



Kent County Veterans Services

836 Fuller Ave NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Phone: 616-632-5722 Fax: 616-632-5723

KCVS@kentcountymi.gov

Minutes- 11/10/2022

Committee present: Mary Johnson, Melvin Bauman, Chris Kamps, Mike Blundell & Jill Hinton-Wolfe(zoom).

Committee absent: Trish Torres (Excused) & Reginald Howard

Staff present: KCVS Manager- Martha Burkett, KCVS Supervisor- Ryan Grams, KCVS Community Outreach Specialist- Rachel Wustman, KCVS Clerk/Emergency Relief Coordinator- Amanda Lake & Deputy County Administrator Jenny James.

Public: Eric Nelson

1) Meeting called to order

- a. The meeting was called to order by Veterans Services Committee chair Mary Johnson.

2) Approval of Minutes

- a. Approved by Chris Kamps, Seconded by Mel Bauman.

3) Pledge of Allegiance – Lead by KCVS Manager Martha Burkett

4) Success Stories

- a. KCVS Martha- I have one. I wanted to highlight a KCVS employee Ryan Grams. Ryan was a part of press conference with Senator Gary Peters talking about the Pact Act. Ryan was there as a subject matter expert, he had great crowd interaction and was able to answer all their questions. Senator Peters called Ryan and asked him to be a part of an expert panel that is coming. We are so proud of Ryan with all his accomplishments, knowledge and skill.

- i. Mary- Mike was also apart of the same panel as Ryan and so we were very well represented

- b. KCVS Martha- We just received a picture of the airport all lit up green for Operation Green Light. We didn't know they were going to do this, so it was a nice surprise. Rachel did share this on our Facebook page.

5) Monthly Impact Report

- a. KCVS Supervisor Ryan- We had a very big month last month if you notice. We have 28 claims awarded last month compared to the month prior of 10. Last year at this time we only had 3 awarded, so that is huge. It looks like the VA is starting to hurry up on their end and get some of our claims awarded. SSR's are down this month. Which is a good thing, meaning veterans aren't experiencing unforeseen emergencies this month. Of course, Meijer Food Vouchers are going strong. We've been able to help a lot of people.

6) Manager Report

- a. KCVS Manager Martha- There is a lot going on right now. The biggest impact we are working on right now is with the Veterans Day Parade and with Operation Green Light. We have a lot going on, on Veterans Day. We have a few different outreach activities we've planned or are participating in that day. There is an event at Grand Valley at Noon, then we will be going to Heather Hills in the afternoon for a pinning ceremony and then of course we have the Veterans Day Parade in the evening.
- b. When I was in the green room at Wood TV last week, I met a woman who was a marketing person from the American Cancer Society. I asked her if she had much interaction with Veterans. After speaking with her about what we do in our office, she agreed to put me in touch with the right person in her organization. So, Rachel and I will try to follow up on that.
- c. The Chamber of Commerce, office of equity and inclusion has given me some feedback. The people who are from the "marginalized population" believe that we need to do a better job of bringing color in to KCVS, and the LGBTQ community needs to be better represented at KCVS. We need to do a better job with that outreach, so they gave me their card. I let them know what we were thinking of doing and he was excited. So, we are waiting to hear more from them, so we can have the opportunity to interact with them and come up with more strategies to bring the underrepresented veteran population out.
- d. I also met with the Jail administration and they're getting excited. I presented them with a proposal about a tiered approach and they loved it. We are hoping to help incarcerated veterans get their DD-214, get Kent County ID cards, start up claims. We are looking at bringing in some psycho educational opportunities by using our clinician from Arbor circle. We just need to make sure that we aren't duplicating services that the jail already offers. We are just waiting on our staff to finish completing the clearance forms so that we can get our staff approved and ready to help the incarcerated veterans. They're talking about using this program as a pilot program to maybe go in and do training for other county offices to begin this in their area for their incarcerated veterans.
- e. The current budget report is on track and there is nothing major going on that will upset that. I met with Chris Wilsens a financial analyst with Kent County Fiscal, before this meeting and we reviewed the projection for the year, and it looks like we will be in really good shape and we should come in under the budget.
- f. We are going to be halting our use of the Jager Foundation for the remainder of 2022. I can't really say much more than that as we currently have legal looking to the matter.
- g. Talking about the MVAA grant there is only one issue we are running into, which is our lodging in Traverse City. The stipend is only \$85 for a hotel room, but that will not pay for a room in Traverse City. We were able to get more money when we were dealing with MVAA Karen Roe. She said we can go above, and they will approve it. But this year, they have some new staff and we just assumed they would approve the overages like they did in the past. But this year, they are kicking it back and they're not going to pay for the overages on the rooms. So, we will just have to absorb that cost, which is a couple thousand dollars. We decided next year that we will not do the Traverse City Retreats

again. We are going to try and utilize local resources for the Equine Retreats instead this year.

7) Old Business

a. Veterans Day Parade

- i. Public Guest Eric Nelson- Everything seems to be on track for the parade so far. KCVS has working on goody bags to pass out during the parade route, along with glowsticks and t-shirts. We do not have any speakers coming to talk after the parade but will be able to see Voices of Freedom perform instead.
- ii. KCVS Martha- The Board of Commissioners also has donated a proclamation for the ceremony.

b. 12 Step program

- i. KCVS Martha- I am going to reach out to Reggie Howard, he hasn't gotten ahold of me to set up a new meeting to go over the program and our plans. We currently have all the materials, so we are ready to go. The 12 step is also something that I spoke with the Jail about was bringing in some sort of 12 step program to Jail for our veterans. Reggie and I just need to nail down a time for the meetings and get it out on our social media.

c. Directional signage for KCVS

- i. Mike- Do we have any update as far as getting some directional signage from the freeway to KCVS?
- ii. KC Deputy Administrator Jenny James- I reached out to the state about that but haven't heard back. I will make note to follow up on that and see where we are with that.

8) New Business

a. Thanksgivings Day Baskets

- i. Mary- In years past we have gathered food items, along with other items to make baskets for 2-3 veteran families. Do we want to do something like this again this year? Rachel has always made a list of items needed in the past and we all work together to get those items from the list.
- ii. KCVS Rachel- Bridge Street Market usually tries to give us a deal on turkeys. So, we are always looking for stuffing, potatoes and those sorts of items. I think that last year most of the committee donated cash, which was great. I then was able to get some items on sale and larger quantity items like potatoes, so they can use stuff like that for more than just this one meal. I know Mary donated stuff like pop tarts and hot chocolate. The kids were so excited about those items.

9) New Activities/collaborations/soliciting feedback/advice

- a. KCVS Rachel- Not a lot going on, we have the parade tomorrow along with a KCVS table that we will have at the Grand Rapids Griffins game on Friday and Saturday nights. I did have someone from the VA reach out to us about helping them plan a women veteran's event. With Martha's approval I did offer Equine Assisted Development Facility as we do have a contract with them. So, we are going to have a bunch of ladies come out to the

farm for a bonfire and do some activities with the horses. We have started sharing this event on our Facebook page and added it to our calendar to get the word out. We also have a few new applications for the house cleaning program. We are going to start getting those out to the committee as they come in. KCVS Kenyon will be starting to take the program over. We are working on a new flyer because of the money coming in from the grant we will have availability for some new clients. We are really trying to push the applicants to be more specific on answering their application questions, so that there will hopefully be less questions from the committee.

10) Public Comment

- a. Eric Nelson- Just a thank you to KCVS for all the help with the parade. I know it will be a success.
- b. Mel- I wanted to thank you all for the card I got in the mail. It was a very nice surprise.

11) Meeting adjourned at: 9:37am.

12) Meeting transcribed by: Amanda Lake