and the West Michigan Suicide Prevention Coalition with the intent of collaborating on the program.
- f. Martha Burkett has received feedback from the Kent County Veterans Treatment Court concerning criteria they would like added into the behavioral health track.
- g. WINC has partnered with the Women Veterans Association of West Michigan and West Michigan Veterans Coalition in order to organize a fall festival in to be held behind the Veterans Services building. The West Michigan Veterans Coalition has agreed to fund the event which has been scheduled for October 25th from approximately 2pm-6pm.
- h. Rachel Wustman has spoken with the director of American House and five other assisted living facilities to organize presentations with a veteran services representative at their facilities in order to connect veterans and surviving spouses that reside there with the benefits that they are entitled to.

9. Around the Table-

- a. Committee Chair Mary Johnson shared reminder that the Ashley Furniture Store is having an event for veterans at 5th / 3rd ball park and will be giving away furniture.
- b. New events-
 - i. 10/25 Fall Fest

10. Public Comment –

- No public comment

11. Adjournment –Veterans Services Committee Chair Mary Johnson moved adjourned the meeting

12. The next Veterans Services Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, November 12th, at 8:30am
place is TBD.