



Veterans Assistance Commission of Will County

Jen Solum – Superintendent
 Glenwood Center 2400 Glenwood Ave Ste 110 Joliet, IL 60435
 Ph: (815)740-8389 Fax: (815)740-4329



February 21, 2023

Commission Meeting

6:30PM

John Olson American Legion Post 18
 15052 Archer Ave, Lockport, IL 60441

- I. Call to Order: 6:30PM
 - A. Pledge of Allegiance
 - B. Opening Prayer: Lead By: Jim Clausen
- II. Roll Call (1:48)

POST	DELEGATE/ ALTERNATE	PRESENT	ABSENT	EXCUSED
AL 5 Harwood Joliet	D: Joseph Kelley A: Gary Califello	Del		
AL 13 Marne Plainfield	D: Lisa McGlasson A: Raj Pillai	Alt		
AL 18 John Olson Lockport	D: Mike Meyers A: Tom Jost	Del		
AL 39 Koca Braidwood	D: Dale Fraher A: James Chappell			X
AL 52 Romeoville	D: Stephen Benicke A: Steven Daley	Del		
AL 191 Lester Smith Wilmington	D: Ken Watt	Del		
AL 241 Buffalo Soldiers Joliet	D: John Gavin			X
AL 392 Peotone	D: Robert Krueger A: Rick Bolanowski	Del Alt		
AL 521 Steger	D: Robert Welch A: Joey Smith			X
AL 935 Manhattan	D: Robert Angone A: John Kestel	Del		
AL 1080 Joliet	D: Thomas Horn A: Gary Stieg			X
AL 1200 Monee	D: Janet Blue A: David Batzek			X
AL 1288 Bolingbrook	D: Larry Shaver A: Herschel Nelson	Del		
VFW 367 Cantigny Joliet	D: Jim Clausen	Del		
VFW 725 William Martin Mokena	D: James Hogan			X
VFW 1493 Frankfort	D: Amanda Koch A: Daniel Koch			X



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VFW 2199 Stone City Joliet	D: Kevin Pomykala A: Ron Adamski			X
VFW 5422 Malcolm J Mayo Wilmington	D: Jennifer Piehl A: Wally Wink	Alt		
VFW 5788 Lockport	D: Keith Carberry A: Ernest Errico	Del		
VFW 5819 Lemont	D: Kenneth Griffin	Del		
VFW 5917 Bolingbrook	D: John Davin	Del		
VFW 9545 Harry E Anderson New Lenox	D: Clarke Christiansen A: Donald Ibarra	Del		
We have Quorum		14		8

III. Election President Pro Tempore

Motion: Shaver (4:19)

Second: Griffin

Nomination: Angone nominates Raj Pillai

No opposition: President Pro Tempore approved by acclamation

IV. Introduction of Guests and/or First Time Attendees: None

V. Public Comments: None

VI. Minutes of Previous Meeting

A. December 13, 2022

Christiansen states according to Roberts Rules, the meeting minutes don't need to be approved. They either stand as read or stand as amended.

Motion to approve: Benicke

Second: Shaver

Voice Vote: Unanimous approval.

B. January 24, 2023

Griffin states that in the introduction of guests and first-time attendees, Steve Daley is from the Romeoville AL Post, not Bolingbrook Post



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Benicke stated that he was marked present when he wasn't there and did not vote to elect Lisa as President Pro Tempore and allowing her to sign the COLA increase.

AnnaMarie explained that the roll call and votes were taken by posts and not individuals. Mr. Benicke's Alternate was present and voted for Post 52. Clarification will be made moving forward.

Shaver states that he was the Delegate and was present, but the Alternate was not.

Motion to accept pending corrections: Shaver
Second: Benicke
Voice Vote: Unanimous approval.

VII. Superintendent's Report

A. Award Log

Papineau goes over reported award logs. Also notes error in written report actual number for 2022 notification letters is 305, not 142. Notes that number of notification letters continue increasing long after the year is complete. Also stresses the importance of updating your VSO once a decision has been made. States that appointments are booked at least 2.5 weeks out. That is an improvement from 6 weeks out. Papineau States that the VSO's are working with Veterans at the maximum level without sacrificing response times and quality of service. Nothing new to report from the VA on Claim policies.

Benicke asked if there was a shortage of service officers.

Papineau confirms and states that we have been trying to get it put on the agenda for a while, but other issues took precedence.

Pillai asked about the difference from claims completed and notification letters received.

Papineau explains that we are not notified when Veterans received notification letters. The letters we are able to track are the ones the Veteran's notify us about. Also notes that we have the capability to handle Veterans' claims from their initial, first-time



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appointment all the way to virtual hearings with the Veterans’ Law Judges at the Board of Veterans’ appeals.

Shaver states that most letters from the VA state the VSO have been notified, but the letters are never sent to the VSO and that we should tell everyone that if they rely on that letter to notify the VSO, it won’t work.

Papineau explains that each appointment receives a summary letter that addresses the issue with instruction for the Veteran to notify the VSO.

Solum states that if we were fully staffed we would be better able to keep up with the claims.

B. Emergency Shelter

Jen solum. We have one Veteran in Quality Inn that is working with Joe. We have approximately \$13,000 remaining in the Emergency Shelter Grant. Once the Grant Runs out, we will go back to pre-COVID methods of serving Veterans.

C. Financial Assistance Report

Jen Solum goes over the submitted report and reiterates that we pay assistance in arrears. Utilities are still low due to Liheap credit on many of our Veteran’s accounts.

Motion to Approve: Shaver
Second: Griffin
Voice Vote: Unanimously approved

VIII. New Business

A. Appointment of Superintendent

1. Commission goes into Closed Session to discuss the following subjects:
Personnel: The appointment, employment, compensation , discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific VAC Employee (5 ILCS 5/120/2©(1)).



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- a) Motion: Benicke
- b) Second: Shaver
- c) Voice Vote: Unanimous, Motion Carries

Return from Closed Session: 7:50PM

2. Motion to Approve Jen Solum as the Superintendent of the Will County VAC:

Motion: Shaver
Second: Meyer

Discussion

Davin stated that the motion was made on the recommendation of the Committee.

Motion amended to recommend to the Commission that the commission accept the committee's recommendation of Jen Solum as the Superintendent of the VAC

Motion: Shaver
Second: Meyer

Voice Vote: Unanimous - motion accepted
Discussion: None

Roll Call Vote: Unanimous – Motion Carries

Motion made to offer her a starting salary of \$110,000.

Motion: Shaver
Second: Meyers
Discussion:

Pillai states that there will be a roll call vote because it has to do with money.



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Roll call vote: Unanimous – Motion Accepted

B. Will County Veterans Treatment Court

Jen Solum states we have been involved with VTC for past month. Our role will be on the support side of the court program. We are to ensure the Veterans' receive the benefits they are entitled to. This includes VA Compensation and Pension Benefits, transportation, Financial Assistance, and peer support meetings.

Papineau states that Joe and Anna have taken a basic benefits course available through IACVAC so they can better recognize the needs of the Veterans.

Jen Solum states that the program is designed for success. Everyone from the Judge to the social workers and the prosecutors work together to help the Veterans successfully complete the program.

C. Plan in Response to a Potential Government Shut Down

Jen solum states that our budget is already approved and will go unaffected by a potential government shutdown. If the VA stops payments, we have our financial assistance program to assist Veterans in need. We also have a fully stocked food pantry.

IX. Old Business

A. Draft Investigation Report

Discussion

Pillai asks Jen if there were any factual inaccuracies in the report.

Solum identified issue on Page 7 regarding the Ad Hoc Cares committee having no part in the approval of the funding. The Ad Hoc Cares committee approved the expenditure twice and recommended it be passed to the Will County Board. Also identified question regarding page 7 and the allocation of the county funds. Also requested clarification on statement regarding Marketing not subject or bidding requirements, however, at that time, under the past law, it was not required for the VAC to follow the county bidding process. The new law requires VACs adopt county bidding policy.



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Atty Gen Tyner clarifies that the VACs are not required to follow the county's procurement policies, but they are required to adopt a procurement policy. It can be adapted to fit the organization.

Pillai states that this does not go into Bylaws. It will be a separate policy that we adopt.

Jen Solum states that, on Page 20, it is stated that the VACWC Executive Board members and Staff unanimously agreed to approve HeyG for the contract. Jen Solum spoke with the staff who was interviewed and confirmed unanimously the staff did not have prior knowledge or input into the awarding of the Hey G marketing contract.

Pillai asks if there are any further comments.

Kelley asked if we had discussed this with the State's Attorney Office

Solum confirms coordination with both the State's Attorney office and the County Executive office, but we are waiting on the investigation report to be finalized.

Pillai stated that there are factual inaccuracies that should be amended before the Board approves the Draft.

Attorney Jeffrey Skly states that none of the amendments would change the findings or recommendations.

Pillai states that we need a motion to accept the Draft Report with amendments, then another to accept the final report once it is ready.

B. Motion to accept the Draft Report with Jen's amendments submitted for a final report.

Motion: Christensen

Second: Griffin

Voice Vote: Unanimous – Motion Carries



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C. Update Sub Committees

1. By Laws

Christensen reports that the committee has come up with ideas and a general format for the By Laws but wants to highlight certain sections to the full commission for their input before presenting a draft for approval. Many of the subjects of the current By Laws are specifically addressed in the MVAA and should be left out to avoid conflict with potential future amendments with the MVAA.

Kelley asked about leaving sections in order to keep Commission Members from needing to refer to MVAA as a simple reference.

Christensen states that understanding the MVAA first is necessary. The Bylaws are to add office specific details.

Atty Gen Tyner states that there is no process for the state to charter organizations, but there is something being processed to address the issue. He further explains the difference between being chartered with the state and being chartered by the state.

Christensen addresses section 6 referring to the qualifying organizations being formed by and for Veterans. Later in the MVAA, it does not specify that the commander appoints a member of the post to the commission. It does not specify that it needs to be a Veteran. The Commission wants to clarify this in the By Laws. Do we want to specifically state that the organization must appoint a member of that organization and an Honorably discharged Veteran.

Benicke states that there are many active non-Veterans that would be helpful on our commission.

Watt asked how many Veterans' organization are listed, and how many don't attend the meetings.

Benicke states there are 26.

Watt states that there are Veteran's organizations that don't show up, but if the non-Veterans appointed are showing up, we don't want to lose their participation.



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Christensen suggests leaving the By Laws open so that the MVAA can define the intention of the law.

Atty Gen Tyner states that he cannot definitively answer the question, and the VAC is welcome to file a formal request with the AG's office for a more definitive answer, but it will reflect the majority of what he is saying. If all details were put into laws, they would be unreasonably long. The VAC needs to view the law as a whole, not individual lines and recognize the intent of the law. Atty Gen Tyner notes that he knows the intent because he wrote the law. VACs are units of local government governed by the MVAA. They are Veterans' service organizations spun up by Veterans, for Veterans. The organizations that can make them up are required to be formed by Veterans, for Veterans. Going beyond and stating that since it does not explicitly state that they must be Veterans in that section of the law, that would be going outside the original intent and would lead to VSOs appointing representative from anywhere. There are several organizations that are great for Veterans, but they don't necessarily need to have a say on the Commission.

Christensen states that he agrees with Atty Gen Tyner, but as it is written, he is reading it as if there is no need for the representatives to be Veterans. Our decision will affect the posts that have already appointed a non-Veteran Delegate because the MVAA didn't specifically restrict non-Veterans. He was told when he was first involved with the VACs, that the Commander could appoint anybody. If the VACWCs intent is to follow the State's intent, we need to put it in the bylaws. Otherwise, we can leave it out and defer to the MVAA.

Pomykala states that he agrees with Clark because in a lot of posts, some of the best people aren't Veterans.

Christensen asked if anyone disagrees.

Angone states that he started a Veteran's club but had to leave after there were more non- Veterans than Veterans in the club. He states he believes Veterans care more for Veterans.



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Daley states the Commander is the one that appoints the best person to represent the post.

Shaver disagrees. States that he has seen VSOs that allow non-Veterans to get involved and lose the quality of everything. Veterans serving Veterans is what this was meant to be.

Davin states he agrees with Shaver and Angone. The issue with non-Veterans is that tend to misrepresent themselves as Veterans.

Krueger agrees that it is an organization by and for Veterans.

Christiansen states that Veterans are failing at bringing to Veterans to organizations. Gives example of Auxiliary taking over the posts simply because they showed up.

Solum states we have two non-Veterans on the board as of 2022.

Christensen states we can add stipulations as to relation of Veteran in By Laws

Shaver states that if you go in that direction, it will keep us within the military family.

Griffin agrees that they need to be part of an organization

Krueger agrees that the organization is of Veterans, for Veterans.

Wink mentions requiring one of the delegates to be a Veteran.

Meyers agrees that the Delegate must be a Veteran, but alternate could be non-Veteran possibly.

Papineau states that if non-Veterans are allowed to serve on commission, eventually it will be a statewide legislative issue that may lead to future problems. Advises board to err on the side of caution.

Pillai suggests voting on allowing v not allowing non-Veterans in Bylaws.



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Christensen asks for a show of hands.

Allow non-Veterans: 9

Mandate Veteran status: 7.

Christensen continues report: removed executive board in accordance with MVA. Purpose of officers is to run the meeting. Suggests appointment of Chaplain, Judge Advocate, Sgt at arms. Asks if that appointment would need to be a delegate. If they are not a delegate or alternate, they are not allowed to Vote.

Benicke asks about appointees not being allowed in closed sessions.

Solum confirms that they can be invited into closed sessions just as a lawyer would.

Christensen asks if it is ok to appoint non veterans as stated officers. Commission affirms.

Christensen asks about election in March or later identifying the issue of officers not re-selected by commander. Suggests election in March with the delegate appointments.

Kelley states that there can be a nomination process, but if there is a challenge, we may need to wait until the next meeting.

Solum states that other VAC's do the nomination and elections at the March Meeting.

Papineau suggests allowing delegates to speak before voting. Nominated, speeches, elections.

Angone clarifies that our meetings are supposed to be quarterly, not monthly.

Christensen confirms that commission wants to put nominations and elections at the same meeting.

Addresses vacancies being filled by vote of commission using election protocols, or can nominees be put forth at meeting when vacancies exist.



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Kelley states the VP will take over for vacancy in President which will leave vacancy in VP.

Christensen summarizes suggestion that vacancy should be elected at next meeting. Commission affirms.

Discusses formation of committees. Are members appointed by president?

Benicke suggests going for volunteers first, then appointment by President

Christensen suggests alternatives solicit volunteers, then elections if there are too many, and appointment by the President.

Discussion by Pillai, Angone, Watt, Christensen,

Christensen summarizes discussion yields two options, Appointment by President and Elections.

Show of hands: Appointment – 7. Elected - 8

Christensen asks about quarterly v monthly meetings. Quarterly meetings may require special meeting to approve Governor's report.

Solum states Governor's report does not need to be approved by Commission but can be if voted on by Commission. Governor's report can be prepared for quarterly meetings.

Show of hands: Unanimously supports quarterly meetings.

Christensen states annual meeting would need to be Annual Meeting. Mentions next section is public comment limits.

Discussion by Shaver, Papineau, Christensen.

Christensen states will be left as it currently is. Next point is section restricting Superintendent from serving as officer for 5 years after separation or retirement from current By Laws.

Discussion by Kelley, Christensen, Papineau, Atty Gen Tyner, Solum



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Show of hands: unanimously supports removing restriction of previous superintendent holding office.

Krueger suggesting altering art 15 to state 5 business days v 5 days.

Christensen agrees to amend. Continues to summarize removal of unnecessary sections and discussions. Asks about President only vacating delegate seat, not VP. Will change to person serving as President will vacate delegate seat. Removal or Executive Commission. Defines purpose of Committees appointed as needed.

Kelley suggest clarification as to who does the annual review for the Superintendent.

D. Status update for Delegate forms

Solum stresses importance of returning Delegate forms before March 1. Forms were sent to posts. VAC staff has followed up with all forms send and not received.

E. Update HB2369

Signed by Gov Pritzker. Will send follow up email with highlights.

Pillai states he put a lot of time and effort, and some money, on the line to help close some of the issues addressed in the bill. This bill is thanks to the hard work of the Commission and staff.

F. Status update of Commission Closed Meeting Minutes Verbatim Recording

Solum states that we still have not received the missing recordings from the past closed meeting sessions and there are OMA violations outstanding. We have sent letters to previous commission members requesting VAC property. One was not responded; the other yielded a negative response.

Pillai states this is a matter of how seriously we want to pursue it.

Christensen asks what are the consequences of not having the recordings?

Solum states that we can be sued.



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Discussion by Davin, Solum, Pillai, Papineau, Shaver

Pillai asks if we want to act or not.

Shaver states that if there is no statute of limitation, we should take some action to acquire recordings.

Christensen asks what would be considered a rational amount of action beyond sending letter. Do we want to refer to Sherriff to collect VAC property. Suggests that further attempts to claim recordings will be futile.

Kelley suggests discussing options with States Attorney for guidance.

X. For the Good of the Commission

Davin asked what happens to the Delegates that don't show up.

Christensen states there isn't much we can do, especially if we go down to 4 meetings. State requires 50% plus 1 for the VAC to be legal. We don't want Posts to submit delegates just to get delegates if they don't show up. Once we have our delegates, we need 50% plus 1 of the delegates on the Commission for a quorum. Mentions MVAA now allows organizations can combine posts and assign a single delegate to represent countywide organization.

Kelley asks about contacting State Command of Organizations to obtain an active list of Posts.

Solum confirms that we have reached out to state and district commands for a list of active posts.

Discussion by Papineau, Solum, Deneen, Kelley, Meyers, Pillai regarding actions taken to contact posts and actions the staff can take to get more posts interested in sending delegates.

XI. Motion to Adjourn

Motion: Krueger

Second: Shaver

Voice vote: Unanimous – Motion passes



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Next Meeting will be held on
March 14, 2023 at 6:00PM
Marne American Legion Post 13
24741 Renwick Rd Plainfield, IL 60544

APPROVED