



# Veterans Assistance Commission of Will County

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 veteransassistancewillco.org



June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**Commission Meeting**  
**American Legion Post 18**  
**15052 Archer Ave, Lockport 60441**

6:04PM

## I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Pledge of Allegiance
- B. Invocation

## ROLL CALL ATTENDEES:

POST	DELEGATE/ALTERNATE	PRESENT	ABSENT	EXCUSED
AL 5 Harwood Joliet	D: Joseph Kelley A: John Honiotes	D		
AL 13 Marne Plainfield	D: Rick Todd A: Raj Pillai	D A		
AL 18 John Olson Lockport	D: Mike Meyers A: Frank DiGiovanni	D A		
AL 52 Romeoville	D: Steven Daley A:	D		
AL 191 Lester Smith Wilmington	D: A: Frank Mlyniec/Tom Stec	A-Tom		
AL 241 Buffalo Soldiers Joliet	D: Michael White A:		X	
AL 392 Peotone	D: Robert Krueger A: Rick Bolanowski	D A		
AL 935 Manhattan	D: Robert Angone A: Lisa McGlasson	D A		
AL 1080 Joliet	D: Tony Arellano A: George Madden	D		
AL 1288 Bolingbrook	D: Larry Shaver A: Wayne Macejak	D A		
AL 1977 New Lenox	D: Mark Razny A: Patrick McLeod	D A		
VFW 367 Cantigny Joliet	D: Jim Clausen A: Dennis Havranek	D A		
VFW 725 William Martin Mokena	D: Paul Cravens A: James Hogan	D A		

VFW 5422 Malcolm J Mayo Wilmington	D: Wally Wink A: Scott Durano		X	
VFW 5788 Lockport	D: Keith Carberry A: Mark Bowman	D A		
VFW 5819 Lemont	D: Kenneth Griffin		X	
VFW 5917 Bolingbrook	D: John Davin A: Gregory Palmer	D		
VFW 9545 Harry E Anderson New Lenox	D: Clarke Christiansen A: Donald Ibarra	D A		
VFW 2199 Stone City Joliet	D: Kevin Pomykala A: Larry Smith	A		

**II. INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS AND/OR FIRST TIME ATTENDEES**

- A. Patrick- Wilmington American Legion
- B. Tom Stec-Wilmington American Legion assigned as an alternate

**III. PUBLIC COMMENTS FOR ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

- A. Raj spoke on the accomplishments that everyone had. He congratulated Larry. Raj talked about the lawsuit and the outcome of the amendment to help protect. Discussed working with both parties to help the veterans. Goals was to get into the vacant Copperfield building. Proposed to allow the VAC to use it vs selling it since it was most cost effective. Congratulations to Jen for the best annual report and everyone at the VAC. This is an election year and there are a lot of people running for office and we need to watch how the VAC fits into the system.
- B. Larry said Raj did a great job as president as well as an alternate. It means a lot to the board and Larry to work together like a platoon. Larry spoke on unity and spoke about Raj being an instrument to getting where we are today. We will continue to push and make this VAC the best.

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES PREVIOUS MEETING**

- A. Commission Meeting March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024 (open)
  - 1<sup>st</sup>: James Hogan accepted as printed
  - 2<sup>nd</sup>: Robert Krueger
  - Minutes accepted as is

**VI. SUPERINTENDENT REPORT**

- A. Award Log
  - a. FY 2024-December 1 2023-June 2024: 1.9 million in monthly payments. 19 million and not in July. Very busy 588 new veterans and 1065 office visits. Filled out over 3,000 forms and could double that by the end of the year. They increased office visits by 456 claims from last year to this year. The best numbers in the state so far. Congratulations to the VSO's. The volume of people coming in so the word is getting out to go to the VAC.
  - b. The PAC Act contributed a lot to this with receiving the awards. We have a supportive commission that is helping us as well.
  - c. Post levels are getting the word out to go to the VAC. All working together for the same goal. Referrals are not being tracked where they are coming from. Start tracking to help find out what posts are referring. This will help to show at the county level how goals are being met. Could track as part of the intake process.

B. Financial Assistance

- a. FY 24 Current Budget-The first half of the year there is 5-6 veterans assisted a month. This was for natural gas, water, sewer, personal products, electricity and rent. Percent used right on target; longevity will need to add to that with moving money. There is a line item for legal to track the invoices and how much has been spent. The money was from other professional services and will show on the next budget. The auto will change since they will need new tires for the cars but no other repairs. Would like to see the total budget so you could see what percentage you are to total budget to use as an indicator to make sure on track. The back page there are a few over the budget, but there was training completed in May for the Denver training. They are not short but it was used.

C. Veteran Problem-Solving Court

- a. Attend Problem Solving Court twice a week there are two colleagues that go to the courts to hold a peer support group as well as see if there are any veterans that need assistance from the VAC. They help to make sure those with substance abuse issues know they are there to help. There are no statistics of how many people in jail are veterans and know they could come to VAC for help.

D. Mental Health Coordinator

- a. Samantha is the Mental Health Coordinator started in March. This role helps to fill in the gaps. The police are now aware of the service offered for the veterans. Participating in the 708 mental health board for the community. She also completed a grant writing course to help get funds for the program. The grants will help when the VAC moves to the Copperfield building.

E. Motion to File Superintendent's Report

- a. 1<sup>st</sup>: James Hogan
- b. 2<sup>nd</sup>: John Daven
- c. Accepted as is.

**VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

A. VACWC Policies and Procedures in Accordance with 330 ILCS 45/Military Veterans Assistance Act

- a. Isara was not favorable to the veteran.
- b. Need to follow with reason with the county for salary ranges, employment. The procedure was not clarified to the veteran about the guard/reserve members. VP of the IL guard in touch with the attorney and the VAC. If an employee is on their annual duty/tour, pay continues up to 30 days as well as military pay. Involuntary or extra voluntary service, they would only get the difference between the VAC and Military pay if they are making more at the VAC.
- c. Motion for annual voluntary/involuntary service the policy would be the first 30 days per calendar year we pay you the full pay, starting day 31 you would get differential pay. This would be an addition to so no appendment to Isara or Usara. This would be applicable for the guard and reserve. Isara is higher than Usara. We are going to supersede Isara and go more than the law. County policy is the bare minimum.
- d. Are the 30 days calendar or work days? It is actually work days for the VAC schedule (Monday-Friday). It is paid days. Annual tour is also on the weekends. The language needs to be updated to include the clarification on the work days for the 30 days of pay.
- e. There is no impact on pension or health care benefits.

Motion to approve-Accept the policy with the amendment to the policy to include 30 days working days of pay to bring the employee up to the differential if involuntary or extra voluntary service is required for guard and reserve.

- 1<sup>st</sup>: Patrick McLeod
- 2<sup>nd</sup>: James Hogan

B. 1300 Copperfield Building Update

- a. Mike Mahoney told the staff they were going to go out for RFP for the Copperfield building. They are supportive of moving in to the building. The county executive was asked for the status. We did

not get any federal funding for the building but they will move forward to sending out request for proposals (RFP).

- b. The RFP is needed to find out how much it would cost to get the VAC space available and not wait for the entire building. The county will be providing the funding and will need to be voted on by the county. They are spear heading the project. They need to get the proposals and will select the contractors.
- c. RFP is for the architecture. This could determine if fixing the building is feasible or will need to go to plan B.
- d. Have people contact the county board representatives to push. Not one board member has been opposed to it.
- e. Would like to put together a sheet that tells everyone what to communicate. Raj will send the letter that the legions could use to collect the signatures from the posts. Emails should also be utilized to ensure the requests are documented.
- f. The RFP is due within 30 days which should be around September. They will see what the damages are from the vendor.
- g. The building and the cost come out of the county budget and not the VAC budget. Caution the group to push before we receive the evaluation.
- h. The fire department may take over a floor in the building. It has not been confirmed.
- i. We could circle back once we get the RFP's. The RFP has 30 days to respond. By September we should have something back. If they decide to move forward then there will need to be another RFP for the construction.

## **VIII. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. New VSO Position**

- a. With the increase with the productivity the wait factor is about 7 weeks with putting in vacations. When everyone is in the office, we are 5 weeks out. Was thinking of a new structure to higher an executive assistant to off load administrative items and eliminate the Assistant Superintendent and moving back to VSO. There is a lack of space and not a funding issue. Eric is doing 4 or 5 different things and cannot do the payroll since he is doing Financial Assistance, outreach and VSO work. There is trust in what Jen needs. Eric got a big raise what does that do if he is removed from the assistant superintendent. An executive assistant would do general administration of the office. Payroll is the biggest thing since it is semimonthly.
- b. Will you create a new job title. His salary and the title and work level will be compensated by. Makes sense to have the administrative superintendent but also primary outreach program. Head of payroll to do administration. The work Eric is doing now will reflect the salary and title.
- c. Executive assistant would be held accountable for doing payroll and other job duties to help Jen get this off her plate. Is the executive assistant a new person or someone who is already there that could move up? Not sure if it is a new person or someone who is ready to move up. Could give up the office for the Commission Board.
- d. There is a preexisting job description for this role that was submitted and approved by the prior superintendent. Need a VSO, Out Reach Director and an Executive Assistant with only one office. Trying to put people in the roles that fit their strengths.
- e. Redesign his job description and keep the title and give the other items over to the new person. Restructure the SOP to include this. Focus more on the VSO for this role but still keeps Eric in a position should Jen be out he could step in as well. This will need to be added into FY 25 if move forward with adding one additional colleague.

f. Motion to approve-No motion needed here

### **B. Financial Assistance Policy Committee**

- a. The Financial assistance policy has decreased drastically over the year. There was a policy changed in

2020 that changed the eligibility. Veterans are needing help in other areas like with car repairs and rent. The current policy is so restrictive.

- b. Jen proposing creating a financial assistance policy that would allow to help those who come in since the current one is so restrictive.
  - c. The most they hand out is \$40 at post 725 because they cannot vet the person asking for the assistance. There needs to be a structure change to allow to help the veterans that need it.
  - d. There was a veteran that lost their job and need help with paying for gas, car repairs and home payments.
  - e. Rick suggested to create a standardized form to allow to vet the veteran in need.
  - f. Policy only helps with offset of rent for \$350, utilities and an Aldi gift card, and a gift card for gas. Expand to have an emergency assistance line item in the balance. Based on need and has been verified it would be ok from Plainfield post.
  - g. There has to be a cap to put parameters around this.
  - h. Need a committee to review the policy to allow to expand for emergency services.
  - i. The following are the members of the committee:
    - Steve Daley
    - Tony Arellano
    - John Daven
    - Rick Todd
    - Mark Razny
  - j. Motion to approve-Motion to form the committee
    - 1<sup>st</sup>: Raj Pallai
    - 2<sup>nd</sup>: Paul Craven
- C. FY25 Budget
- a. The main account, description, what was provided this year and what is asked for next year. The increase was to account for the increases and cola rates for the VSOs. There is a request for less air travel and mileage increase since training is close.
  - b. New computers were given this year so that is a decrease.
  - c. There is a decrease in the professional services since it was moved into legal services this year.
  - d. Emergency assistance will be increased if voted on for policy.
  - e. The total overall budget for FY25 is \$1,203,000. We went to the county with the pre-approval and that was the first initial meeting. Nothing was flagged by the county so it should go through pending approval from the Commission.
  - f. The pet expenses include food, fixing Charlie and vet bills.
  - g. Will the \$1000 be enough to purchase a laptop with an additional employee? There is one additional computer in the house now they could use.
- h. Motion to approve the FY25 Budget:
- 1<sup>st</sup>: James Hogan
  - 2<sup>nd</sup>: Robert Krueger
- D. Amend Bylaws to Change Meeting Date in The Month of June
- a. Motion to move the meeting to the beginning of the month from the end of the month. The bylaws committee should meet to discuss and make the changes to propose to the committee.
  - b. The committee for the bylaws is as follows:
    - Lisa McGlasson
    - Clark Christiansen
    - John Daven
  - c. Motion to approve-No motion needed on this

E. Superintendent Annual Evaluation Committee

- a. The committee needs to be formed to conduct an evaluation of the superintendent and submit to the VAC President.
- b. The following are the committee members:
  - Paul Cravens
  - Lisa McGlasson
  - Mark Bowman
  - Dennise Havranek
  - Tony Arellano
- c. Motion to approve-Motion not required

## **IX. EXECUTIVE CLOSED SESSION**

- A. Motion to enter closed session (7:39 PM):
  - a. 5ILCS 120/2 Sec2(c)1: The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific individuals
  - b. 5ILCS 120/2 Sec2(c)11: Litigation
  - c. 5ILCS 120/2 Sec2(c)21: Approval of closed Minutes, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024
- B. Motion to return to open session.
- C. Motion to approve items discussed during closed session.

## **X. FOR THE GOOD OF THE COMMISSION (8:03 PM)**

- A. Commission President Updates
  - a. Thank you to the VSOs for the great work to get everything done. Everything we do needs to be right so the veteran gets the best service. Thank you to the commission without you we cannot operate. The commission is the meeting.
- B. Presentation of Certificate of Appreciation for Volunteer
  - a. Appreciation to help get the files digitized. The success was with the help of Mr. Alen Dean an Air Force veteran. He deserves the certificate of appreciation from the VAC.
- C. Legislative Updates
  - a. Hand out with the pending legislation. Jen will send out the list with the links.
  - b. HB 612 WWII veterans to receive the tax exemption and does not have to reapply. EAV over 250,000 you are not exempt in any way. You could receive the tax reduction up to and then prorated.
  - c. SB 3479 If you go to a claim shark or an attorney, they will need to disclose there are other options free of charge.
  - d. Would like to see a bill to support military spouses. Can not get a license in the state where they live. Worked everywhere spouse was stationed, only a veteran could transfer license to practice. Could someone propose this.
- D. Farm 2 Veteran
  - a. Will 4 Vets and Farm 2 Veterans joined together to bring fresh ground beef, pork, steak and eggs to the Will County VAC. A refrigerator and freezer were also donated to the VAC. We are asking for all posts to let the veterans know if they need help to go to the VAC for fresh meet and eggs. We are working with a farm coalition to resource fresh produce in the upcoming weeks.
- E. Recurring Outreach
  - a. Every Thursday: Together We Stand Peer Support Group at VACWC Office Joe Martin
  - b. Second Monday: VSO Papineau Outreach Manhattan American Legion 935 Breakfast
  - c. Every Third Friday: VSO Papineau Outreach at Wilmington VFW 5422
  - d. Every Thursday: Rotating VSOs Outreach at Joliet CBOC
  - e. Every First Monday: VSO Georgakopoulos at Blueberry Hill Café Homer Glen
- F. VACWC Calendar: [www.veteransassistancewillco.org](http://www.veteransassistancewillco.org)
- F. VetFest 2024 September 28<sup>th</sup>
  - Each post will donate a basket for raffle. Looking for other donations as well.
  - Come to the fest and put up a table cloth to get it out there.
- G. Will County Fair August 21<sup>st</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>
  - Volunteers needed for the fair. There are a lot of shifts to cover. This is good exposure for the VAC.

## **XI. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- A. Warriors walk in New Lenox on September 14<sup>th</sup> Walk and the banquet is on September 13<sup>th</sup>. Support the program by coming out to the post July 21<sup>st</sup> Slammers game as a fundraiser for the Warrior Walk.
- B. Stone City Post 2199 picnic August 3<sup>rd</sup> starts at 12 PM.
- C. Stone City Post 2199 July 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Wreaths Across American Van will be there
- D. Lisa appointed the coordinator for the AARP. Proposed to the AARP sponsor tax fairs to help low income or seniors that need help. There are no income requirements but willing to help people.

**XII. MOTION TO ADJOURN**

- A. **1<sup>st</sup>: Robert Krueger**
- B. **2<sup>nd</sup>: Paul Cravens**

**Next Meeting Will Be Held on  
September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024**