



## Veterans Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Date/Time/Location:** February 13, 2023 – 10:00 a.m.  
Hybrid Zoom Meeting – WCHD, Girard St & Zoom

**Committee Members Present:** Paul Pelot, Robert Wilson, Allan Jensen, Lynne Graham, Christopher Brown, Wes Weston, Richard Conoboy, Andrea Vance

**Committee Members Absent:** Joseph Shepherd

**Staff/Guests:** Liz Witowski, Whatcom County Health Department  
Chelsea McGlothan, Whatcom County Health Department  
Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health Department  
Amanda Burnett, Whatcom County Health Department  
Melissa Nyberg, Whatcom Homeless Service Center  
Cori Bryant, Opportunity Council  
Chuck Messinger, Opportunity Council

Agenda Item	Discussion
1. Call to order	Meeting called to order by Lynne Graham.
2. Roll Call	A quorum was present.
3. New Business Review/Approval of December 2022 Minutes	Al Jensen moved to approve the August meeting minutes. Andrea Vance seconded the motion. The board voted and the motion passed. <b>Aye: 6, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0</b>
Open Public Comment	There was no public comment.
4. Reports & Discussion	<p><b>i. Raising the Income Guidelines for Veterans Assistance Funds Discussion</b></p> <p>Liz stated a link to the <a href="#">ACS</a>, which is the Census data from 2021, was emailed out to members. There was a question last board meeting of how many folks could expand the income lid from 60% AMI to 80% AMI served. Liz stated census can't help us with that because it tracks who's at poverty level and who is not. Liz shared the Census data and discussed the charts.</p> <p>Chris notes the margin of error from the charts. Liz stated due to the margins of error being so huge, she's unsure if the data is useable. She stated she wanted to share the data to see if the income guidelines should be raised.</p>

Al commented on the number of people noted that have no disability. Liz stated that is State disability not VA disability.

Liz shared and discussed the [Veteran's Relief Fund 2023 Budget](#) draft. Chris asked if the Law Advocates contract is expected to be \$40,000? Liz stated it is expected to be less than \$10,000. Chris asked where the \$30,000 from TBD comes from. Liz stated they have to biannually submit their budget to County Council and they set aside \$230,000 in contract dollars, but they do not think they will spend that amount. Ann stated with the approval they received last week that was switching the contractual to personnel costs. Ann stated this current budget looks like an older budget as things have been switched around a little. Liz stated part of that \$40,000 and part of the contractual budget will be rolled up into personnel costs. Chris asked for clarification on the financial assistance line item. Liz stated it's the direct assistance that comes from the Health Department office for Veterans. Liz stated once the Business Offices closes the books for 2022, they will be able to provide a breakdown of what was spent last year and what is budgeted for this year to see the flow of money.

Chris commented at the start of the Veterans Advisory Board the only use of the funds was for the financial assistance. States it is interesting to see how things have changed over time and how much more is being paid on payroll and contracts than what is available for financial assistance. Chris asked if anyone has any feelings about that? Wes stated what does the \$231,000 buy, number of customers served, cases resolved. He stated it is a valid question when you have a cash outlay and want to know what the results are. Liz clarified the Whatcom Service Homeless Center line item of \$76,500 is financial assistance to veterans, not paying for staff which is in addition to the \$75,000 line item above. Ann stated there has been a drop in the need of financial assistance due to having staff to get people to a point where they can be financially independent.

Chris asked for more data to show how long the funds would last for. Paul asked what kind of funds are we still authorized to provide? Liz stated they cover mortgages, rent, childcare, some doctor and dental bills, and utilities under the temporary financial assistance. Chuck stated they've been utilizing some alternative resources to help pay for gas cards and bus passes.

Liz asked the board if they want to continue the discussion about raising the AMI or table it? Paul asked how can we more easily assist veterans? Liz stated raising the AMI from 60% to 80% would make jobs easier. Chuck stated it would better utilize the fund and that Opportunity Council has some ideas for how to better utilize the funds moving forward. Paul stated he would like to vote in favor of what will help the board and the community serve the veterans of Whatcom county more efficiently. Chris stated data was requested to determine how much more money would be spent if they did raise the AMI. Liz stated the data isn't available to show how many more veterans would qualify if the AMI was raised to 80%. Chris asked if Opportunity Council can estimate how many more veterans might need that level of funding. Chuck stated they haven't seen a lot of people over the 80% threshold. Liz asked Melissa what the verbiage says in the VAF contract, 60% of AMI or per RCW. Melissa stated it only says per RCW. Liz suggested rather than Opportunity Council using the 60% of AMI, use category C of the RCW? Ann stated she would like to see a more parameters that are spelled out for Opportunity Council and look at things on a case by case basis and have conversations if needed. Chuck stated that works for Opportunity Council.

Liz stated keep contract as it is per RCW 73 and if there's a client they'd like to serve whose over 60% AMI, send the County an email for further discussion. Wes asked if this is monthly, annual, perpetual, a reapplication each year? How do they account for the funding? Liz stated it is about \$3,000 per veteran and the board voted to raise that to \$6,000 during COVID. The RCW states it is temporary assistance but does not spell out what temporary means. Chuck stated the question is what do we do moving forward? Wes asked are we out of the pandemic or still in at a mark where housing is unaffordable?



	<p>Chuck argued that if the cost of housing is a factor, that should be considered first and foremost. Ann stated it's temporary and the case manager works with them to figure out how to get their income up. She stated we are not out of the pandemic. She envisions it to still be temporary, maybe looking at a cap or limit and case managers show evidence they are working with clients along the way. Chuck stated there's a possibility of utilizing the funds in conjunction with another fund they have.</p> <p>Chuck stated another factor is the HUD-VASH team is in the process of getting new staff set up in the county so they can start accessing some of the subsidies that are available through the Housing Authority. Lynne asked if there's enough flexibility available that we don't need the board to vote on changing the AMI? Liz stated that is correct.</p> <p><b>ii. Updates from staff: New County Veterans Specialist position</b> Liz discussed the new county Veterans Specialist position and stated it has been approved by County Council and they are in the process of finalizing the job description. This new position will be located at the Vet Center. Allan asked what the timeline is for that position. Ann stated hopefully in the next few months they will be onboarding. Paul asked if a degree is required. Liz stated it is either a masters degree or bachelors with 5 years' experience. Andrea asked what the salary range is. Liz stated she is unsure but believes it starts around \$66,000.</p> <p>Cori discussed what her work has been with Opportunity Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with veterans in the county through Opportunity Council and other various groups</li> <li>• Getting them into housing through SSVF or the CRC program</li> <li>• Helping them complete health care applications – eye, dental, mental health</li> <li>• Getting them to WorkSource if they're looking for employment</li> <li>• Get welcome home kits</li> <li>• Website login issues, VIC cards, my healthy vet access</li> <li>• VSO to get pensions or benefits</li> <li>• Assisting with medical mis-billing</li> <li>• HUD-VASH veterans bus passes</li> <li>• Obtaining gas cards</li> <li>• Other miscellaneous requests</li> </ul> <p>Liz stated when she receives calls for assistance and it is not something she can help with, she can send them to Cori. Chuck stated Cori has been phenomenal with seeking out donations for clients. Chuck stated Cori will start spending one day a week at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center as well as working with the landlord liaison to properly educate property managers in the area.</p>
<p><b>5. Good of the Order</b></p>	<p>Melissa shared the Federal Standards with SSVF program are being changed. As of May 11, 2023, the President is removing the Stafford Act. Meaning we will be returning to timelines for rental assistance. Chuck stated they currently serve about 50 veteran households that will be affected.</p> <p>Paul shared a list of companies who will be hiring recently and the job fair that will be happening at Skagit Valley College in the Northwest Career &amp; Technical Center March 14, 2023 from 2:30-6pm.</p>
<p><b>6. Next Meeting</b></p>	<p>The next meeting will be held Monday, April 10, 2023 – hybrid.</p>
<p><b>7. Adjourned</b></p>	<p>Wes motioned to adjourn. Richard seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:12 a.m.</p>