



Kent County Veterans Services

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DRAFT minutes 6-10-2021

Committee Present: Mary Johnson, John Baxter, Mel Bauman, Jill Wolfe, Michael Blundell, Shane Scherer, Trish Torres

Committee Absent:

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

Guests: Michael Hyacinth (Veteran Entrepreneur), David Marquardt (Director of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation), Allison Sirpilla (WoodTV)

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 – KCVS Staff Rachel Wustman led those in attendance to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. Approval of the Minutes from Previous Month
 - a. Committee Chair Mary Johnson proposed a correction to 9b as Ryan Grams presented the changes, not Mary Summers as stated in the minutes. Committee Member Jill Wolfe motioned to approve. Mary Johnson seconded the motion to approve. Committee Member John Baxter voted to approve the minutes with the exception of 10e.
 - b. Minutes approved with changes.
4. Success Stories
 - a. Martha Burkett was able to find a replacement driver for the Men's only Equine Retreat under very short notice with the assistance of the MACVC email group and Carlos Castillo of the Vets Center.
 - b. Disability Advocates of Kent County, Senior Neighbors, and an unknown third organization were able to collaborate to provide a veteran and their spouse with bathroom accommodations, therefore greatly improving their quality of life.
 - c. All but one of the available seats for the Men's only Equine Retreat has been reserved.
5. Monthly Impact Report
 - a. Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams. provided an update. 25 fully developed claims were submitted, 66 claims are in development, and 7 claims were awarded, 4 SSR claims were awarded, and 6 burial claims were awarded.

- b. Committee Chair Mary Johnson asked if an opening date for the office had been determined yet. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett stated that no definitive date had been set.

6. Manager's Report

- a. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett detailed the budget report.
- b. Martha Burkett stated that grant funded activities are being implemented, the department is not over budget, and everything is on track.
- c. Committee Member John Baxter asked for confirmation on if Kent County Veterans Services will provide direction but not assist in the filling out of the DD 293. Martha Burkett confirmed that that is the case.

7. Old Business

- a. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett proposed altering the My Community Dental Center grant to allow for veterans with private dental insurance, that does not fully cover their dental expenses and that would result in financial hardship, to have the remaining balance not covered by their insurance to be paid out of the grant.
- b. Committee Member Jill Wolfe voiced her support by sharing that one of her students, a Marine Corps veteran, had experienced the exact predicament that Martha Burkett had described.
- c. The committee members voiced unanimous support for the change.
- d. Mary Sumners gave a farewell and addressed the committee retreat.
- e. It was determined that Martha Burkett and Mary Sumners will meet to work out the details of the retreat.

8. New Business

- a. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett explained the Has Heart grant request.
- b. Has Heart is requesting \$75,000 to assist with the renovation of a historic building on the Veterans Memorial Park that is to be converted into a coffee shop for veterans that will be used to display veteran artwork. Funding has already been provided by the city; however, the amount will not be sufficient to complete renovations.
- c. Committee Member John Baxter expressed his concerns about the possible presence of homeless individuals deterring the community from visiting the park and requested a presentation from Michael Hyacinthe, an aide to Congressman Peter Meijer, who is heading the project before making a determination.
- d. Committee Member Mel Bauman expressed his interest in the idea of the proposed coffee shop, however he also shared John Baxter's concerns about the presence of homeless individuals deterring the public from visiting the park and agreed that a presentation would be necessary.
- e. Committee Member John Baxter also suggested that Michael Hyacinth reach out to Congressman Peter Meijer to see if either himself or one of his foundations could contribute to the project as well.
- f. Martha Burkett stated that she would get in contact with Michael Hyacinth to arrange for him to meet with the committee and provide a presentation.
- g. Martha Burkett proposed to the committee that it support Finish the Mission's Freedom Cruise by providing grant funds.
- h. The committee agreed to commit \$2,000 Finish the Mission's Freedom Cruise.
- i. Martha Burkett spoke on the topic of the Women's Banquet.

- j. The American Legion Boat and Canoe Club has offered to host the Women's Banquet for free on July 31, with the only expense that Kent County Veterans Services would be liable for being a \$200 cleaning fee. The venue is able to host 100 people with COVID-19 restrictions, and 150 without.
 - k. Judge Rosemarie Aquilina has been identified as a keynote speaker for the event.
 - l. VSO Theresa Ergang will be collaborating with WINC to make decorations for the event.
 - m. Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams presented a Soldier's and Sailor's Emergency Relief Fund request to the committee for direction and clarification as the request presented a policy question that has not previously been addressed.
 - n. Ryan Grams stated that the background of the request is that it is for an auto repair, the veteran is legally married but separated from his spouse and the vehicle is owned, insured, registered, and operated solely by the spouse who also is living separately from the veteran.
 - o. The committee declined to take on the request. Ryan Grams stated that he will draft a policy change for the committee's approval to ensure that in the event a similar situation arises, it is addressed in the policy.
9. Public Comment
- a. Paul Ryan shared that Finish the Mission's Freedom Cruise has historically attracted up to 2,000 vehicles, indicating high turnout, and they are allowing veteran service organizations to have a resource table at the event.
 - b. Kent County Veterans Services, the Vet Center, and West Michigan Veterans Coalition will be participating with their own resource tables at the event.
 - c. Paul Ryan shared that the Armed Forces Thanksgiving Event will take place on May 21, 2021 at 10:30am. This will be a live in-person event at the Veterans Memorial Park, with a live stream starting at noon. The keynote speaker will be retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael Durant.
 - d. Committee Member Mel Bauman shared that the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans will be hosting a flag raising on May 20, 2021 at 10am.
 - e. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett shared that a Wellness Day community event is being planned for veterans and their families on June 12, 2021. There will be art, music, face painting and balloons, and a county veteran ID station.
10. Adjournment –Veterans Services Committee Chair Mary Johnson moved adjourned the meeting at 9:24 am.