

Frederick County Veterans Advisory Council Minutes

Wednesday, September 18, 2019

Attendance

Voting Members	Present	Absent	Excused
Daniel Campbell		X	
Sharon Jacko	X		
David Kaye	X		
Rachel Nachlas	X		
Fred Schumacher	X		
John Lynn Shanton	X		
Fred Wood	X		
Ex-officio members			
Dee Harrison	X		
Michelle Day			X
Andrea Walker			X
Michael McLane			X
County Councilman Steve McKay			X
Delegate Carol Krimm	X		
Nan Mann	X		

Guests: Julie Riggs, James Hubbard, Keith Midberry, Laurie Sherman, Doug Silvern, Josh Bokee, Christy Butler, Roger Wilson, Tiffany Freeze, Miles Ward, Patty McDonald (for Michelle Day), Joyce Anne Sundergill-Schmid (for Andrea Walker).

Staff: Linda Bergofsky

Welcome and Introductions

Fred Schumacher opened the meeting by leading the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Establishment of a quorum: After a review of attendance, Fred Schumacher determined that a quorum was established.

Approval of Meeting Agenda: A motion was made by Sharon Jacko to approve the meeting agenda. Fred Wood seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Welcome to new ex-officio member: Fred Schumacher welcomed Nan Mann as a new ex-officio member of the VAC. Nan serves in the office Senator Chris Van Hollen and replaces Robin Summerfield.

Old Business

Approval of the August 21, 2019 meeting minutes: David Kaye made a motion to approve the minutes of August 21 as revised. Fred Wood seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Summary of closed meeting on September 9, 2019: Linda Bergofsky reported that the five voting members of the VAC met on September 9 to discuss the qualifications of five individuals who had submitted applications for three open positions. It was noted that current VAC member Dan Campbell did not submit a letter of interest. Having a quorum, the members selected the top three candidates using a forced choice rating. The top three scoring candidates were Sharon Jacko, David Kaye, and Deborah Childers.

Fred Wood made a motion to submit the VAC's recommendations of the top three candidates to the County Executive's office for review and action by the County Council. David Kaye seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

Final Draft Bylaws: Linda Bergofsky introduced the final draft of the bylaws. She noted that the modifications requested to the second draft regarding under what circumstances a member would be considered to have resigned were reviewed by the County Attorney but were not acceptable because they would conflict with the enabling legislation. Therefore, a member is considered to have resigned if s/he misses 50% of meetings in a 12 month period. However, the original language regarding a nominating committee has been struck as the County Attorney concurred with the VAC that it was not required.

Sharon Jacko made a motion to approve the bylaws (Version 3, dated September 10) and forward to the County Executive's office for review and action by the County Council. Fred Wood seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Chair's Comments: Fred Schumacher deferred making any comments in light of the full agenda.

Presentation

The Comcast Essential Program: Joshua Bokee, Director of Government and Regulatory Affairs for Comcast presented information about the Comcast Essentials program. The program began about six years ago and was initially intended for families with children in school lunch programs. Participants were given access to \$9.95 per month Internet coverage (including a wireless router) and the option to purchase a refurbished computer for \$149. Since then the program has expanded to include families in HUD-supported housing, Veterans receiving State or Federal assistance, and individuals on Medicaid, SSI and SNAP. Currently, over 300,000 people in Maryland participate. Individuals can apply for the program on line or through a dedicated phone number. Participants in Comcast Essentials do not have to undergo a credit check and Comcast will "forgive" accounts in arrears or unreturned equipment as long as a year has passed. However, households may not have had Comcast internet in the prior 90 days.

The Frederick County Veterans History Project: James “Jim” Hubbard currently serves as the director of the Frederick County Veterans History Project. Jim discussed that our local effort is part of the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress (LOC) Folklife Center, which collects and preserves the firsthand interviews and narratives of United States military Veterans from World War I to the present. That project was endorsed unanimously by both Houses of Congress and was signed into law by President Clinton on in 2000. The Frederick County project has recently been revived and Jim is looking for additional interviewers and referrals to Veterans who may wish to participate (it is all voluntary). Interviewers are trained to use the field kit provided by the LOC; the field kit helps both the interviewer and interviewee prepare for the interview. Only certain types of materials are acceptable, e.g. audio or video recordings, original letters or diaries, original photographs, original maps, and original military records. To date, over 300 Frederick County Veterans have participated and with a Veteran population of over 17,000, Jim noted that there are many more stories to be told. To that end, Rachel Nachlas suggested there may be ways to connect the VHP with Frederick Community College, e.g. potential Veteran participants such as those who use the Veterans and Military Services center and interviewers and videographers through the FCC Film program. Rachel asked that Jim follow up with her directly to discuss future opportunities.

Legislative Priorities in the upcoming Legislative Session: Delegate Carol Krimm led a discussion on how ideas for legislation make their way through the Maryland General Assembly into law. The process starts with legislators and stakeholders identifying solutions to problems. Ideas and possible solutions are handed over to the Legislative Services office and then to the Bill Drafting service, which then delivers a bill to the sponsor along with a Fiscal Note on the financial impact of the bill. Sometimes there are co-sponsors and sometimes a companion process is being followed in the Senate. After First Reading, when a bill is introduced, it is assigned to a Committee —Environment and Transportation, Economic Matter, Ways and Means—for a hearing. Bills that come out of committee get a Second Reading and can be voted on (unless the bill gets an unfavorable committee report, in which case it is likely dead). Regardless, bills must pass in both chambers with the same language and must then be signed by the Governor to make it into law. Bills that don’t make it through can always be reintroduced the next year.

Carol discussed two bills of particular interest to the VAC, one that was introduced last year that did not pass (tuition assistance for Maryland National Guard members) and one that passed but was not funded (the Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans). The VAC also mentioned interest in efforts to provide income tax relief for low income retired Veterans and tuition assistance for Veterans discharged prior to 2013. This year’s Veterans Caucus retreat is scheduled for November, at which time members will decide on priorities. Roger Wilson noted that Jan Gardner is developing her legislative package and is also looking for ideas. Rachel participated in the Veterans Caucus retreat two years ago, and one of the ideas on education was introduced in that year’s session. She and Fred Wood are meeting to discuss another idea for consideration. Carol emphasized that while the VAC cannot testify in support of a bill, individuals can.

Public Comment

Doug Silvern of Service Coordination, Inc. announced that his company will not be continuing its intensive case management program for Veterans in the absence of a significant and dedicated source of funding. The VAC expressed concern over the potential loss of this very important program.

Sub-committee Reports

Tri-fold: As requested, the tri-fold was modified to include a picture of the World War I monument in Memorial Park. It is currently in circulation and is being handed out whenever and wherever Linda Bergofsky attends meetings. Linda suggested that, going forward, the sub-committee may wish to consider other forms of outreach and communications to focus on as well. Carol Krimm asked that additional information be included about how homeless Veterans in Frederick County may access services.

Speakers: Linda Bergofsky confirmed that speakers for October will be Diana Modelski, Melissa Barber, and Julie Riggs. The November speaker will be Col. Lauren Barone. As of the date of the meeting, the Public Affairs Office at Ft. Detrick had not confirmed if it would be able to provide a speaker for the December meeting.

The Speakers subcommittee will be meeting on October 23 to plan for at least the first six months of 2020. There is significant interest in having an extended discussion about homelessness and housing insecurity as soon as possible. Carol Krimm suggested that we try and get the January meeting televised if homelessness will be the focus of our discussion.

Bylaws: There was no additional discussion.

New Business

Coordinator's Report: Linda Bergofsky gave the Coordinator's Report. In addition to facilitating the closed meeting, preparing the final draft by-laws, and revising the tri-fold, she attended a job fair at the Martinsburg VAMC where she met over 80 Veterans and their families.

She reminded everyone to check the VAC website for events and announcements.

Announcements

Fred Schumacher reminded the VAC about the Veterans Day proclamation scheduled for Tuesday October 29 at 11 AM in Winchester Hall.

Sharon Jacko announced that the United Way has received many requests from Veterans for home repairs on the Day of Service, October 4. United Way is in discussion with Home Depot to provide this type of support periodically throughout the year.

Adjournment

Upon completion of business the meeting was adjourned at 8:20 PM.

Next Meetings:

Regular monthly meeting: October 16 at 6:30 pm.

The meeting will be held in Winchester Hall, 3rd Floor Conference Room

Submitted by Linda Bergofsky

Approved