

## Frederick County Veterans Advisory Council Minutes

Wednesday, December 23, 2020  
By Web Ex and Facebook Livestream

### Attendance

Voting Members	Present	Absent	Excused
Deb Childers	X		
Paul Hunter	X		
Sharon Jacko	X		
David Kaye	X		
Wilfred Plumley	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	X
Nan Mann	X		

Staff: Linda Bergofsky, Ingrid Nicolau

### Welcome and Introductions

Fred Schumacher led 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. Sharon Jacko seconded and the motion was approved unanimously.

### Old Business

Approval of the meeting minutes from November 18, 2020: Sharon Jacko made a motion to accept the minutes from the previous meeting as submitted. David Kaye seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Introduction of new member: The County Council approved our recommendation for the VAC vacancy and Paul Hunter is now a voting member.

Status of legislative proposal: Steve McKay has been working on language for the two legislative proposals Will brought to the VAC in September. These proposals will be discussed under New Business.

2021 Meeting calendar: Linda has developed agendas for the first 3 months of 2021 and suggested the VAC approach the remainder of the meetings incrementally. This will also be discussed under New Business.

**Chair's Comments:** Fred Schumacher acknowledged the new food distribution application developed by the County. Linda provided some background on how the app was designed and how the same GIS technology could be deployed for COVID-19 vaccine distribution. She invited the VAC to offer other ideas for using the technology. Fred also officially welcomed Paul Hunter to the VAC.

## **New Business**

Nomination of officers for 2021: Fred Schumacher announced that he would be stepping down as Chair of the VAC. Linda mentioned that there are no prohibitions in the enabling legislation or the bylaws that would prohibit a non-voting member from serving as a member of the Executive Committee. When Fred opened the floor for nominations, Sharon Jacko offered that she would be honored to step in as Chair and David Kaye offered himself as Vice Chair. The VAC discussed whether the current structure of the VAC with a Chair and two Vice Chairs should be retained. It was the feeling of the Council that the structure was helpful and necessary as the VAC was just beginning its work but is no longer necessary; moreover, it is not required in the bylaws. Fred Schumacher indicated that he would like to stay involved and is willing to serve as the third member of the Nominating Committee. Members of the VAC expressed gratitude to Fred for his service. Elections will be held at the January meeting.

Year in review: Linda asked the members to reflect back on the work of the VAC over the past year. The discussion touched on the need to get more engagement and participation from members of the Veteran community in our meetings. Some topics generated considerable interest last year and going forward, the VAC should continue to tackle topics that are important to Veterans in the community. However, other members noted that this last year may not be ideal for gauging community interest because of our reliance on Zoom and Web Ex as meeting platforms. That said, the VAC should still explore bringing meetings to the community (as was planned for 2020). Linda noted that the VAC may wish to revisit the bylaws to include VSOs as ex-officio members as a way of ensuring their buy-in and involvement.

The discussion also touched on the importance of inviting speakers who can address the issues we identify, as was the case in the November meeting when we discussed Frederick County's need for HUD-VASH vouchers with the chair of the Maryland Veterans Commission. Another suggestion related to having the VAC identify in advance of every meeting specific requests and expectations for the speakers to react to, such as reduced fees for Veterans who are using Frederick County Recreation or YMCA programs. The VAC also supported the idea of planning the meeting topics on an incremental basis.

Legislative proposals: Steve McKay reviewed the two pieces of legislation that are in draft form, beginning with a brief overview of how legislation is developed and proposed in the County. The first bill provides property tax credits for elderly individuals and retired military. This law, which is enabled by the State, is already in force with an income needs test and a threshold value of the affected property. However, the state law did not include an income needs test. Steve noted that no retired military have taken advantage of the property tax credit under the current law. The version that Steve

plans on proposing would modify the law to eliminate the income needs test and to increase the value of the threshold, on the premise that the law is intended to explicitly express gratitude for military service and encourage retired military to live in the County, regardless of their income. He also shared his strategy for garnering support with other Council members, given the fiscal challenges the County is facing. Members of the VAC discussed additional points that Steve could use to make the case for changing the law, whether widows of retired military are also included, how other counties are dealing with this issue, and the magnitude of the impact. Steve indicated that there is no common framework for the legislation in other jurisdictions. He also mentioned that there are no hard data to prepare good estimates of the number of retired military who would be affected and so the fiscal note will likely overstate the impact. Some VAC members mentioned that they may be able to obtain data.

Steve noted the second piece of legislation related to disabled Veterans has the chance for a more productive discussion because he already has another Council member interested in co-sponsoring. This bill is also likely to generate a fiscal note with high estimates. Similar to the first proposal, this proposal is modeled on language from the State, with some variations, and provides for property tax relief for Veterans with a VA disability rating of 50% to 99% (Veterans with 100% disability are already exempt). The tax credit is good for five years. The VAC offered contacts and information to help bring a face to disabled Veterans and exemplars, as well as some other ideas for refining the proposal.

#### **Public Comment**

- No public comments were submitted through the designated public input portal

#### **Announcements**

Linda discussed the planned topics for February (Veterans in Schools program) and March (Opportunities to assist Veterans through grants).

Linda mentioned the list of financial resources prepared by the State of Maryland and which is on our website. She also shared information on the “Ask the Question” campaign to encourage service providers to ask all clients about their military service. Linda again encouraged the VAC and others to check out all of the programming being offered through the Steven A. Cohen clinic and the Saratoga War Horse equine therapy program. The Calendar of Events and News page on the VAC website provides details on all of these programs, along with links to register.

The next meeting of the VAC will be held on Wednesday, January 20, 2021 at 6:30 pm. We will be electing officers and addressing the issue of Veteran recreation and wellness with speakers from County Parks and Recreation, Team Red, White, and Blue, and the YMCA.

#### **Action Items and Adjournment**

##### Action Items:

1. Linda will send out the agenda for January and ask for specific questions or requests members have for the speakers, so that they can be collated and shared in advance of the meeting.

2. Will and Paul will investigate if they can access data on retired military in the County that Steve could use in the preparing the legislation. Linda will share her contact for the Disabled American Veterans service officer.

Sharon made a motion to adjourn the meeting and wished everyone a Happy New Year; the motion was seconded by Will and was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:38 PM.

Submitted by Linda Bergofsky

Approved