

Frederick County Veterans Advisory Council Minutes

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Attendance

Voting Members	Present	Absent	Excused
Deb Childers	X		
Sharon Jacko	X		
David Kaye	X		
Rachel Nachlas	X		
Fred Schumacher	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: Jay Hessler (for Andrea Walker), Teresa Spruill, Merna Pettit, Melissa Barber, Mallary Lass, Laurie Barone, Cassidy Koehler, Joyce Pratt, Lakshmi Darbha, Constance Baptist.

Staff: Linda Bergofsky

Welcome and Introductions

Fred Schumacher opened the meeting at 6:31 PM by leading the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Establishment of a quorum: After a review of attendance, Fred Schumacher determined that a quorum of voting members was present.

Approval of Meeting Agenda: David Kaye made a motion to approve the agenda as submitted. Rachel Nachlas seconded and the motion was approved unanimously.

Old Business

Approval of the meeting minutes from February 19, 2020: Rachel Nachlas made a motion to accept the minutes from the previous meeting as revised. Deb Childers seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Update on action items: Regarding the action items outstanding from the January meeting, Steve McKay noted that there was no update on the Veteran property tax credit law identified as problematic by a citizen. Councilmember McKay noted that he will have to obtain support from three other Council members in order to successfully alter the current legislation.

Linda Bergofsky noted that she attended the February Homeless Coalition meeting and was successful in obtaining Letters of Coordination for two projects under the VA Grant and Per Diem program —Building Veterans and Platoon 22. Although Building Veterans was unable to submit its grant application timely due to technical issues with the Federal acquisition system, both organizations are now on the radar of the Coalition and the Community Foundation. Additionally, the Homeless Coalition will consider adding a Veteran voice when it expands the current membership configuration. At the meeting, Linda learned that due to the complete turnover in leadership at the CAA, it unlikely to resubmit the Functional Zero application anytime in the near future. Regarding the action item from February, Linda drafted a letter on behalf of the VAC to County Executive Gardner alerting her to concerns raised regarding access under the Mission Act and in response to changes in DoD policy for accessing military clinics.

Summary of closed meeting and vote on recommended applicant: Fred Schumacher reported that the Nominating Committee of the VAC met in closed session on March 12 to discuss the qualifications of the four individuals who had submitted letters of interest to fill the vacancy. The Nominating Committee consists of Fred Schumacher, Sharon Jacko, and David Kaye. Two of four applicants also participated in a personal interview; one who was not available submitted responses in writing. Having a quorum, the members assessed all of the available information on each applicant and selected the top candidate using a forced choice rating. The top rated candidate was Wilfred Plumley, Jr. Fred emphasized that there are two more levels of review (County Executive and then the County Council). Deb Childers made a motion to forward the name of the recommended applicant to the County Executive. Sharon Jacko seconded and the motion was passed unanimously.

Chair's Comments: Fred Schumacher thanked Melissa Barber from Every-Mind for stepping in to support the VAC's first virtual meeting. He and Linda will continue to assess the best way to engage VAC members and citizens should another virtual meeting be required in the future.

Presentations:

- Some Background on Women in the Military and Women Veterans: Given that the staff of the VA Women's Health Program were not available to present, Linda Bergofsky provided a snapshot of women in the military and those that are treated within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Currently, there are approximately one-quarter million women in the military. For every 100 women that enlist, there are almost equal numbers joining the Army, Navy, and Air Force, with about 8% joining the Marines. The proportion of women who are officers is slightly higher than it is for men. However, women in the military are significantly more likely than men to be members of a racial or ethnic minority. Women also tend to be much younger on average and more highly educated.

Nationally, one out of every ten Veterans is a women. This proportion is expected to increase to almost one in five by 2040. Not unexpectedly, women Veterans are younger, better educated, and more racially diverse than their male counterparts. While women are a minority of patients served in VHA, their numbers are growing. Equally important, almost two-thirds of women VHA patients have a service connected disability rating. Each VA Medical Center is required to have a Women's Health Program Manager and provide comprehensive care for women to include primary

preventive care and treatment as well as gender-specific services. Linda shared contact information for Martinsburg's program as well as other resources for women Veterans.

The VAC discussed how the growing numbers of women in the military, especially in the officer corps, and including the first cadre of women serving in the infantry, have important implications for their needs and expectations once they leave the military and seek care within VA.

- Frederick County Commission for Women: Dr. Lakshmi Darbha, current President of the Frederick County Commission for Women, provided an overview of the organization, whose mission is "to create a stronger community by addressing challenges and fostering unlimited opportunities for all women". To that end, the CFW has a number of current programs aimed at supporting women through mentoring, training, outreach, advocacy, and referrals to services. One current focus is on assisting female led families, who are overrepresented among ALICE households, to improve financial stability by gaining life skills, education, and counseling. The CFW partners with other organizations including The Women's Center at FCC, Heartly House, The Human Relations Commission, The Asian American Center, United Way, and the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women. Through its participation in the state-wide Voices of Women listening tour, CFW learned that women in Frederick County lack knowledge of and existing services and resources. Both the female head of household and Voices of women projects include Veterans; Lakshmi would welcome additional Veteran representation on the CFW.

Former CFW President Constance Baptist, USAF, provided her perspective on women Veterans in the county. She reiterated that women are the fastest growing segment of the Veteran population and that Frederick County has a somewhat larger proportion of women Veterans compared to the US as a whole. Ms. Baptist observed that in many ways, men and women Veterans face the same challenges related to mental health, employment, housing and homelessness, and access to benefits and health care. Issues uniquely related to women Veterans reflect that they are less successful translating leadership skills learned in the military once they enter the civilian work world. Ms. Baptist's noted that women leaving the military have a higher rate of divorce and incur higher levels of debt; they also have lower civilian incomes.

There was considerable discussion about additional issues that women face in the military and as Veterans, including the consequences of military sexual trauma and repeated family separations. Additionally, women Veterans that are homeless are more likely to be caring for children. VAC members supported a unique approach to supporting women Veteran's that reflect their different experiences and needs.

Public Comment

- Teresa Spruill noted that she has received many requests from grocery stores for Veterans to fill temporary positions. These businesses need additional help stocking items that are in high demand as a result of the pandemic. Linda will share this information with Michelle Day.
- Mallery Lass noted that the Steven A. Cohen Clinic at Easterseals will continue to support Veterans through virtual counseling visits.
- Similarly, Melissa Barber stated that Serving Together's peer navigators are taking calls remotely.

New Business

Coordinator's Report: The formal coordinator's report will be submitted in writing as an addendum. Linda Bergofsky reported that that she was able to attend the 2nd annual Women Veterans Day sponsored by the Women's' Caucus of the Maryland General Assembly. Among the honorees were several surviving members of the 6888 Battalion who live in Prince Georges County. The 6888 was the only all-female, African-American battalion sent to Europe to work under combat conditions. They successfully managed postal operations in England and throughout the ETO.

COVID-19 Concerns: Several members expressed concern for how Veterans in Frederick County are faring given the current public health emergency and what the impact would be if the military were activated. Jay Hessler, representing the Frederick County Health Department, noted that locally we face shortages of raw materials and lab space for testing. Current guidance requires an individual to have a fever of 104 degrees to be eligible for a test. This is a rapidly changing situation and Linda will monitor for opportunities to support affected Veterans.

Announcements

Linda noted that many of the events that had been planned for March and April have been cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19. She will review the web site to make sure the events calendar is accurate and reflect any events that are now virtual.

The next meeting of the VAC will be held on Wednesday, April 15, 2020 at 6:30 pm, preceded at 5:00 PM with an Executive Committee meeting. The meeting focus will be on Veteran Service Organizations. We have the Zoom meeting platform if we need it; Linda will work with the Executive Committee to develop the agenda and a brief questionnaire/discussion guide for the VSOs. Invitations will go out at the end of March.

Action Items and Adjournment

January Action Items:

- Steve McKay will continue study of the tax credit issue.

February Action Items:

- Linda Bergofsky will submit the letter of concern to the County Executive.

March Action Item:

- Linda Bergofsky will submit the VAC's recommendation regarding the vacancy.

Upon completion of business the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

Submitted by Linda Bergofsky