

**Veterans Service Commission
Of Hamilton County
September 23, 2024**

Meeting called to order at 10:00 am September 23, 2024, by Commission President Jean Wilson

Pledge of Allegiance led by President Jean Wilson.

Attendance Roll Call taken:

Commissioners: Mr. Headen - present, Mr. Rowland - excused, Mr. Staniford - present, Mr. Watson - present, and Mrs. Wilson present
Executive Director, Orlando Sonza, Executive Assistant, Pam Minser

Guests: Suzette Heller from Save A Warrior, Charles Norton and Willard Scott Veterans members of DAV Chapter 115.

Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda as presented was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Headen.

Discussion, hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Headen– yes, Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Mrs. Wilson – yes.

Unanimous vote – Motion carries

Presentations and Announcements:

Suzette Heller of Save-A-Warrior gave a presentation on the Save-A-Warrior project.

Video of presentation is available online

Open Forum:

Minutes:

A motion to approve minutes from September 9, 2024 as published was made by Mr. Staniford, duly seconded by Mr. Headen.

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Headen– yes, Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Mrs. Wilson – yes.

Unanimous vote – Motion carries

Old business:

2025 budget update was given by Mr. Sonza. Budget presented to the BoCC. Prior to the presentation Mr. Sonza had the opportunity to meet with Vice President Commissioner Driehaus and President of the board Commissioner Reece. Since presentations were limited in time Mr. Sonza wanted to give a briefing of the budget to each of the Commissioners to give them the opportunity to ask any

questions on the VSC budget. Commissioner Summerow Dumas was contacted, a meeting request was made on a couple of occasions.

Mr. Sonza stated that Vice President Driehaus doesn't really feel the need to appoint more Commissioners to the VSC board. Commissioner President Reece has not made up her mind at this time and will not decide until December. Commissioner Summerow Dumas unsure of where she stands on the issue.

Mr. Sonza to elaborate on the fact appointing 6 more board members to the VSC would be about the cost of a wheelchair accessible van that VSC is looking to purchase in 2025 or could take away some of the funding for another Veterans' program the VSC is looking to put into place in 2025, especially if the move to the Bond Hill location is all locked in.

Van(s):

Mr. Sonza updated the board informing them that the bids for the vans are starting to come in. The vans will be wheelchair accessible. Just for clarity the vans are not to replace metro or metro access this is to supplement those that are not on the bus line or who cannot take the bus for reasons like PTSD. Also, we are waiting on confirmation from Metro on how far Access will go to pick up veterans for the VA medical appointments. The initial understanding was that Access would pick up for veterans any where for there appointments even if outside of the bus line. This was also Commissioner Vice President Driehaus's understand. Her office is reaching out for clarification.

We have provided all of you with one of the quotes for a van, not requesting a vote we are still on more quotes to come in. This is just to give you an idea on what we are looking at and about the price range would be for purchasing vans.

Mr. Watson had a question about the training of drivers and qualifications that would be needed for the drivers. Also, had questions about insurance needed. Mr. Sonza stated that as we move forward with the purchase of the vans the costs affiliated with the training, insurance, wrapping and special equipment needed has been included in the 2025 budget.

New Business

Franklin County Veterans Service Commission visit:

Mr. Sonza gave a briefing on his visit to the FCVSC office.

- He shared that Franklin County gives gift cards to the applicants instead of a check. Gift cards are for use at Aldi stores restricts are made to the cards so items like alcohol cannot be purchased with the gift cards. They have a vault to keep the gift cards secured.
- Vans are not used in Franklin County; they use a variety of taxi services to transport veterans to and from the VA medical appointments.
- For financial assistance they have implemented into their policy a 250% below federal poverty in the decision-making process of financial applications. Mr. Sonza asks that we implement this into the new financial assistance guidelines currently being updated and being reviewed by the Prosecutors office.
- They file 1000 claims a month, most of them being Intent to File claims.
- They currently of 33 employees working at the FCVSC to assist 66,000 plus veterans in their county. Currently the claim work and financial assistance at the HCVSC is increasing and more staff will be needed to keep up with the work coming in, the move to Bond Hill will help with getting more employees to be able continue Outreach Events, Medical Transportation, VA claim work compensation/pension/education/VA home loans, financial assistance and the other programs that are being implemented in 2025.

Financial Literacy program:

Mr. Sonza stated when I came on board one of the things I wanted to spearhead was a financial literacy program. We have the ball rolling, we had a presentation here from a strong member of the veterans community Ashok Ghildyal who specializes in VA Home Loans has looked to see if he could assemble a team through his network to teach financial classes here at the VSC once a month, this would include a banker, financial advisor, and a realtor a group of volunteers to come into the office one hour a month to teach a financial class to help Veterans build and fix their credit, get a VA Home Loan, teach smart financial decision making and smart investment. Once dates are established, we will implement a sign-up sheet for our veterans.

Remote Access:

Equipment and software are in the Terminal Remote Access is being set up, once that is complete, the laptops will be imaged and ready for remote working. This should be all complete within the next couple of weeks.

Sycamore Township Letter: (Attached)

Mr. Sonza shared this letter with all the board members. The letter is to thank the VSC of Hamilton County for their donation to the Sycamore Veterans Memorial.

Public Radio Advertising:

This proposal is for advertising in 2025 so this will be tabled until December or January.

Bond Hill Move:

Mr. Sonza – Bond Hill move is going forward if there is no hiccups during the 60 day due diligence period. A meeting with all the departments heads will be held on September 25, 2024 he will keep the board posted, Mr. Sonza is also working with the County Administrator Jeff Aluotto to schedule a tour of the new facility for the staff.

Retention Records:

The retention records schedule was approved by the BoCC, waiting for the Historical Records Society to sign off on the schedule, once that is done the scanning will begin. Trying to eliminate the non-essential records as soon as possible in preparation for the move.

Outreach Events:

Tuesday 9/24 the Healthy Aging Event at Word of Deliverance Church in Forest Park,

Wednesday 9/25/2024 Welcome Home Veterans Event in Blue Ash

Tuesday 10/1/2024 & Wednesday 10/2/2024 Easter seals Outreach Grand opening of their new center

Friday 10/4/2024 Homeless Stand Down at DAV Headquarters

Amber, Pam and I others from AUSA, Cheryl Floyd, Todd Sledge and several others had a meeting discussing the next Veterans Appreciation event in 2025. Appears we may be partnering with AUSA which is a non-profit organization any donors would go through AUSA. This joint effort could make this an even bigger event they have many contacts and connections already established as well

Challenge Coins:

Proofs of two different challenge coins were presented to the board one with color on both sides and one color on only one side of the coin.

A motion was made to order the challenge coin with two-sided coloring was made by Mr. Staniford, duly seconded by Mr. Headen.

Discussion, hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Headen – yes, Mr. Staniford- yes, Mr. Watson – yes, and Mrs. Wilson – yes.

Unanimous vote – motion carries

Commissioners Reports:

Commissioner Headen stated that he will have something for the next meeting he is waiting to get more information before he presents this to the rest of the board.

Commissioner Watson had questions about the retention schedule, requested a copy of. Mr. Sonza gave clarification of what is a permanent record which can be maintained electronically or paper form. Documents like a DD214, marriage license, identification would be considered a permanent record. Applications and supporting documents will only need to be kept for 3 years.

Commissioner Staniford has a meeting with Ohio representatives to discuss 5901 and the ability 5901 gives the BoCC to appoint more Commissioners to the board because the VSC budget request for 2025. Ohio representatives are a little concerned because the last time this was done, it did not go very well.

Commissioner Staniford requested to add a proposal for Save A Warrior to the agenda, motion does for lack of a seconded

Discussion, Mr. Headen feels this should be tabled to next months meeting. Commissioner Wilson asks this to be on next month's agenda to consider a proposal to sponsor veterans for the Save A Warrior Program.

Next Meeting:

The next board meeting will be held on Wednesday 10/9/2024 at 10:00am.

Motion to Adjourn was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Watson

Discussion, hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Headen – yes, Mr. Staniford- yes, Mr. Watson – yes, and Mrs. Wilson – yes.

Unanimous vote – motion carries

The meeting adjourned at 12:28pm.

Minutes approved by:

President Jean Wilson

Vice-President, Richard Headen

Secretary, Steven Staniford

Member, Lee Watson