

**VETERANS SERVICE COMMISSION
OF HAMILTON COUNTY
December 18, 2024
BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

Pledge of Allegiance: Led by Commission President Jean Wilson

Meeting called to order at 10:06am

Roll Call:

Mr. Headen - present, Mr. Rowland – present, Mr. Staniford – present, Mr. Watson – present,
Mrs. Wilson – present

Staff & Guests:

Mr. Sonza, Ms. Minser, and Mr. Gronefeld – Staff
Mr. Munas – Hamilton County Prosecutors Office
Chris Green – Veteran Volunteer with Colerain Veterans Memorial
Ben Rosenfeld – Dyadic Dynamics

Meeting Agenda 12/14/2024:

Motion to approve meeting agenda made by Mr. Staniford, duly seconded by Mr. Headen

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

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

Unanimous vote: Agenda approved

Executive Session:

Motion to enter Executive Session:

To review emergency financial assistance applications for the period of 11/1/2024 through 11/30/2024, pursuant to ORC 121.22(J) and 5901.09 Mr. Sonza ask to add Jim Gronefeld the Financial Assistance manager be allowed to be present during any financial assistance reviews in Executive Session, the motion was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland.

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

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

Unanimous vote: Motion passes to enter Executive Session

Open to public forum

Meeting Minutes November 25, 2024:

Motion to approve November 25, 2024, VSC board meeting minutes, made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland.

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Headen-yes, Mr. Rowland – yes, Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Mrs. Wilson – abstain

Majority of vote: November 25, 2024 meeting minutes approved.

Financial Assistance Applications:

Motion to approve the financial assistance reports made by Mr. Watson, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland.

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

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

Unanimous vote: motion passes to approve financial assistance reports

Presentations/Announcements

None

Open forum:

Discussion on posting job opening for the VSC to Indeed, Ohio Means Jobs state site, and the Hamilton County BoCC website. Director Sonza stated that he will task these out and get them taken care of.

Mr. Watson had a question about clocking in and clocking out through Paycor. A follow up will be done with HR.

Old Business:

Colerain Food Drive: Chris Green

Mr. Green shared with the VSC Operation Surprise a Veterans Family for Christmas.

Nominations are made in the community and 12 veterans are selected. **A list of the items that are given to these 12 families is attached to the minutes.** A request for a donation to help with the cost of Operation Surprise a Veterans Family for Christmas. Mr. Sonza explained that currently we are unable to request funding at this time. He asked Mr. Green if the sponsorship would be able to be considered for payment in 2025. Mr. Green stated that it would be a great deal of help. Mr. Sonza explained the sponsorship process. A motion was made for \$3,000.00 for the Operation Surprise a Veteran's Family for Christmas to be payable in 2025, by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Staniford.

Discussion:

Mr. Green invited members of the staff and board of the Hamilton County Veterans Service Commission to be interviewed beginning at 5:00am on Friday 12-20-2024 and distributed items to the families will begin at 8:00am on 12-20-2024 as well. Location is 11331 Dallas Blvd, Cincinnati, OH 45231.

Roll call vote:

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

Unanimous vote: motion passes to approve financial assistance reports.

Holiday Cards:

Mr. Sonza shared that the VSC issued 40 checks in the amount of \$200.00 each, and we currently have 36 applications for Christmas. Aldi cards are not in yet. If they do not arrive by Thursday December 19, 2024, VSC will issue checks again. Explained the delay in the process of Aldi Cards.

Financial Literacy:

Currently 13 people have signed up for the Financial Literacy course that is taking place at Easterseals on January 23, 2025 from 6:00pm – 7:30pm. We were expecting only ten so happy with the turn out so far. Spectrum will launch the Ad for the financial literacy course starting tomorrow, December 19, 2024.

Records Retention:

Mr. Sonza informed the Commissioners on the retention records. The records retention employee has scanned all the minutes from 1992 to current once. Personnel files that were found molded inactive personnel files that were found in a filing cabinet. This filing cabinet had suffered an abundance of water damaged and the files were molded. A one-time disposal of these records is being requested. A list of these files has been made and will be kept on record. The County records storage facility contacted VSC regarding 40 plus cases of files at the storage center. The extent of damage, if any is unknown currently. Mr. Sonza will be going to the storage warehouse today to look over the records.

Veterans Memorials:

Spoke with Montgomery County Veterans Service Commission. Montgomery handles the care of the memorials in their county. Mr. Sonza recommends that VSC creates an SOP. To designate the maintenance of memorials. VSC needs to take this on, if VSC does not then it won't get down. We owe this to our Veterans if we don't, no one will. In talking with the Board of County Commissioner's office there is no plan in place to care for these. ORC 5901 states that this is the responsibility of the County Commissioners to oversee and care for these memorials. VSC will look into what needs to be done to develop a program to care for these memorials. Mrs. Wilson recommended Jerry Jonas who has done restoration and upkeep on Veterans Memorials.

Van Acquisitions:

The Van will be delivered in late February, fully wrapped. VSC will post job positions after the first of the year it will more than likely be two (2) part time drivers at 20 hours a week.

Policies & Procedures Manual:

The motion to approve the manual and the ability to change and update when needed was made by Mr. Staniford, duly seconded by Mr. Headen.

Discussion:

Mr. Watson submitted a conflict of interest document that he would like to see signed by each employee and commissioner. Mr. Sonza will have this letter review by the Prosecutors office for review.

Roll call vote:

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

New Business:

2025 Webmaster- Commissioners were each given a copy of the three contracts to view. Mr. Sonza recommended that the VSC continue working with the current Webmaster. It is the better value of the three contracts and covers all the needs of the VSC.

The motion to maintain Dyadic as the Webmaster for 2025 was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland

Discussion:

Mr. Staniford had questions about the County website and being part of that. Mr. Sonza explained that the Amber Ndubuisi, Outreach Manager has reached out several times and it appears that the County is still in negotiations over the contract. The VSC feels it is in the best interest to contract with someone and not wait so that the VSC can keep it's website up and running without a lapse, this would be a disservice to our Veterans if the Website is not working.

Roll call vote:

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

Unanimous vote: Motion passes

Media Marketing:

Commissioners were given a list of media marketing for 2025 proposals. Including radio, television and billboards.

The motion to approve the media marketing as presented was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Watson

Discussion:

Mr. Staniford feels Hubbard marketing should be removed stating the cost is just too high compared to the others. Mr. Sonza discussed another Hubbard proposal of \$5,000.00 a month that consists of weekly interview spots with Veterans. Though it is a great thing to do, Butler County VSC has done these and after a time could not fill these spots. Butler County was reaching out to other VSC's to help fill the spots.

Mr. Staniford had questions about the different packages and why voting on using 2025 funds now. Mr. Sonza explained that the need to approve these now to be able to continue advertising in 2025 since the next board meeting won't be until January 22, 2025 the need for advertising to continue is important.

Mr. Watson would like to extend the advertising to more buses, the connector and benches.

Mr. Watson also shared a couple of google reviews with positive comments on employees

No further discussion, motion amended:

Motion to approve the media marketing for 2025 with the removal of Hubbard media was made by Mr. Staniford, duly seconded by Mr. Headen

Roll call vote:

Mr. Headen-yes, Mr. Rowland-yes, Mr. Staniford-yes, Mr. Watson-yes, Mrs. Wilson-yes

Unanimous vote: Motion carries

Emergency Financial Assistance Cost of Living Adjustment

Mr. Sonza asked the board to consider increasing items such as food, hygiene, and clothing, With the explanation that the increasing costs of daily living expenses the current

amount given for such items doesn't go very far in today's economy. Mr. Sonza presented EFA Cost of living adjustments for food from \$300.00 to \$350.00 with an additional \$200.00 per person with a maximum of \$600.00, Personal Hygiene \$75.00 to \$100.00 with \$50.00 for each additional, and clothing from \$125.00 to \$150.00

A motion to make a cost-of-living increase for emergency financial assistance beginning January 1, 2025 was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland.

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Headen-yes, Mr. Rowland-yes, Mr. Stanford-yes, Mr. Watson-yes, Mrs. Wilson-yes

Unanimous vote: Motion carries for a cost-of-living increase in January 2025.

Copier/Printer Purchase:

Mr. Sonza presented the need for a new copier/printer. The current copier is slow, old and noisy. No formal quotes have been gathered at this time. Some research was done on a couple of copiers that would meet the needs of the office.

Motion made by Mr. Rowland to purchase a new copier in January of 2025 for the office in the amount not to exceed \$10,000.00, duly seconded by Mr. Headen.

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Headen-yes, Mr. Rowland-yes, Mr. Staniford-yes, Mr. Watson-yes, Mrs. Wilson-yes

Unanimous vote: Motion carries for the purchase of a new copier.

Commissioner/Executive Director Updates

Mr. Staniford:

Attended the Veteran of the year award ceremony through Greg Landsman's office. Craig McKee received the award for Hamilton County and John Charles Looker received the award for Warren County.

Project Little Heros/Back the Blues – was a great event, reported there were 400 veterans' children that attended and were able to receive gifts. Spoke with the Outreach Manager to expand for next year. Mr. Sonza added that the train display was a bonus to this event. Mr. Sonza would like to make this our winter event each year. Have the appreciation event in the summer and this could be the winter event each year.

Mr. Headen:

Mr. Headen visited the, VA Hospital, and he would like to thank the staff, the director and Pam, for getting the word out there about the VSC. He would like to see the VSC expand services to those that are housebound. Mr. Sonza agreed and approved for a Service Officer to visit a Veteran who is in the VA Hospital who needs assistance with claim work or any other assistance the VSC may be able to provide.

Mr. Watson:

Mr. Watson and the Executive Director attended the graduation ceremony for Veterans Court. Four graduated, and five were recognized and had their records expunged through

the Veterans Court overseen by Judge Nester. These Veterans now have an opportunity to make a fresh start with their lives. I think this is a great program for our veterans. Judge Nester recognized Service Officer James Massey for his role in helping the Veterans Court and for making this a success for these veterans.

MOAA Christmas Party, many kudos to the Staff and the VSC for their part and sponsorship for their Surviving Spouse's program they had. MOAA had a lot of feedback and look forward to doing this again next year.

Mr. Sonza:

Mr. Sonza shared the resolution approved by the Board of County Commissioners on appointing 3 more Commissioners to the VSC board per 5901 we need respect their decision on that they will commence January 15, 2025 for a term of 5 years and they have the prerogative to renew that after the 5 years.

Mr. Staniford stated that this is incorrect that 5901 states is not allowed only if the VSC triggers that 10% budget increase would they be allowed to add or keep commissioners beyond the 5 years. Mr. Staniford asked to get a prosecutor's opinion on this. The pay for these commissioners will be out of the general fund. The BoCC also approved a 3% COLA which will bring the board's annual salary to \$7,050.39 a year for all 8 Commissioners. Our first meeting of 2025 will be 8 Commissioners seated on the board.

Mr. Sonza also explained to the board that he is allowing the staff to consider a once-in-a-lifetime bed-bug emergency examination, they will need to meet the emergency financial assistance qualifications.

Mr. Sonza asked the board to vote on purchasing 4 additional laptops at approximately \$1,400.00 each. This would include hardware, office 365, and the software.

The motion to purchase 4 additional laptops not to exceed \$1,400.00 each was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland.

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Headen-yes, Mr. Rowland-yes, Mr. Staniford-yes, Mr. Watson-yes, Mrs. Wilson-yes

Unanimous vote: Motion carried

Mr. Watson added that when he was being interviewed to be a VSC Board Commissioners he was asked what he would like to see happen for the Veterans of Hamilton County, he told the Judge that he would like to see a Veterans Court start up here in Hamilton County, Mr. Watson stated he is glad he did because it is a wonderful program for our Veterans.

Mr. Staniford questioned the voting for a commissioner to be exempt from accreditation points. Stated other Commissioner through out the state vote on this. Mrs. Wilson and Mr. Sonza explained that they were told by the state that a letter from the VSC Board President is all that is needed to request exemption from accreditation points.

Mr. Headen brought up the need to decide on a voting practice for the next meeting to avoid a tie vote. Recommendation that the president does not vote unless a tie vote happens, Mr.

Staniford stated if the president doesn't vote there would not be a tie vote. Mr. Sonza stated if a board member is not in attendance at a meeting there is the possibility of a tie vote. A procedure would be beneficial moving forward. After further discussion no procedure was determined for future meetings.

Mrs. Wilson stated this may or may not be her last meeting as a member of the VSC board she feels that the work that this board and staff has done in the past six months has been great and feels we are doing great things for the Veterans in Hamilton County.

Next meeting will be held Wednesday January 22, 2025 at 10:00am.

The motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Watson

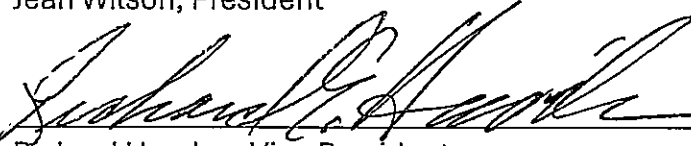
Discussion: Hearing none

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Headen-yes, Mr. Rowland-yes, Mr. Staniford-yes, Mr. Watson-yes, Mrs. Wilson-yes

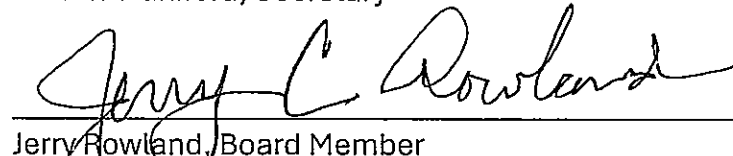
Unanimous vote: Motion passes meeting adjourned

Jean Wilson, President



Richard Headen, Vice President

Steven Staniford, Secretary



Jerry Rowland, Board Member



Urulee Watson, Board Member

