



## **Kent County Veterans Services**

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DRAFT minutes 2-11-2021

Committee Present: Mary Johnson, John Baxter, Mel Bauman, Shane Scherer, Trish Torres, Jill Wolfe,  
Committee Absent: Michael Blundell  
Staff Present: Martha Burkett, Ryan Grams, Jacob Calvert, Nelson Soto  
Guests: Paul Ryan, Theresa Robinson, Jennifer James

1. Meeting called to Order/Introductions –
  - a. The meeting was called to order by Veterans Services Committee Chair Mary Johnson at 8:30am
2. Pledge of Allegiance – Committee Member Trish Torres led those in attendance to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. Introduction of guests – Committee Chair Mary Johnson introduced guests Paul Ryan and Dan Ophoff as well as new Veteran Services Committee members Jill Wolfe and Michael Blundell.
4. Approval of Minutes –
  - a. Committee Member Jill Wolfe noted that the date on the minutes was incorrect and should be changed to 1-14-2021.
  - b. Committee Member John Baxter made a motion to approve the minutes. Committee Member Trish Torres seconded, UNANIMOUS
5. Success Stories –
  - a. Committee Member John Baxter shared his experience receiving his second COVID-19 vaccine dose through the Wyoming VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic, stating that he had been able to receive the vaccination in just 31 minutes.
  - b. Veterans Services Manager and Veterans Support Coordinator Nelson Soto shared that the previous day Nelson took his first call in which he was able to assist a veteran that had recently been released from the Kent County Jail with getting transportation to transitional housing and will be assisting the veteran to Community Rebuilders to obtain permanent housing.
6. Monthly Impact Reports
  - a. Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams provided an update, noting that the number for the Meijer Food Vouchers is zero due to the vouchers currently being unavailable.
7. Manager's Report

- a. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett detailed the **budget report**.
  - b. Martha Burkett stated that she had received notice from the Finance department that there was a shortage in **the 2021 budget reserve amount**. This was remedied by reallocating funds that would otherwise go unspent from the Soldiers and Sailors Relief line item to the reserve funds. While a specific cause of the shortfall could not be determined with certainty, Martha Burkett, with the assistance of Marvin Vannortwick from the Finance department and Deputy Administrator Jennifer James, inspected the departments budget documents to determine that Veterans Services was not at fault.
  - c. Martha Burkett reported that **the 2020 budget** has been successfully reconciled.
  - d. Martha Burkett gave an update on **the program developments**.
  - e. **All programs** are on track and progressing as planned.
  - f. Martha Burkett and Nelson Soto met with staff from the Vet Center and Arbor Circle as well as the probation officers that will be referring veterans to the wellness programs to **discuss the current state of affairs and what steps need to be taken**.
  - g. **The recently hired therapist from Arbor Circle** is being oriented and prepared to begin working with veterans.
  - h. The probation officers have stated that **the courts have not been busy**, however it is expected for more cases to come in in the coming weeks, therefore bringing potential referrals to the wellness program.
  - i. **Outreach media** has been in full swing with members of the staff and partner organizations appearing on billboards, internet advertisements, and news interviews.
  - j. Martha Burkett expressed interest in **having Nelson Soto conduct several speaking events** at local organizations such as the American Legion or VFW, and has had him participate in the community meetings she takes part in to introduce himself and spread awareness of his position.
  - k. Committee member Jill Wolfe offered **to assist in arranging for interviews with local and statewide print outlets** for Nelson Soto to spread awareness of his position.
  - l. Deputy Administrator Jennifer James provided **initial information on the process that she will be following to bring the millage back before the voters**.
  - m. Kent County Veterans Services staff will work with the Advisory Committee to pull together **information about the accomplishments made since the millage was approved last**. This information will be brought before the Legislative and Human Resource committee and the Finance and Physical Resources committee, which will then have an opportunity to review all the information that has been gathered, as well as proposed ballot language. The two committees will then forward a recommendation to the full board at which time the board will then make the final decisions on the proposed ballot language.
  - n. Jennifer James also recommended **meeting with Area Agency on Aging** to receive advice on receiving millage approval as they have done so several times in the past.
  - o. **A timeline** will be provided once Jennifer James has received guidance from the Elections Office.
  - p. Martha Burkett asked Jennifer James to **explain how funding will work as the current millage expires**. Jennifer James explained that while the millage will expire on December 31, 2021, the funds collected in 2021 will be applied to the 2022 programming.
8. Old Business

- a. Committee Chair Mary Johnson began discussion on the proposed changes to the Soldiers and Sailors Relief policy.
- b. Veterans Services Supervisor Ryan Grams presented the proposed changes as follows:
  - i. Update the names of the Advisory Committee members.
  - ii. Change the name of the department from “Department of Veterans’ Affairs” to “Veteran’s Services”.
  - iii. Change the definition of “Veteran” to include National Guard and reservists.
  - iv. Add NGB22 and HINK from a VA clinic as acceptable forms of proof of service.
  - v. Remove “active duty” from the “Eligible Dependent” section.
  - vi. Add “and photo identification” to the end of the “Resident” section.
  - vii. Change “Veterans Affairs Committee” to “Veterans’ Services Advisory Committee” in the “Frequency of application” section.
  - viii. Change “Applicants who have a demonstrated history of frequent assistance requests may be denied or application for assistance may be presented to The Kent County Veterans Affairs Committee in order to receive approval, should the Emergency Relief Coordinator deem it to be warranted” to “Though discretionary there is no limitation as to the frequency of applications. A qualified applicant may apply as often as a non-reoccurring need occurs. It is the burden of the applicant to seek financial assistance from other resources outside of Kent County Veterans Services” in the “Frequency of application” section.
  - ix. Change “Though discretionary there is no limitation as to the frequency of applications. A qualified applicant may apply as often as a non-reoccurring need occurs. It is the burden of the applicant to seek financial assistance from other resources outside of Kent County Veterans Services” to “Applicants who have a demonstrated history of frequent assistance requests may be denied or application may be presented to The Kent County Veterans’ Services Advisory Committee in order to receive approval, should the Emergency Relief Coordinator deem it to be warranted” in the “Frequency of assistance” section.
  - x. Change “Veteran Service Officer” to “Emergency Relief Coordinator” in the third bulleted item in the “Application Process” section.
  - xi. Change “Kent County Veterans Affairs Committee” to “Kent County Veterans’ Services Advisory Committee” in the third bulleted item of the “Application Process” section.
  - xii. Add “Beyond the applicant’s first application, the” to the sixth bulleted item in the “Application Process” section.
  - xiii. Remove “Budget course: Dates are TBD by KCVS” from the sub-bulleted item of the sixth bulleted item in the “Application Process” section.
    - 1. This change was rejected as is and will be rewritten by Mary Sumners.
  - xiv. Add “The Veterans’ Services Advisory Committee has the ability to overturn any decisions made by the Emergency Relief Coordinator” to the end of the “Application Process” section.
  - xv. Change “\$750.00” to “\$1500.00”, “\$1500.00” to “\$3000.00”, and “(<\$1500.00)” to “>\$3000” in the “Authorization Levels:” section.

- xvi. Remove "Print 2 copies of the voucher, 1 copy goes with applicant, 2<sup>nd</sup> copy goes into VetraSpec Documents with application" due to being covered under SOP.
- xvii. Add "Mortgage Payments" sub-section to the "Housing" section.
  - 1. Add "A copy of the mortgage and a separate mortgage letter from the lender must be provided" to the "Mortgage Payments" sub-section.
  - 2. Add "The mortgage must be in the applicant's name" to the "Mortgage Payments" sub-section.
  - 3. Add "Applicants may only submit late mortgage payment requests. Future mortgage payments will not be considered" to the "Mortgage Payments" sub-section.
  - 4. Add "No property taxes will be paid" to the "Mortgage Payments" sub-section.
- xxviii. Add "will eligible for consideration" to the "Security Deposit/1<sup>st</sup> Months Rent" sub-section.
- xix. Remove "Annotate in Vetraspec financial assistance that the payment is for SECURITY DEPOSIT" from the first bullet point in the "Security Deposit/1<sup>st</sup> Months Rent" sub-section.
- xx. Add "Kent County Veterans' Services is not responsible for" to the fifth bullet point in the "Security Deposit/1<sup>st</sup> Months Rent" sub-section.
- xxi. Change "HRS" to "Home Repair Services" in the "Home Repairs" sub-section.
- xxii. Remove "REQUIRES PRE AND POST INSPECTION. (Mel or Fred committee)" from the "Home Repairs" sub-section.
- xxiii. Change "treating" to "treated" in the "Bed Bugs/ other infestations" sub-section.
- xxiv. Add "Cell Phone and Internet Service" sub-section below the "Bed Bugs/ other infestations" sub-section.
  - 1. Add "The applicant must show proof the services are in danger of being shut off" as a new sub-section of "Cell Phone and Internet Service".
  - 2. Add "The applicant must prove the need for services (such as for employment or school)" as a new sub-section of "Cell Phone and Internet Service".
- xxv. Remove the entire "Medical Bills" sub-section.
- xxvi. Remove "Auto repairs are once in a lifetime per vehicle" from the "Auto Repairs" sub-section.
- xxvii. Change "Require" to "After the first assistance" in the second bulleted item in the "Utilities" sub-section.
- xxviii. Add "is required" to the to the second bulleted item in the "Utilities" sub-section.
- xxix. Change "ONE TIME PER YEAR" to "Applicants can be awarded up to three times per twelve months" in the seventh bulleted item in the "Utilities" sub-section.
- xxx. Remove "Maximum of \$800.00" from the "Utilities" sub-section.
- xxxi. Remove "IF EXCEEDS REQUIRES BOARD REVIEW. PROOF ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN SOUGHT ELSEWHERE REQUIRED" from the "Utilities" sub-section.
- xxxii. Add "and/or clothing" to the second bullet point in the "Work Clothes/Tools" sub-section.
- xxxiii. Remove "\$400.00 LIMIT ON CLOTHING" from the "Work Clothes/Tools" sub-section.

- xxxiv. Remove “\$1000.00 LIMIT ON TOOLS” from the “Work Clothes/Tools” sub-section.
  - xxxv. Add “\*\*WITH EXCEPTION TO HOME LOANS, NO LOAN DEBT WILL BE PAID\*\*” to the “Work Clothes/Tools” sub-section.
  - xxxvi. Remove “Not Covered By Emergency Relief” sub-section
  - xxxvii. Remove Page 13.
  - xxxviii. Change “Veteran” to “Veterans” in the “Appellant Rights” sub-section.
  - xxxix. Add “office or Advisory Committee” to the “Appellant Rights” sub-section.
    - xl. Change “with” to “to” in the Appellant Rights” sub-section.
    - xli. Remove “in writing” from the “Appellant Rights” sub-section.
    - xlii. Add “Veterans’ Services Advisory” to the first bullet point in the “Appellant Rights” sub-section.
    - xliii. Add “Meetings are held monthly” to the first bullet point in the “Appellant Rights” sub-section.
    - xliv. Add “Veterans’ Services Advisory” to the second bullet point in the “Appellant Rights” sub-section.
    - xlv. Add “The applicant may appear in person for the Committee’s review if it is requested in their appeal” to the third bullet point in the “Appellant Rights” sub-section.
    - xlvi. Add “will be accepted” to the third bullet point in the “Appellant Rights” sub-section.
    - xlvii. Remove the “Closing Applications” sub-section.
  - c. The Committee concluded that a proposal would be created on the topic of month to month rents to be voted on at the next meeting.
  - d. Ryan Grams shared that starting in two weeks all of the Soldiers and Sailors Relief program responsibilities would be passed from VSO Reginald Farrior to Clerk II Jacob Calvert and Reginald Farrior will be starting VSO training.
9. New Business-
- a. Committee Member John Baxter spoke on the Kent County Millage Initiative.
  - b. Committee Chair Mary Johnson proposed creating a new sub-committee consisting of Committee Member John Baxter, Committee Member Mel Bauman, Committee Member Shane Scherer, and Deputy Administrator Jennifer James to explore the promotion of the Kent County Millage Initiative.
10. Committee Connection Information Sheet-
- a. Veterans Services Manager Martha Burkett stated that there were no new developments.
11. Around the Table-
- a. New events-
    - i. No New Events
12. Public Comment –
- a. **Paul Ryan** shared an update on the West Michigan Veterans Transportation Pilot.
  - b. **The program** currently has six drivers and approximately six riders.
  - c. **The program** has been extended until March 11, 2021.
  - d. **The program** is currently in the process of seeking funding to operate past March 11, 2021 and potentially expand into surrounding counties.
  - e. Paul Ryan shared that **WINC has partnered with Soul Food Eatery in Muskegon** to provide three dinners, two lunches, and two breakfasts to any veteran from the 13-county area that

- is covered by the West Michigan Veterans Coalition. Funding was provided by the Bob Woodruff Foundation, and Kent County Veterans are eligible to receive meals.
- f. Paul Ryan voiced his support for **including National Guardsmen and Reservists in the Soldiers and Sailors Relief policy** and shared a recent report from the Department of Defense which stated that National Guard and Reserve unit activation is at its highest rate since World War II.
  - g. Committee Member Mel Bauman also **voiced his support for including National Guardsmen and Reservists in the Soldiers and Sailors Relief policy** and shared his experience getting his second COVID-19 vaccine and seeing Air Guardsmen that had been called to duty.
13. Adjournment –Veterans Services Committee Chair Mary Johnson moved adjourned the meeting at 10:21am.