

**Veterans Advisory Committee**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Date/Time/Location:** April 9, 2018/10:00 a.m./Veterans' Conference Room, Whatcom County Health Department

**Members Present:** John Mitchell, Paul Pelot, Richard Conoboy, Christopher Brown, Bob Hines, Heather Mueller, Al Jensen, Ward Nelson

**Members Absent:** Wes Weston

**County Staff:** Elizabeth Harmon-Craig, WCHD Veterans Specialist, Chris D'Onofrio, WCHD Human Services Clerk; Anne Deacon, WCHD Human Services Manager

**Guests:** Jim Pace, VSO; Richard Wilson, VSO; Pam Wilson, VSO, Doris Kent, VSO; Ann Beck, WWU Veterans Specialist; Melissa Nyberg, Opportunity Council; Cindy, Veterans Navigator Program Representative

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action/Who
1. Call to order	Meeting called to order by Chair Paul Pelot	Paul Pelot
2. Roll Call/ Introductions	Roll call, quorum present. Introductions commenced.	All
3. Review/Approval February, 2018 minutes	Minutes of February 12, 2018 reviewed. Motion made (John Mitchell) and seconded (Ward Nelson) to approve minutes as presented.	<b>Motion:</b> To approve the February 12, 2018 minutes as presented. <b>Aye 7, Nay 0, Abstain 1, Absent: 1</b>
<b>4. New Business</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="157 1019 422 1081">• <b>Update on recent resolution</b></li> <li data-bbox="157 1224 436 1455">• <b>Discussion of challenges faced by representatives of Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)</b></li> </ul>	<p>The ordinance to adjust income eligibility criteria for veteran support was passed and implementation has begun. Liz hasn't seen discrimination based on source of income (vouchers), but instead the challenge is finding a housing unit being rented at the Fair Market Rate. The efficiency of the veteran's program and the ability to expand service without requesting new funds earned praise from the council.</p> <p>The VSO representatives in Whatcom County are experiencing several challenges that stem from a history of burdensome accreditation policies and lack of support from the state offices which has resulted in a low number of representatives, frustration on the part of the representatives, and a relatively low rate of service connection for local veterans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="520 1425 1556 1482">• Jim Pace has been a VSO representative for over 20 years and serves many veterans in Whatcom County as well as some that travel from Canada. His</li> </ul>	Liz Harmon-Craig

	<p>work contributes to veterans receiving millions of dollars in Whatcom County based on his contract which pays him \$10,000/year. The large caseload and his age have led him to consider retirement in 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Richard and Pam Wilson are VSO representatives that volunteer at the Bellingham Vet Center. Their highly fluctuation workload has them stretched thin on time, and they are also considering retirement. They are concerned that not enough younger veterans are engaged enough to take on their rolls, and that the need to work with younger vets from the Iraq/Afghanistan era will not be met with the present system.</li> <li>• The process of becoming a VSO representative requires intensive training, the ability to work with newer technology, and the willingness to travel to and from Seattle without compensation. Representatives must be accredited with the VA through an existing service agency such as Vietnam Veterans of America or Disabled Veterans of America.</li> <li>• Doris Kent points out that there is a lot of funding left on the table with about 4/5 of the Whatcom Veterans not connected to services. A professional, full-time VSO representative in Whatcom County would bring in enough funding through increased service connections to offset the cost of their salary.</li> <li>• Some vets see the existing service organizations distastefully – might prefer a neutral party, such as the County’s Veteran’s Office.</li> <li>• A state-wide coordinated response to the challenge is being developed by the Association of County Human Services organization in the coming months. This could lead to a county-hired staff member that has their salary paid in part by the state.</li> </ul> <p>Ward motions that Liz prepare a proposal in conjunction with the VSO representatives and service organizations within Whatcom County to investigate how to renew/extend/expand the contract currently held by Jim Pace and create a plan to utilize those funds moving forward after Jim retires.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bob seconds the motion and all members vote in favor.</li> </ul> <p>There is consensus that many of the currently-serving VSO representatives will be willing to train new vets to take their place. For many returning vets, a period of up to ten years is common before that vet is ready to reconnect with services or service provision.</p>	<p><b>Motion:</b> To explore options for retaining the contract of Jim Pace in Whatcom County after his retirement  <b>Aye 8, Nay 0, Abstain 0, Absent: 1</b></p>
<p><b>5. Fund Balance</b></p>	<p>The fund balance is currently \$604,497.42</p>	<p>Liz</p>
<p><b>6. Good of the Order</b></p>	<p>The <i>Growing Veterans</i> organization will host a plant sale at Bellewood Acres on May 6<sup>th</sup> to raise money for the organization.</p> <p>An Energy Careers Prep Night will take place at Bellingham Technical College on</p>	

	<p>April 10<sup>th</sup> from 4:30-8:30 for people interested in careers in the energy sector.</p> <p>On April 11<sup>th</sup>, from 9:00am – noon there will be a Veteran’s Job Fair in Ferndale at the Pioneer Pavilion Community Center at 2007 Cherry Street sponsored by WorkSource.</p>	
<b>7. Next Meeting</b>	Next meeting will take place on June 11, 2018 from 10:00-11:30	<b>Ongoing homework assignment:</b> submit to Liz for discussion at next meeting ideas to engage veterans in activities they like to do.
<b>8. Adjourn</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting was adjourned at 11:30</li> </ul>	