

# Kent County Veterans Services

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## VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

February 5, 2015 – 8:30 a.m.

82 Ionia NW, STE 380

### MINUTES

**Present:** Mary Johnson, Paul Potter, Fred Chambers, Harold Mast, Mel Bauman, Carrie Roy, Richard Goodrich, Wayman Britt

**Guests:** Theresa Robinson, George Robinson, Bob Cransma, Elena Bridges, Simeon Switzer

#### **Absent:**

- 1. Call to Order** – Paul Potter called the meeting to order and lead the in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- 2. Public Comment:** Elena Bridges talked about the transportation that’s currently happening and for the board to develop a transportation service for our Kent County Veterans. Elena will provide more information with a pros and cons packet for each option. Paul responded stating that he would like the board to review it and take action in form of a study committee.
- 3. Approval of Agenda/Minutes:** Approve minutes of Jan 8. Everyone approved. Minutes approved.

#### **Report of Chair:**

**Status Updates:** Departmental name change discussion and manager’s report. Carrie stated she stopped by the new building at 836 Fuller. The move in date should still be either the first or second week in March, 2015. Grand opening will be on March 26, 2015. From 10:30A.M – 11:00A.M, there will be a proclamation from the board of commissioners and the open house will be from 11:00A.M-1:00P.M.

**AmeriCorps Personnel:** Carrie emailed the updated MOU to Scott and has not heard back from him. Carrie also included the copy of the MOU. Corporate wanted to change a few things in their MOU for our protection, if everything was agreeable.

**Project Outreach:** Paul emphasized on the importance of making sure that Veterans are more aware of the resources that are being provided for them. He also stated that the process on this outreach needs to be clearer. He mentioned the need for a timeline and a well thought out plan for a controlled rollout to lessen the possibility of being overwhelmed. The committee needs to decide if they are changing the name of the Kent County Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Project Veterans Education and Training Grant:** Paul stated that the team has wrapped everything up and is ready to present. Simeon Switzer had met with the committee in Paul Potter's absence. Simeon had met with the Community College, Davenport, and Grand Valley State to collect information. Simeon emphasized the importance of making sure that the documentation is done correctly once the scholarships are handed in. Carrie asked Simeon how we would ensure the effectiveness of the scholarship and that it was being used for schooling purposes. Simeon responded that it was an issue that he had thought about and he would defer that to the committee. Harold stated that he will vote against the scholarship, due to the new three year plan that is coming into play and his concerns for the budget. Harold stated that the committee's concern for veterans should be more focused on their need for housing and healthcare and that the GI Bill is enough for college students. Paul stated that there would be a yearly review of how the veteran used the scholarship; schooling, bills, personal, etc. Then an evaluation would follow. It was suggested that Simeon and/or Paul meet with the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency on this issue to get their input. Carrie stated she will be meeting with the MVAA and will ask for input on the scholarship program. Mary motioned that the discussion on the scholarship be tabled until Carrie meets with the MVAA later that afternoon. Motion passed.

**Strategic Plan:** Paul mentioned the thought of combining Carrie's goals and objectives and the three year strategic plan into one document. Carrie mentioned that there were 4,704 customer service surveys sent out in the mail on February 04, 2015. The goal was for these surveys to determine our time to resolve a veteran's issue, what the veteran's think of our service delivery, and are our veteran's willing to refer a family member or friend to the Veterans Affairs for services. These surveys will be a part of the Performance Measure Process and will help to establish a baseline measurement. Paul stated that he would like the strategic plan team to get back to him by the 15<sup>th</sup> of February with at least a process identification and a timeline.

**Operational Guidelines:** Everyone reviewed the copy of the Operational Guidelines that Paul had passed out during the last meeting. Carrie mentioned that there were a few changes since 2008 when the Guidelines were put together. Carrie mentioned that it's not the Veterans' Affairs Committee's responsibility to audit Trust Fund Folders, it's the State's responsibility. Paul mentioned that it was referring to more of a procedural or in house audit to meet the State's criteria, not a financial audit. Paul moved to appoint Harold to take care of the operation issues. Motion seconded by Mel. Motion passed.

**SSRF Operational Guidelines:** Carrie provided a clean copy of the Soldiers and Sailors Relief Fund. The policy is back down to one day of active duty for purposes other than training. The policy is open to funding, meaning there isn't a limit of how many time a veteran may use the SSRF and there is no limitation as to what type of assistance the veteran can apply for. The policy, however, clearly states that the funding is meant to elevate financial hardship situations and is to be used in an effective manor promoting self-reliance and sustainability. The

VSO can approve up to \$750, the Manager can approve up to \$1,500, and anything over \$1,500 for emergency needs to be approved by the Manager, the Chair or secretary, and one other committee member. Paul motioned to approve the SSRF. Fred seconded the motion. Motion approved.

**Veteran Transitional Housing:** Paul mentioned that he and Carrie were brainstorming ways to make programs more cost effective and how to improve quality. Carrie mentioned the increasing need for Transitional Housing. She mentioned the idea of renting a duplex for one year to help with those families and to cut down the cost of housing expenses. Paul mentioned that there needs to be an assessment on the need, the cost, and a willing landlord. Paul appointed Fred and Mary to work with Carrie on this assessment and to report back next month.

4. **Staff Report:** Carrie stated that we have 96.85% left in our budget. In the month of January, the Internal Support Line Item was \$9,916. Carrie put together a one page summary report. The VA filed 37 fully developed claims for the month of January, we expended \$1,800 on burials and we didn't have to reimburse any markers, the Trust Fund approved \$5,427, in the SSRF we expended \$8,477, and new VA monthly awards was \$20,742. Paul suggested having a comparison to where we are now from the year before.
5. **Around the Table:** Harold asked how incarcerated veterans qualify for VA benefits or if we are reaching out to these veterans. Rich Goodrich explained that the VA has a Veterans Justice Outreach person who goes to the jails and works with these veterans. The veterans can get up to 10% while they are incarcerated. Harold asked if some of the cost for incarcerating veterans could be covered by the VA and in return, reduce the county cost. Carrie stated that medical costs might be able to be covered if they qualify for VA healthcare.
7. **Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 9:32 a.m.
8. **Next Meeting:** March 5, 2015.