



VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

May 2, 2017

I. Call to Order – Don Beasley, Chairman

The May 2, 2017, meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Chairman Don Beasley at 10:00 am. The meeting was held at the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA) Administrative Office, 602 N. Fifth Street, Baton Rouge. The meeting opened with the pledge of allegiance recited in unison, followed by a short prayer from Commissioner Green. Roll call of members was conducted by the Chairman.

Commissioners present: Don Beasley, Rudy Bourg, Bill Detweiler, Mary Mills, Thomas Green, Carroll Knott, Richard O'Brien, Wyatt Lobrano.

LDVA Staff: Joey Strickland, Secretary; Homer Rodgers, Undersecretary; Julie Baxter-Payer, Executive Counsel; Lisa Bruhl, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Veterans Homes; Alex Juan, Communications Director; Al Leger, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits; Bill Dixon, State Approving Agency (SAA) Director; Holly Talley, Executive Management Officer; English Josey, Internal Auditor; Linda Theriot, Director of Nursing Services; Matt Farlow, Deputy Assistant Secretary/ HR & Finance; Stephanie Wade, Chief Fiscal Officer; Dustin Guy, Human Resources Director; Billy Robbins, Cemeteries Program Director; Barry Robinson, Capital Area Regional Manager/Training Officer; and Charmagne Scott, Confidential Assistant. LDVA Cemetery Directors: Tim Johnson, NELA Director; Ted Crumm, Slidell; Carol Martin, Central; Ken Epperson, NWLA.

Guest: Mr. Alton Rock

II. Introductory Remarks- Secretary Joey Strickland

Secretary Strickland welcomed Commissioners to the second of four quarterly meetings for 2017. Began with an introduction of LDVA's new Legal Counsel, Julie Baxter-Payer. Joined department after working in the Governor's Office as the Deputy Chief of Staff. Julie gave remarks about her background and her path to LDVA.

Billy Robbins introduced the Cemetery Director from LDVA's 4 cemeteries. At previous meeting, Commissioners requested they attend the meeting to brief about what was going on at their respective cemeteries. This allows the commissioners to get to know them face to face and vice versa.

III. Approval of February 7, 2017 Minutes

The February 7, 2017 meeting minutes had been distributed to the Commissioners for review prior to the May 2, 2017 meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Division Reports

Human Resources (HR)/Fiscal. The standard handout showing vacancies within the Administrative Program and the five State Veterans' Homes (SVHs) as of April 21, 2017, was provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. Vacancies for the Administrative staff total only 2 vacancies. The vacancies were in: Admin- Executive Counsel (filled 1 May 2017); Cemetery Program- Leesville, Mobile Equipment Operator (filled end of April/May). Mr. Guy noted the vacancies at the Veterans Homes in the nursing division are 91% filled. The department received Civil Service approval for the annual Affirmative Action Plan. HR is working on updating process/policy and procedure manual. Continuing the audit of HR entries. LVH received a very good HR program "drop-in" audit in March.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Ms. Mills to accept the Human Resources report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Farlow reviewed the standard handout of the department's FY 2016-2017 operating budget as of April 21, 2017, which had also been provided to the Commissioners prior to the meeting. He noted that approximately 78.8% of the budget had been expended. LDVA currently has nothing in arrears; travel vouchers and HQ budget status are being audited monthly; VACs budgets statuses are being audited monthly; Cemetery payments/budgets are being audited and reconciled monthly; homes gaining payments reports under preparation and action by each home, with NELA home already in progress.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Ms. Mills to accept the Fiscal report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Cemeteries. The standard handout concerning the status of the 4 LDVA Cemeteries as of April 17, 2017, was provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. Mr. Robbins and each of the Cemetery Directors Reported:

Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery/Keithville, Ken Epperson: had a total of 20 internments for March. June 15 cemetery will host a bench dedication. Sends out a monthly newsletter. Working on various Outreach Projects to raise awareness.

Southeast LA Veterans Cemetery/Slidell, Tedd Krumm: had a total of 46 interments for March. Busiest cemetery. Working on grant to add more space for cremains.

Northeast LA Veterans Cemetery/Rayville, Tim Johnson: had a total of 9 interments for March. Continuing to work with FEMA and LDVA to correct erosion issues at the cemetery. Having some storage issues. Recognized Randy Joiner for the great work he does as an employee at the cemetery.

Central LA Veteran Cemetery/Leesville, Carol Martin: had a total of 12 interments for March. Having some turf issues and water is yellowing markers. Working to resolve these issues.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Knott, to accept the State Cemeteries report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Veterans Homes (SVHs). Ms. Bruhl briefed on her standard consolidated report that had been provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting. Also, copies of demographic information for all facilities were provided to the Commissioners. Ms. Bruhl highlighted activities at each facility:

Northwest LA Veterans Home/Bossier City

Facility occupancy: 89%

Facility will celebrated its 10th Anniversary in April 2017.

Installation of modern home theater system donated by the Elks Lodge.

Northeast LA Veterans Home/Monroe

Facility occupancy: 94%

The HVAC replacement project/contract has been awarded and project will begin soon.

The annual crawfish boil for residents, their families, and staff is scheduled for Friday, April 28th.

Southwest LA Veterans Home/Jennings

Facility occupancy: 93%

In process of reopening in house pharmacy. Pharmacist has been hired. Projected open date is May 15, 2017.

Facility received a generous donation from the Zigler Foundation. Purchased a 35 inch Samsung flat screen TVs for every Veteran's room.

LA Veterans Home/Jackson

Facility occupancy: 81%

Annual Resident Family Picnic was held on March 24, 2017. Great turnout thanks to good staff preparation. Residents and their families had a great day.

The facility completed their 2nd CNA class on April 4, 2017.

Southeast LA Veterans Home/Reserve

Facility occupancy: 90%

Work began in December 2016 on the new recreational activity building. Building is set to be completed by June 11, 2017.

The facility will be hosting its 2nd CNA program in April 2017. They have 10 applicants participating in the course.

A motion was made by Mr. Green, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to accept the SVHs report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Contact Assistance/MFA Fund. The standard handout concerning the status of Contact Assistance was provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. Mr. Leger reported all parishes are open. Contact assistance remains fully staffed with no vacancies. 4 new counselors are currently receiving OJT and are awaiting the VAC 101 class to be held. Only 4 that do not have PIV cards. Mr. Robinson is setting up VAC training class for the Fall. All counselors from around the state are required to attend. Roving counselor positions are continuing to have a positive effect.

A motion was made by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, to accept the Contact Assistance report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Talley reviewed the Military Family Assistance (MFA) Fund report, which showed a current balance of \$366,028.29, as of March 28, 2017. Donations to date for this current fiscal year totaled \$10,706.45, and expenditures totaled \$422,207.61. Expenditures were: Flood related \$345,601.00; MFA Need Based \$31,230.82; and LANG Travel \$45,375.79.

A motion was made by Ms. Mills, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to accept the Military Family Assistance Fund report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Approving Agency Cleo Wallace reported on SAA in Mr. Dixon's place due to Bill being out recovering from surgery. He reported Veterans' SAA, Veterans' Education and Training has completed its 2016-17 FY Contract. The SAA has received a satisfactory rating from the VA and JPRG. This is the highest rating a SAA can receive. LDVA has received this rating for the past 10 years.

A motion was made by Mr. Green, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, to accept the State Approving Agency report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Internal Audit. Mr. Josey discussed the Audit Projects Worked on in 2016 – 2017: Cemetery Division- issued reports for 4 cemeteries in February 2017; developed and completed Monthly audits of Resident Aging Balances of the Accounts Receivable at each of the 5 homes; began quarterly audit cycle. He also discussed the Non-Audit Projects Performed: Property maintenance and Management Pilot thru the ACMS Pioneer system.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green, to accept the Internal Audit report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Counsel Ms. Baxter-Payer just started with the department officially the day before. She is working to get up to speed on the current workings of the department.

Communication/Women Veteran Outreach Ms. Juan was attending another event, so the Secretary asked Ms. Talley to brief from the handout provided to Commissioners by Ms. Juan prior to the meeting. LDVA has received compliments from across the country on the new website. All feedback has been positive and Veterans really like how user friendly it is. Continuing to work with website developers to improve database capabilities that capture data in the best possible way. LDVA has constant contact capabilities which allows the department to do email blasts, etc.

LDVA launched a Women's Lunch & Learn series is picking up momentum. Second luncheon will be held in Monroe at ULM on April 28. 25 female Veterans were registered to attend.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green, to accept the Communication and Women Veteran Outreach reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Other Matters

Veterans Park It was discussed that there is discussion of turning the park by the Capitol in to a Memorial Park to honor Louisiana's service members.

Third Quarter Commission Meeting The next Commission meeting has tentatively been set for Tuesday, September 12 at 10:00 am, pending commissioners confirming their schedules are clear for this date to ensure quorum will be met.

VI. Adjournment

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, a motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 12:39 pm.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ Joey Strickland, Secretary

Date of Approval

Minutes submitted by Charmagne Scott. Copies of all handouts are filed with the Commission minutes and are available upon request.