



Kent County Veterans Services

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Minutes 7/21/2022

Committee present: Mary Johnson, Melvin Bauman, Trish Torres, Jill Hinton-Wolfe, Reginald Howard

Committee absent: Chris Kamps, Mike Blundell

Staff present: Ryan Grams, Martha Burkett, Rachel Wustman and Amanda Lake

Guests: Eric Nelson, Paul Ryan and Tammy Arends

A. Meeting called to order/ instructions-

- a. The meeting was called to order by Veterans Services Committee chair Mary Johnson.

B. Pledge of Allegiance – Lead by KCVS Community Outreach Specialist Rachel Wustman

C. Approval of the minutes from July Meeting-

- a. Approved by: Mel Bauman, Seconded by: Reggie Howard

D. Mary- I do want to review some guidelines. We have had a few issues develop. I want to reiterate that we are a committee not a board. We are not a decision-making body, and there are very few things that we take a vote on. So, make sure that when you are talking to people that you are letting them know you are part of an Advisory committee and not a board. Also, if there are any issues that come up with the staff or the Office, please go to Martha. If there are issues with issues that involve the management of the institution, those come to me (Mary). I will address those problems and go higher if I need to. This process was voted on by the committee a couple of years ago and when things quiet down, we need to relook at our policy.

E. Success stories

Mary- Ryan sent out a nice story about a 90-year-old gentleman that was needing assistance with new handrails and basically a new bathroom. With help from Disability advocates, which we give millage money to was able to help the man put in new hand rails and a new bathroom. Its so nice to see that the money from the millage is making headway out in our community and they're using that money for veterans and using it well.

- A. KCVS Community Outreach Specialist Rachel- Stories like this are so great because this puts a 90-year-old face that will now be able to stay in his own home for longer. We also had two claims this month that resulted in back pay being paid. One of the claims is from a Surviving spouse that we met at the Senior Expo that was looking what benefits that she might be able to get. She meet one of our Veteran Service Officers, Theresa Ergang there and the surviving spouse asked for her business card. Theresa said no, we are going to set

you up for an appointment now. Then next week after her appointment, she was leaving and said that she finally felt heard. Fast forward about a month later, Theresa received word that she was awarded \$150,000 in back pay because her husband had passed away from a service-related injury. Not to be out done, Andrew was working with a veteran and got him \$250,000. So, with that we are bringing that money back into Kent County to these Kent County Veterans to help with their quality of life. So, with that we are bringing money back into the county.

B. KCVS Supervisor Ryan- I have another success story, its our new clerk here at KCVS Amanda Lake. She is the one who has done the minutes for us this month and I thought did a good job at it. Does everyone want to introduce themselves to her?

- a. Mel- I'm Mel Bauman, I've been on the committee for oh, 8 years, I guess. 40 years in the Army and 35 years in civil service concurrent with that. I am on a bunch of other committees. I say that I am retired, but I am busier now than before.
- b. Reggie Hi, I am Reggie, United States Navy Veteran. I served 11 years. I work for Healthcare for homeless veterans now.
- c. Mary- I am Michigan Army National Guard, veteran of the Persian Gulf War. I am also a Nurse. I am also like Mel; I am on a lot of different groups and keep very busy after retiring from Nursing.
- d. Jill- Hi, I am Jill Hiton-Wolfe, I am a US Army Veteran. I am currently the GVSU Military and veterans Resource Manager. I am also active on several other state and local veterans initiatives.
- e. Trish- Trish Torres, 25 years retired Air Force. I am on a lot of different organizations with my church and other veteran organizations. So, thanks for being apart of our team.
- f. Mary- Welcome, we are seeing smiles on Ryan and Rachels faces and we haven't seen those in some time.

F. Manager Report

A. KCVS Supervisor Ryan- We are still moving up; we are getting busier every month. Which is great for us. Our Food vouchers are also going up and up and up. The face to face contact is higher than last month and every month with people coming in, which is awesome after Covid. People are out and doing stuff and coming in to see us. It's been exciting the last few months in the Office with more traffic. Any specific questions on the report?

B. KCVS Manager Martha- You should have the budget document in your packet, there might be more than one. The one that is important is the expenses vs. budget worksheet. You can see by looking at it that we are staying on track and well within our budget. I worked on the budget earlier in the month and sent you copies of what I had submitted. We have looked our spending is looking like and what we are projecting for the end of the year. See how much we will have for next year. Projection for the end of the year is that we will be smack on target for the budget, there might be a little bit leftover, but not a lot. So, that's good news. The board of commissioners will be looking at that in probably September because of switching to an October fiscal year. So that is a little bit of a change. There is another document there that shows that grant spending and the different initiatives that we are doing.

- a. Mary- We don't have that sheet in our packet.
- b. Martha- Oh, I thought I had sent that to Rachel to add it, so I will go ahead and send that to you all.

C. KCVS Manager Martha- So Jill has been working hard on the Women's appreciation celebration that we are doing this Saturday at Meijer Gardens. Everyone should have invitations and I hope some of you are able to make it. It's a lovely event with a nice brunch

and we will give away a few memberships. We also have our Art Prize Gala as our next big event that is coming up. I have been working to get speakers lined up for that then we're ready to go. I don't know if Rachel has sent the Save the Date out yet or not, but flyers will go out to everyone in email form. Then in a few weeks we will send out the formal invitations with the registration on that. We currently still working along with our Grant Initiatives and we are so happy with the house cleaning company that we are working with. They're amazing and do a great job. If you look at the Arbor Circle Report, it is demonstrating how people are being changed by the program. By helping one Veteran, they are also helping the Veterans family and the community with this program. Everyone knows that substance abuse is a ripple effect, being untreated can cause harm to the family. But if they get better it ripples out to the family and community. So, we should be proud of what is happening there. We are just working to get through the events of the Fall. We have the Art Prize Gala coming up and working on the grand opening day of the Veterans Memorial still. Also, because we didn't use the allotted funds for the banquet. We will have funds for 1 or 2 more female veteran events at the end of the year. Rachel and I will put our heads together and see what we can figure out.

G. Millage Update

- A. Mary- We have about 2 weeks left before the vote. I think that we will be glad when it is done and voted on, but like Tammy said the other day I'll miss the committee meetings and the people. We have yard signs out everywhere. We have a few 4 x 5 signs out different places. We have about 270 signs out. We have articles out in the Cedar Springs Post, an article this week or next Veteran millage that they do every year with the different candidates and millages going on in the community. Rockford Squire has a really nice article going in this week and next week. MLIVE did an article also.
- a. Mel- Hey Paul, what's going on with Media?
 - b. Paul- I have reached out too WOODTV, WXMI, WZZM, I got a rush, rush response from them. I did a 2-minute ZOOM interview with WOODTV with someone from the Clerks office talking about voting, senior millage and Veterans Millage. I believe that I got a favorable quote in the interview talking about mental health and post-traumatic stress. But that will get peoples attention. Yesterday the West Michigan Veterans Collation quality of life meeting met. Best meeting to attend. Speakers for the month just happen to be from Disability Advocates that talked about home rehab and commercial spaces. Our Speaker Amanda who talked about residential evaluations and rehab mentioned that the program is funded by a grant from the KCVS. That gave me the chance as the Chair to be able to plug the millage. Telling them that if we don't pass this millage, stuff like this will go away. Lastly, I have an interview with Cheryl Lee Irwin. I have been on her show before. I have sent a brochure to her already that Tammy drafted. I will also send her the fact sheet with numbers on it. I think what is going to really restate with her is Mental Health and the female Veterans activities that KCVS does. Also, after listening to the success stories. Can we share the stories from earlier?
 - c. Rachel- Yes of course. I will draft up and email and send it out to you. I'll send what Disability Advocates sent to us.
 - d. Mel- I think that it would be great if we don't mention anyone names.
 - e. Mary- Don't we have something with WOOD radio also?
 - f. Paul- I am personally acquainted with Steve Kelly who is hosting the morning show, I just haven't gotten around to asking him yet.
- B. Mel- Does everyone know Tammy? Tammy is with the West Michigan Veterans Alliance and without the alliances assistance we would not have a millage committee period. They have funded and paid for our signs. She's been with us the entire time and without her and the alliances help this wouldn't have happened.

- a. Jill- I also wanted to put in a good word for Tammy also. They have a housing grant for student Veterans. It is up to \$500.00 a month for Student Veterans while they're in school full-time and veteran. So, they're awesome. I know everyone on the committee knows that I presented at the Kent County Democrats last week and they endorsed the millage. I tried to also with the Kent county Republicans, but they said that they don't endorse millages. I've also been going around talking to my friends and family about it and found it very helpful to let them know about owning the \$200,000-dollar house it will only cost you \$5.00. It just got them to wrap their heads around it a little bit better.
- b. Tammy- Also in regard to that, I've created a Facebook page called Citizens supporting Kent County Veterans. If you can like the page and share it out there, there is an information sheet out there that Paul and I had handed out in an easy to read format.
- c. Jill- I also have a Facebook page, so maybe we can merge them or at least share each other's information.
- d. Paul- I had a Vietnam vet by the name of Mike, who is a graphic artist designer. He took the logo that the committee millage had and wrapped some graphics around it. There are like four different versions of it as a PNG, instead of the JPEG which makes it easier to put on Facebook.
- e. Mary- We have had a tremendous amount of help getting this millage of the ground. So many people have been so good about it. I had a librarian call with some good points. She brought up that the website that was made in 2014 is still up and doesn't have the correct information. Martha, do you have any information on that?
- f. Martha-Yes, I talked with Jenny about that yesterday and I don't know how to change it. So, we need to contact someone outside the county to fix it. I reached out to Lori this morning to change the data but haven't checked my email for an update.
- g. Mary- So, I received an email from the Librarian the next day after our very long conversation. So, told me that she was very happy that I had listened to her. She said that she is going to be voting no on August 2nd. Because she couldn't find any facts on the website. The website was old, so I sent her a fact sheet and a copy of the brochure. She has a website in Caledonia, so she said that she will post the information that I had given her but will not influence people one way or another. The other issue that she has where do just average people go for information. That is something that we need to look at in the future. We went to local places, but they are very veteran oriented. So, at this point there isn't much more that we can do for the millage. I want to thank Tammy, Paul, Eric, Mel and Dan who were all on the committee. Every little thing that everyone did for this millage, helps.
- h. Martha- Hey Mary, can I get the information from the millage? The flyers and pamphlets. I can't use them, but good for reference.
- i. Mary- Yes, I can send you the brochure.
- j. Martha- Thank you to all of you for your hard work and all that you've done. I value and appreciate your effort. What your doing is important. So, thank you.

8. Old Business

A. SSR Policy Review.

- a. Mary- SSR policy review, Ryan go ahead. Also, this is something that we will be voting on.
- b. KCVS Supervisor Ryan- 3 weeks ago Mary and I got together and revamped the SSR policy. We did some changing on the verbiage along with a bunch of updates we had to do for the money stuff. I emailed it out to everyone a few weeks ago and I've heard back

from everyone via email that everyone's in favor of the changes. We just need to complete the motioning.

c. Mary- May I have a motion made to accept the revised emergency relief policy?

d. Mel- Motion made

e. Reggie- Seconded.

f. Mary- Any discussion? Now is the time to ask Ryan and questions. Alright, no discussion. Do I hear an aye, aye? (everyone speaks aye) Nay? Ok, it is passed.

g. KCVS Supervisor Ryan-Thank you

9. New Business

A. Mel- Can we get an update on the Stand Down?

a. Rachel- My goal is once I have spoke to Russ, we will find an evening of getting together to put all the surplus.

b. Mel- Where are we breaking that down? Here? (KCVS) Or There? (Grand Armory)

c. Rachel- We would like to do it the Monday before, but put them together out there. We are planning on having our Committee meeting, then going out to the festivities right after that. We are working on food right now. Joe Holman and I met for coffee this week; he is coming to the women's celebration this Saturday to take some pictures for us. So, just finalizing everything. We have a tent coming, tables are coming and being set up by the county. We will provide chairs for the vendors; we will have a warm meal for our veterans and will have food for them to take with them. We have a lot of swag surplus and everything's in order.

d. Reggie- Is swag be taken care of?

e. Rachel- Yes, I just needed a tax-exempt form from you guys. I have been talking to one of your coworkers and it is being taken care of. Another thing we are offering is we are going to be doing Kent County ID's. We will have it all set u and ready to go for our veterans to get a Kent County Veteran ID. I have also reached out to MVAA, they are coming also to help our veterans who need to get a copy of their DD-214. They will have the ability to look them up and print if they have the DD-214 in their system. We also have Peter Meyer speaking at the event, we will be posting of colors, national anthem which will all just be a short ceremony.

f. Tammy- I have a question, is all the funding for the food taken care of?

g. Rachel- Yup, everything's taken care of.

h. Tammy- Ok, just wondering if the Alliance can help with that if needed.

i. Rachel- We can talk after this; I have some ideas.

B. Mel- Well, sometime in August as we don't have a date yet. But Senator Gary Peters will be doing his motorcycle trip through Michigan. His office called me and asked where they would like him to visit. When it comes to Grand Rapids, it would be nice to visit the Army Reserve Center. So, Peters will be here, don't' know the date yet. I would like him to come to KCVS also to visit. I have also hooked them up with the Patriot Riders. That can all change, but as of right now. It is scheduled for August. Secondly, the 2nd of August is the first Tuesday of the Coast Guard Festival. They will be having an employee's day. They will be meeting at the American Legion next door. We will be having a breakfast, a tour of the facilities and a tour of one or two of the cutters that are stationed there. After that, we come back for lunch and will leave at about 1pm. I would encourage any of you to attend.

a. Jill- I know I work with several GVSU employers and they went last year and would love an invite again this year. I know last year you had a flyer or poster. Can I get another one this year to pass along?

b. Mel- Yes, I will have Paul pass it along to you. So, the sooner the better. We are short on attendees this year. So, the sooner the better in this case.

B. Mary- Hero's corner update

- a. Reggie- Well, heroes' corner is going well. We have T-shirts now and we are changing lives. We have one veteran that was sleeping on the floor, so we got him a bed. He just called me the other day and he got a job at Home Depot. He is loving his job and everything going on in his life right now and feeling like a dad again. Now he can provide things for his kids that he wasn't able to before. A lot of our funds come out from my pocket. But we are getting ready to file for our 501C and it is like \$600 some bucks. I did fork the money out from my own pocket for these shirts, but we haven't sold too many yet. I have been just giving a lot of them away. We had a Round table meeting with the governor. I presented her with one of our hero shirts and talked to her about what we are doing and how veterans' lives are really being changed. We are looking at a small bus as we know some veterans are having a hard time with transportation. We would like to connect with the Grand Rapids home for veterans to see if they can bring some of their fully functioning Veterans out there. We are also looking to talking to more parents who have children who just returned from the military. Get them off the couch. We can only work 11-4 right now. So, we need to open that up more. We are currently meeting at Marges donuts on 28th St. Very motivating with me being a homeless vet and now helping other vets. We are also noticing no millage signs in the intercity. (Mel will get him some)
- b. Mel- When we get our time set for Senator Peters to come, we need to also send out an invitation to the governor. They are the same party and would like it if she comes.

C. Mary- Do we have any update on AA?

- c. Mel- I've had a few other veterans asking why we don't have a chapter here. The census is saying they don't mind it being with civilians, but most all would prefer it to be all veterans because Veterans share a lot of the same experiences.
- d. Reggie- I am 15 years sober and had to participate in the recovery process. I will investigate getting some more information on getting it started up. I would be happy to start on up here. I think we need to have one in the Grand Rapids area, I know of a lot of veterans that go to civilian AA and get frustrated.
- e. Mel- I know that the veteran's guys and gals that go to the treatment court have alcohol substance abuse. They think they would be more comfortable in a place where there are more veterans talking about their problems.

- f. Martha- I have a place where we can have the meetings, but I am looking for a veteran that can run it.
- g. Reggie- I will get a start up packet.
- h. Martha- It is something we want to start; I will set up a meeting with Reggie and Rachel and get this going.

C. Mary- Rachel new activities?

- a. Rachel- We have gone over most of them. WE have the stand down August 11th. On August 13th we are doing the family tie dye workshop here at KCVS. Shirts will be provided for anyone wanting to participate. We had two last year and they were a huge success and a lot of fun. We will have some music and Pam Alderman will be running it. On August 20th we have the Art Prize Gala that Martha mentioned already. September 17th, we have our Art Prize kick off. We aren't running this, and I am sure that Paul will talk about it, but there is a resource fair that will be coming up. We plan to be there. Outreach has taken a little bit of a back seat for me with having me doing the Veterans Support coordinator roll, I am still making the time to go out and do a couple of tours of care facilities. I am letting them know what we are doing and bringing activities to them, such as the horses, art, music and yoga. So I am still working hard to get out there in our community.
- b. Ryan- We will also be going out the Marine Corps reserve center on September 1st and 2nd, they're doing Marine Corps retirement education days. It will be two days and it will be Rachel, Brad and myself out there talking about claims and retirement.

D. Reggie- Are we still doing the housecleaning? I have had a couple of Veterans that submitted applications, who hasn't received anything yet.

- a. Rachel- I talked with your coworker to give him some feedback on this. I like the feedback also to keep the communication open and track everything.
- b. Mel- I wanted to make sure that on the applications, that they just can't write that they're depressed. I get depressed every time I look at the vacuum cleaner. They need to write down more reasoning behind just being depressed.
- c. Martha- Can I way in here? There is a difference between mild situational depression and clinical depression. Someone who is clinically depressed may not be able to get up and clean their house at that time and that is a legitimate medical concern. It is a DSM five, its been there for years and years and years. Physicians treat it, psychiatrist treats it. I think it is a totally legitimate thing to have a diagnosis, to support that. I don't think that's a reason to refuse them. And, fatigue, fatigue goes along with PTSD, it goes along with Depression, it goes along with Trauma and other physical ailments. So, if there is documentation of this and not just because they stayed up all night watching movies then that can also be a legitimate concern that can interfere with the person's functioning in a significant way.
- d. Mary- We don't know that; we don't get any diagnosis's or any supporting documentation.
- e. Martha- We just must go on their word, don't dismiss them. Those are legitimate debilitating circumstances. Its not like I'm just a little tired fatigue, its like I am bone weary and I can't function. Life is hard for me to even go to the grocery store, its

hard for me to get up out of bed, its hard for me to do anything because its medical reason.

- f. Mary- We need more documentation in these cases to know what they can and what they can't do. You know, as a nurse I don't see any age or anything, I see chronic pain and depression. You can have anywhere from I don't want to work, using your chronic pain and not have to do anything. To yeah, they hurt, and their depression goes along with the chronic pain. I know that. But without more information we are not going to get diagnoses we don't know that. I don't want to give this housekeeping to someone who is just laying on the couch eating bon-bon's and watching TV and sit and watch these people clean their house.
- g. Martha- Well, then thing is we are making a judgment. I am hearing some biases and stereotypes.
- h. Mary- No, no its not. We are just asking that we see more information as to why, why they have the chronic pain. Have they had 5 surgeries on their back, well then yeah, they do have pain. We have no problem with that at all.
- i. Martha- A person doesn't have to have 5 back surgeries to have chronic pain. How many of these come through saying they're depressed or have chronic back pain?
- j. Mary- Yes, I agree.
- k. Martha- Among the veteran population, those are not uncommon complaints. They just aren't.
- l. Mary- Ok, at this point I am going to stop the conversation now. We are just re-iterating everything at this point.
- m. Martha- Well, what I want to get at is, is there something we can do to refine this process. I don't want anyone to be excluded automatically without asking if they have a doctor's diagnosis or note or provide us with anything that shows us that.
- n. Mary- I don't say know automatically. I email Rachel back to get more information on the applicant. I don't want to say know right off hand. I am just saying we just need more information on the situation before we make a judgement.
- o. Martha- Yeah, that's why we need to talk about the process. Because Mel's remark was, no we aren't giving it to them. I think that's just a little too black and white. I think that we need to figure out how do we get some documentation from them that will support that claim or not. We set up the eligibility criteria and if they're meeting the original criteria then do, we need to adjust the criteria?
- p. Mary- Yes, I do think that we need to look at the criteria once again. I will say that Mel has always been the one that has asked for more information about an applicant. I don't ever see him saying no, we're not going to give it to ya. Or yes, we will. He is always that one that wants more information on the applicant. Again, I am going to stop this discussion where we are.
- q. Mel- I didn't get to finish.....but my point was if they're just tired or depressed then we need to go back and get more information.
- r. Martha – Ok, sorry. I wasn't trying to attack you. Just sentimental for people with mental health issues.
- s. Mary- Well, they're all important.

10. Public Comment

- a. Paul- Something that Rachel brought up earlier. West Michigan Veterans Coalition is having a military family resource fair on Sept 24th from 11am-2pm. It will be at the

Armory on 44th St. We've partnered with the Michigan National Guard family program to do this. We have almost 50 exhibitors who have either confirmed their attendance or expressed interest. They cover anything from education, employment, health care, quality of life. KCVS are very much apart of this also. We are hoping they can supply a VSO that can be onsite and also have KCVS there to make ID cards. That would be awesome. VA will also be there doing enrollments. The Grand Rapids Vet center will be there making dog tags. We haven't confirmed it yet but looking at getting food trucks. Medal of honor recipient Jim McLuhan will be there; he will be opening the event by speaking and singing the national anthem. Event is free. We are also trying to get the Kent County Health Department there to do Vaccinations.

- b. Eric- Mel when you talk to the riders for the patriot riders, they are American legion riders, VFW riders. Patriot riders are not a 501C. If they are wearing their respected colors this be political with Gary Peters coming.
- c. Tammy- twice a year the West Michigan Alliance for Veterans holds a retreat for veterans, and it's held at Rockwell lake lodge in Luther, Michigan. We have a retreat coming up September 12th, 13th, and 14th. The retreat is free to any veteran. We take care of transportation and food. Its just a great way for veterans to get together with other veterans and talk about issues. We do have a few speakers that come in. They don't deal specifically with certain issues, so we are wanting to have Reggie come up and talk about Heroes corner. We have a counselor that comes up from the Muskegon area. Registration is still open for this; I have a handout that I can send to you via email if you're interested. One other thing that the Alliance is doing, we are working with Hospice of Michigan right now creating a PBS documentary involving hospice and care for our veterans and their families during the end of life process. This shows the steps that veterans and their families can take to get into contact with hospice and what hospice will do for them. We suspect it will be released sometime in November of this year, so we are excited about this.

11. Adjournment