



Veterans Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date/Time/Location: October 12th, 2020 / 10:00 a.m. / Virtual GoToMeeting
 Committee Members Present: Allan Jensen, John Mitchell, Lynne Graham, Paul Pelot, Richard Conoboy, Wes Weston, Andrea Vance, Anne Deacon
 Committee Members Absent:
 Whatcom Co. Health Dept. Staff/Guests: Ann Beck, Ashley Geleyense, Liz Harmon-Craig / Amy Martin

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action/Who
1. Call to order	Meeting called to order by Chair Lynne Graham	<i>Lynne</i>
2. Roll Call	Roll call, quorum present. Amy Martin was introduced as the SSVF Specialist for the Opportunity Council. Amy helps Veterans get in contact with an accredited agent, help sign up for Veterans Affairs healthcare, and other Veterans Affairs services.	<i>All</i>
3. Review/Approval February 2020 minutes	Minutes of February 10, 2020 reviewed. John motioned that the minutes be approved as presented. Allan seconded the motion. A vote was held and the motion passed.	Motion: To approve February 2020 minutes as presented. Aye: 9, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0, Absent: 0
4. Selection of VAB nominating committee for recommendations on filling 2 vacant positions	Robert Hines and Ward Nelson both stepped down from the board, so there are currently two vacancies. The County has received five applications for the vacancies, and it is County policy that applications are not reviewed in the open forum in respect to the applicants. Liz called for two current board members to meet at a later date to go over applications and make the selections to fill the two vacancies. Liz with follow up with the committee in the near future with applications. Lynne Graham, Richard Conoboy, and Wes Weston volunteered to serve on the committee to select the two new members of the board. Allan motioned that Lynne, Richard, and Wes serve as the nominating	<i>Liz</i>



	committee. Paul seconded the motion. A vote was held and the motion passed.	Motion: Lynne, Richard, and Wes to serve as nominating committee. Aye: 9, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0, Absent: 0
<p>5. Reports/Discussion</p> <p>a. VA Virtual Experience Action Center – Bob Mortenson, VA Seattle</p> <p>b. COVID trends seen by the County</p>	<p>Today is a federal holiday so the VA is closed. They want to come back to the meeting in December.</p> <p>What Liz saw at the County level in the spring has changed as the year has gone on. At first, the County’s Veterans Service Organizations work was with younger and recent vets because a lot of these veterans suddenly had time on their hands by working from home. As the year has progressed, claims are being filed because veterans need income because of job and stipend loss. Most of the work is being done by email or over the phone. Liz has found that completing claims virtually is more efficient, but has also met with people outside at the Health Department when the weather is nice. We are not sure what that will look like when the winter weather starts.</p> <p>We are not seeing our regular clientele of folks requesting assistance with rent payments, perhaps because of the eviction moratorium. We are mostly working with small business owners, which is a group who usually would not need this support. We are using a mix of Veterans Assistance Funds and CARES Act dollars where applicable to meet this need. Liz’s concern is that when COVID is resolved, there will be an influx of requests for rental assistance, as we are still getting requests for utility payments. Amy shared that Opportunity Council also anticipates a wave of need once COVID funding and the eviction moratorium ends. A monthly request is around \$2,500, and the County has provided assistance up to three months if the need could be well documented. We are not spending down our Veterans Assistance Funds right now, partly because our contractors are not carrying out contract work.</p> <p>Anne suggested that this committee take a vote to approve expanded benefits in terms of length of time and upper dollar amount in case we get push back from somewhere in the department or the County. The board discussed the possibility of expanding benefits for Veterans. The Veterans</p>	<p>Liz</p> <p>Liz</p>



<p>c. VAB Members report on trends in their respective part of the veterans world during COVID</p>	<p>Assistance Funds balance is currently over \$800k which is \$300k more than normal. Through the CARES Act, we have about \$400k that we have to offer to the community for rental and mortgage assistance only for up to three months per household. Applications must be processed by November 30th, but rent/mortgage payments can be paid through the end of December. The Veterans fund does not have that deadline. If planned out, assistance can be distributed over a longer period of time between the two different funds. The County is currently serving 6-8 households per month, and Liz said we could afford to assist those Veteran households with \$20,000 over ten months.</p> <p>A couple members would like to see the numbers drawn out at the next meeting before taking a final vote. Allan likes the idea of a stop gap to cover some additional funding until we can get the exact funding since we are going into the winter months. Lynne and John suggested being prepared for the clientele who will seek assistance after the moratorium ends.</p> <p>The board will plan to have a special meeting on November 9th to review and vote on an estimated budget for Veterans assistance. We will also look at what we think might happen if we expand the eligibility above 60%. If the nominating committee has met by then, they can also bring forward the two nominees.</p> <p>Wes motioned to support the Health Department to expand benefit assistance parameters of the veteran's advisory fund. Richard seconded the motion. A vote was held and the motion passed.</p> <p>The County has not been invoiced for contracts with Law Advocates and Veteran Volunteer Transportation since the first quarter of the year due to not being able to conduct services because of COVID.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> From the Employment Security Department (ESD) perspective, still seeing a lot of assistance covering unemployment benefits. ESD has waved job search requirements until November 9th, so there might be an influx of people who are scrambling for jobs. 	<p>Motion: Support of the Health Dept. to expand benefit assistance parameters. Aye: 9, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0, Absent: 0</p> <p><i>Paul</i></p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Vet Center hasn't seen much of a change or increase in clients since COVID started. Individuals and groups are continuing to meet by phone, and new clients are being taken at a normal rate. • From a private practice perspective, people with PTSD are struggling more than usual, and seeing more folks admitted to inpatient mental health and substance use treatment. • The Post is seeing more people for claims. • For students, courses have been cut down, so financial aid for housing has been affected. 10-15% of veteran students have not come back possibly due to economic impacts. There's a higher rate of veterans that aren't adapting well to 100% virtual classes. The Foundation came up with some extra grant money that has gone to assist veterans with housing. More students will be attending in person classes going into winter quarter. Enrollment is down by about 18% as opposed to about 26% previously. If on-location classes are offered and the veteran chooses not to take the on-location class courses then they get paid that the virtual less rate, but if the university has chosen not to offer on location classes, then the veteran collects the full BAH as before. 	<p><i>Lynne</i></p> <p><i>Andrea</i></p> <p><i>Allan</i></p>
<p>5. Good of the Order</p>	<p>Allan asked if the board could send a thank you to departing members Ward and Robert for everything they've done to help veterans over the years. The Health Department typically gives certificates to people for their service on the board.</p>	<p>Allan</p>
<p>6. Next Meeting</p>	<p>The next meeting will be held Monday November 9th, 2020 on GoToMeeting.</p>	<p>Lynne</p>
<p>7. Adjourned</p>	<p>The meeting was adjourned.</p>	<p>Lynne</p>