

**Veterans Service Commission
Of Hamilton County**

Commissioner Board Meeting January 22, 2025

President Jean Wilson brought the meeting together at 10 A.M.

Pledge of Allegiance – Led by Jean Wilson

Roll Call: Commissioner Burwinkel, Commissioner Headen, Commissioner Parks, Commissioner Rowland, Commissioner Staniford, Commissioner Ware, Commissioner Watson, Commissioner Wilson

Attendees: ED Sonza, Pam Minser, Eric Munas Attorney with the Hamilton County Prosecutors Office

Guests: Judge Cross, Magistrate Thomas Beridon, Tom Conlon, Theresa Burns- US Army Veteran, Charles Norton – US Army Veteran, Maurice Thomas – US Marine Corps Veteran

Agenda – Discussion

Commissioner Staniford presented an agenda to replace the published agenda with 11 items which are dated 1-22-2025.

Motion to approve published agenda with 11 items was made by Commissioner Headen, duly seconded by Commissioner Rowland.

Discussion: Hearing none

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

Recognition of Staff & Guests

New Commissioner Victoria Parks – Brief introduction she is an US Army Veteran, past Hamilton County Commissioner, currently on the City of Cincinnati Council.

New Commissioner Bill Burwinkel – US Army Veteran, currently serves on the Board for the Adopt A Class Foundation, President of the Board of the Adopt A Class Endowment Fund, on the Board and Governance Chair of Cincinnati Golden Gloves, and as Commissioner on the Hamilton County Great Parks board.

New Commissioner Lincoln Ware – US Marine Veteran after his military service he returned to Cincinnati where he has been a Radio Talk Show Host for nearly 52 years.

Honorable Judge Cross – brief introduction on the Community Engagement Program, being more active in the community she has the full the support of all 16 other judges. I am happy to be here today to support the commission and offer any help needed.

Appointment of New Officers

Motion made to conduct nominations and appointing new officers was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland

Discussion:

Mr. Staniford has concerns about the appointment of Mr. Burwinkel and a 2011-029 Attorney General opinion that a commissioner cannot be a member of the Park Board Commission in the same county. Mr. Staniford raised similar concerns regarding Ms. Parke and her role as City of Cincinnati City Council member.

Mr. Burwinkel made a statement regarding his appointment and the concerns regarding a potential conflict. (please see attached statement)

Mr. Burwinkel –yes, Mr. Headen –yes, Ms. Parks –yes, Mr. Rowland –yes Mr. Staniford –yes, Mr. Ware –yes, Mr. Watson –yes, Ms. Wilson -yes

Motion Passes

Nominations for New Officers

President:

Mr. Watson nominated Mr. Rowland, Mr. Rowland respectfully declined the nomination

Mr. Staniford nominated Ms. Wilson, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland

No other nominations, nominations closed

Vice President:

Mr. Watson nominated Mr. Headen, Mr. Headen accepted the nomination, duly seconded by Mr. Headen

No other nominations, nominations closed

Secretary:

Mr. Headen nominated Mr. Burwinkel, duly seconded by Ms. Parks. Mr. Burwinkel accepted the nomination

No other nominations, nominations closed

Vote:

President – Jean Wilson

Mr. Burwinkel – yes, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson – yes

Vice President – Richard Headen

Mr. Burwinkel – yes, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson – yes

Secretary – Bill Burwinkel

Mr. Burwinkel – yes, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – abstain, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson – yes

Congratulations to the elected officers.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Mr. Staniford to approve the minutes for December 18, 2024 minutes, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland

Mr. Staniford Motion has been amended to make any necessary changes or ask questions by the next meeting.

Discussion:

Hearing none, roll call vote:

Mr. Headen – yea, Mr. Rowland – yea, Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson – abstained

Motion carried

Motion made by Mr. Rowland in light of recent and past events, especially the most recent event on January 13, 2025, which brought embarrassment to this commission I move that we recommend to the Court of Common Pleas Commissioner Steven Staniford because of his outrageous, unprofessional and unethical conduct that he be removed immediately, duly seconded by Mr. Watson.

Discussion:

Mr. Staniford to Mr. Rowland – I'm glad you were able to comment on the event based on the source of the information you received, I appreciate that

Mr. Burwinkel states he was there and saw this firsthand. I'm urging this board and the public to ask the courts to make a swift decisive decision to remove Mr. Staniford. Standards of public service must be upheld, disrupting self-serving behavior which we saw right here at this meeting cannot be allowed to serve as a critical point of the body. This serves as a turning point, we must send a message that the Veterans Service Commission is here to serve, restore, accountability and transparency for the veterans of Hamilton County.

Mr. Watson – I've served with Mr. Staniford on this board for a year now and the recent event is only one of 20 or 30 occasions where he has attacked people, been disruptive and cursed at people during a board meeting myself included. His behavior when someone opposes or doesn't support his mission/goal he attacks you, it doesn't matter who it is, or if someone else may have a better idea, he first response is to attack that person. He has no respect or little respect for anyone or their thoughts. I have observed a lot of his behavior and been a target of his behavior for a year now. This is nothing new.

Mr. Sonza – I was there, I serve at the pleasure of this board, the board has the authority when it comes together no one individual has authority to speak on the behalf of the board. I have spoken with each of you individually and all agree that the board makes decisions not an individual member. What happened that Monday at West Point and the US Army, the term would be Conduct Unbecoming as a commissioned or even a noncommissioned officer. What happened was very unbecoming of this board with clients in the lobby and in the office with service officers seeing sheriffs' deputies come in to deal with a commissioner's behavior. I have done my best to work with Mr. Staniford in the 7 months that I have been here we've agreed at times and disagreed at times but, the sheer display unprofessional outrageous behavior in front of clients and staff, two of them who had never encounter a commissioner until that date. I have updated the staff with the concerns, they have expressed their concerns with me and President Wilson has been informed of the concerns of the staff.

Mr. Headen – I've worked with Staniford since I've been here, he is a very smart young man but, I was called on 1-13 and it was very disturbing, and I came to the office, spoke with the magistrate who was here. As a board member I have no right to come into any office and tell anyone what to do, period. In this meeting as a board, we can do that, we can direct, make decisions etc. but no individual member can instruct anyone in this office to do anything. When I arrived Mr. Staniford calmed down some, I can't attest what I heard just what I saw when I arrived. I have seen behavior on this board that I disagree with. I'm here for two reasons: to work with this board and to fight for veterans, that's my mission should be all our missions. He is the director he needs to run the day-to-day operations. If there is an issue that needs to be discussed or addressed that must be done here as a board. I support board members, but I don't support the misbehavior of a board member. That's all I have to say

Mr. Staniford – stated he never raised his voice; he stated that the meeting could be held in the boardroom and when the magistrate, deputies, and other subordinates came out he was sitting in the boardroom sitting. Yes, that is your private office, this office was given by the County Commissioners. So, this is the office of the Commission. Mr. Sonza is the reason things escalated, he's the one who contacted the deputies and involved other subordinates in this. He stated that no one even knew he was in the office until things escalated. Mr. Sonza's judgement is what is questioned here. Mr. Sonza reached out to a person he oversees, who is being investigated instead of reaching out to the board. The only thing he gives is a (bleep) about pardon, my language, I don't care about politics, I'm not a politician, I care about Veterans. Nobody here that knows me can deny that. Do you think I'm going to give up watching this commission whether I'm on this board or not. No because it was a mess when I got here and I'm damn sure not going to make sure it's a mess if I'm not here. It's as simple as that, when I have a commissioner that states she got clearance through the Ohio Ethics Commission to be on this board and when I asked, I'm told she never got clearance to be on this commission, and she tells me I can stick it up my (bleep). I record these meetings, so I can play it back if you would like.

Mr. Burwinkel – yes, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – no, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson – abstain

The majority vote passes to recommend the removal of Commissioner Steven Staniford.

Presentations and Announcements:

None

Executive Session:

The motion to enter Executive Session to review emergency financial assistance applications for the period of December 18, 2024, through January 17, 2025, pursuant to O.R.C. 121.22 (J) and 5901.09.was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland

Discussion:

Mr. Watson would like to invite the Judge, Magistrate, the Finance Manager and our Attorney to the Executive Session

Roll call vote:

Mr. Burwinkel – yes, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson -yes

Return to Public Forum:

Financial Applications

The motion to approve the Assisted financial application report was made by Mr. Rowland, duly seconded by Mr. Headen

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Burwinkel – formal recusal, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson -yes

Motion passes

Non-Eligible applications

The motion to approve the non-eligible financial application report was made by Mr. Rowland, duly seconded by Mr. Headen

Discussion: Hearing none

Mr. Burwinkel – formal recusal, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson -yes

Open Forum:

Theresa Burns – Just wanted to see what the Veterans Commission was all about, and would like to volunteer for the annual event coming in August

Mr. Staniford:

Director at the previous meeting we asked for an update on the time and attendance through HR. Mr. Sonza updated the board on the request.

Aldi Gift Cards

Gift cards are in hand.

Two Legal Clarifications Requested:

- 1- Modifications of the policy and procedures manual 4.15 would bar employees of the service commission from running for a public office.
- 2- Clarification of if the policy and procedures manual if we are applicable to be guided by it.

Responses:

Political Office

Preventing an unclassified employee from running for political office. It is not permissible to change this unless it is a state or federal law there is in place that prevents

Certificate of Issuance

Item # 2 is not advisable that the employer be held to the same policy and procedures as the employees.

Mr. Rowland:

Heading to the gym I saw one of the new billboards for the VSC. Glenway & Lawrence

Mr. Staniford:

Motion to generate any powers generated or conveyed by the previous board to return to the current board of commissioners, duly seconded by Mr. Watson

Discussion:

Mr. Staniford explains his motion, that all previous decisions and powers that were previously given to the current management should be revisited by the new board. This is with consultation with other commissions throughout the state.

Mr. Burwinkel – no, Mr. Headen – no, Ms. Parks – no, Mr. Rowland – no, Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – no, Mr. Watson – no, Ms. Wilson – no

Motion fails

The motion to ask for an Attorney General opinion on the appointment with Commissioner Parks, to confirm her being a board member, is not a conflict was made by Mr. Staniford.

Motion dies for a lack of a second.

Financial Literacy Workshop

Being held at Easterseals of Redwood at 2901 Gilbert Ave, 60 registered attendees, this is to help with credit repair, home buying, investments and more.

Motion to allow up to \$1,500.00 to purchase food from Mission BBQ made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland

Mr. Burwinkel – formal recusal, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson – yes

2025 Appreciation Event

Amber Ndubuisi shared slides on how we are making this bigger and better. Expanding services using VA mobile claim units.

- Slides attached to the minutes

Discussion:

Mr. Staniford questioned Wi-Fi availability at Sawyer Point. Recommended contacting Verizon for a possible Wi-Fi donation for a Hot-Spot so Veterans ID's can be made the day of the event

If the VA Mobile claim units are not able to be at the event, VSC will be having Service Officer's from our sister counties (Butler, Warren, Clermont) and other Service Officers there to assist Veterans with their claims during these days. The request for mobile units requires 90-day notice and we our request is well ahead of that time frame.

Director Sonza asked the board to support funding not to exceed \$330,000.00 for the veteran's appreciation 3-day 2025 event. Regular updates will be provided by Amber Ndubuisi as we move forward in the planning of this event.

Motion made to approve \$327,810.00 for the Veterans Appreciation 2025 event by Mr. Staniford, duly seconded by Mr. Headen

This motion does include the \$93,000.00 dollars for the Marketing Pack as well.

Discussion:

Mr. Lincoln Ware had a question about the GABP expense of \$78,000.00. Confirmed that this was for the cost of the food and beverages, there was no cost for the use of the Stadium.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Burwinkel – formal recusal, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson -yes

Motion Passes

Veterans Monuments and Cemeteries

Update: By law the upkeep of the monuments and cemeteries lie solely on the BoCC. However, other Counties have spearheaded the project. Agreements between the VSC's specifically Montgomery County take on the project with the agreement that the expense is solely on the BoCC.

A full presentation is attached to the minutes from Dodd's who does restoration of monuments and graves in Montgomery County.

Van Acquisition

Job description for Part-time driver is in the process and will be uploaded on the County Website
Presented 3 van wraps for the Commissioners input.

The motion to approve the design selection #3 white with soldiers was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Ms. Parks.

Discussion:

Modifications to put Hamilton County in a larger print, adding the VSC phone # and website

Roll call vote:

Mr. Burwinkel – formal recusal, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson -yes

Motion passes

Advertising

Billboard: Picture of the new billboard has been provided to each commissioner

Radio One advertising: ED Sonza asked for a second vote for the record to show that Mr. Lincoln Ware had not part of the advertising for Radio One this was approved in 2024. It has been asked that Mr. Ware and Mr. Burwinkel formally recuse themselves from this vote.

Motion made to approve the advertising with Radio One by Mr. Staniford, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland

Discussion:

Just giving clarity to Mr. Sonza to move forward with the signing of the contract. Ms. Parks added this is also a show of transparency as well.

Roll call vote:

Mr. Burwinkel – formal recusal, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes Mr. Staniford – formal recusal, Mr. Ware – formal recusal, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson -yes

Motion passes

Bond Hill Update:

The board was given the most recent footprint of the Mercy Health Building. Move has been pushed to the right. The move will consist of 5 other county agencies. It appears we will have room for 24 employees in the workspace and a larger area for our board meetings.

Free parking for our veterans and employees, right off the interstate, furnishings will remain, as well as the modular walls. There will be six designated spots for our Veterans 3 Purple Heart/Silver Star parking and 3 for veterans only.

Concerning current office space, Mr. Sonza stated he has talked with Maria with the Treatment Court, they have up to six offices we can use and a much larger conference room we can use when needed.

The motion was made to hold the next board meeting in the larger conference room by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Burwinkel – yes, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes, Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson – yes

Motion Passes

The motion to have Pam Minser continue taking the minutes for the board meeting was made by Ms. Parks, duly seconded by Mr. Burwinkel

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call vote:

Mr. Burwinkel – yes, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes, Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson – yes

Motion Passes

Tiny Houses:

A program set up for affordable housing for veterans – information attached to the minutes.

Pre-trial Services

Clothing relief for veterans who are being released from incarceration to provide jackets that would be housed here in our closet a variety of sizes. The board was asked to approve no more than \$2,000.00 so VSC can purchase jackets and have them available for pre-trial services.

The motion to approve up to \$3,000.00 to purchase clothing was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland.

Discussion:

Ms. Parks asked if there was a way we could find out how many female veterans

Mr. Burwinkel – formal recusal, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes, Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson – yes

Motion Passes

Director Updates:

Dorene Dillard – New Service Officer, comes to us from Easterseals – doing a great job she is working with Jim on the financial assistance applications.

Katie Finley – New Secretary, taking on helping with financial intake and will help with HR duties to free up some of Pam's times

Christopher Smith – New Service Officer, offer letter was signed and returned by Mr. Smith yesterday he will begin on February 3, 2025.

President Wilson asked if the new employee could make an appearance so they can put names with faces.

Mr. Sonza provided an update on the Dole Act Law that was signed by President Biden on January 2, 2025.

The section pertaining to County Veteran Service Officers, to allow 10 million dollars in federal funds annually for two years. To create new programs, support or expand similar entities with areas of High Suicide Rates through the crisis line and critical care. An inquiry has been submitted to the state for more information on this law for clarification on how to pursue this grant.

Mr. Burwinkel asked what avenue the VSC takes to get grants. Mr. Sonza as of now only the Addiction Response Grant has been considered. But we work with our budget analyst Cheryl Floyd for directions on any grant monies available.

Commissioner Updates:

Mr. Headen:

The motion to meet just once a month on the 2nd Wednesday of each month was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Burwinkel.

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll Call:

Mr. Burwinkel – yes, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes, Mr. Staniford – no, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – no, Ms. Wilson – yes

Motion carried – majority of the vote

Next Meeting:

February 12, 2025, at 10:00am – 1st Floor, Room 1150– Pre-trail Services

Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Headen, duly seconded by Mr. Rowland

Discussion: Hearing none

Roll call:

Mr. Burwinkel – yes, Mr. Headen – yes, Ms. Parks – yes, Mr. Rowland – yes, Mr. Staniford – yes, Mr. Ware – yes, Mr. Watson – yes, Ms. Wilson – yes

Meeting adjourned at 1:20pm

Minutes Approved this date: 2-12-2025

Jean Wilson, President: [Signature]

Richard Headen, Vice President: [Signature]

Bill Burwinkel, Secretary: [Signature]

Victoria Parks, Member: _____

Jerry Rowland, Member: [Signature]

Steven Staniford, Member: [Signature]

Lincoln Ware, Member: [Signature]

Lee Watson, Member: [Signature]