

Veterans Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date/Time/Location: June 11, 2018/10:00 a.m./Veterans' Conference Room, Whatcom County Health Department

Members Present: John Mitchell, Richard Conoboy, Christopher Brown, Heather Mueller, Al Jensen, Ward Nelson, Wes Weston

Members Absent: Paul Pelot, Robert Hines

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

Guests: Ann Beck, Assistant Director of Veteran Services, Western Washington University

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action/Who
1. Call to order	Meeting called to order by Vice-Chair John Mitchell	John Mitchell
2. Roll Call/ Introductions	Roll call, quorum present. Introductions commenced. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board member Wes Weston attended for the first time and shared his background: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wes is retired from the Marine Corps after 28 years of service ○ He now works on installing renewable energy systems on marine bases to reduce cost and improve resilience ○ He is an active volunteer and supports the Red Cross as a volunteer instructor, Toys for Tots, Marine Corps League, FourBlock instructor, and golf tournaments that raise money for scholarships ○ Wes works as a consultant for FourBlock and provides coursework for veteran university students to help them prepare themselves for the occupational world 	All, Wes Weston
3. Review/Approval April, 2018 minutes	Minutes of April 9, 2018 reviewed. Motion made (Ward Nelson) and seconded (Al Jensen) to approve minutes as presented. A vote was held and the motion passed.	Motion: To approve the April 9, 2018 minutes as presented. Aye 6, Nay 0, Abstain 1, Absent: 2
4. New Business • WWU Veterans Initiative Presentation from Ann Beck	Ann Beck reports that the veteran community at WWU faces unique challenges relating to campus culture. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military service is looked down on by some of the students who equate veterans with war • Board members report that veterans clubs have struggled in the past to engage with the broader campus community, and that some veteran students feel that they need to downplay their service 	Ann Beck leads discussion

<p>• VSO Officers Update</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative perceptions appear to be limited to students- interactions with professors have been much more positive • In the past, elsewhere, administrators have been influential in forming campus culture and anti-military leaders have shaped negative associations • The experiences of local vets at WWU have been variable, with some finding acceptance while others have not • Veterans approach university with more life experience and maturity, and this can lead them to view selves as different from the civilian population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Despite these assets, Ann is concerned that veteran students are not getting the unique types of support they need to better integrate and find success on campus ○ One specific challenge for vet students is managing the financial paperwork and obligations as well as the academics • Veteran population is growing, and vets are more likely to be first-generation college students and/or people of color than the rest of the student body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The percent of vets that are women is also increasing quickly • The goal for student veterans is better integration with the broader community in Bellingham and beyond <p>There is a completion waiver for undergrads who have used all of their benefits but not yet graduated that is being underutilized</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a partnership with Olympic College in Bremerton <p>A vet scholarship fund is being built to provide ongoing financial support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To become endowed, they will need to boost the fund from \$20k to \$25k • Chamber of Commerce meeting suggested as funding opportunity, as well as a chance to tout the benefits of hiring veterans <p>After the VSO representatives presented to the board last meeting, Liz has been working to increase VSO capacity in Whatcom County. She reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The contract held by Jim Pace will be terminated with his retirement in 2019 and cannot be used by a replacement VSO • A new Veteran’s Group has been created as part of the Association of County Human Services, which is a state-wide organization nested within the Washington State Association of Counties • WDVA will offer training and accreditation free of charge to county employees, but not to volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Liz intends to get this certification, but will not be able to handle the caseload by herself; she hopes instead to have volunteer support do much of the upfront paperwork that she could then certify/submit ○ One benefit to having Liz certified is that she will have better visibility 	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other Veteran's Related-Activities and Resources 	<p style="text-align: center;">to track claims and update clients on progress/problems/needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bob Wilson, the current VSO who volunteers at the VSO office once per week will continue while seeking certification through the Lummi Tribal Authority • A county employ who works in probation (Del Harden) is currently working towards accreditation and intends to join forces with the veterans service office <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Del will volunteer, but will continue to work 40 hours per week at his job in probation, so his time will be limited here • The expected need for VSO support is about three days per week, ideally split among three volunteers to avoid burnout <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Each volunteer will need to complete about 40 hours of online training and will need to have the skills to work with vulnerable individuals who may have various types of illness, or be in states of disarray ○ In the long term, we will likely need to expand beyond the three days per week as more vets utilize services and their needs grow ○ In the near-term, Al Jensen may be able to lend some support with VSOs from the American Legion • The plan to certify Liz and utilize assistance from volunteers will help in the short term, but a long term solution will likely require funding a VSO staff position, and possibly using the veteran's fund to pay for that position, although it's not currently allowed by our RCWs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Luanne Van Werven has shown support for a bill that would allow veterans' fund to pay for this position, but it has not been able to pass the state legislature <p>A group of veterans recently built a wheelchair ramp for another veteran in Maple Falls. This is a great example of veterans coming together to support one another, but there is concern that many members of local service organizations are ageing and that the need to find replacements is becoming more urgent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Whatcom Allied Veterans Council could be a good resource for this • There are veterans groups on the various campuses around Bellingham that could help fill the need of recruiting younger veterans in service organizations • As the pool of veterans shrinks (fewer people serve now than in the past), efforts/outreach to recruit service members will need to increase • It is important that these service organizations continue to work on behalf of veterans because there are limitations to what the veterans office can do and many holes that will need to be filled by outside agencies 	
<p>5. Fund Balance</p>	<p>The fund balance is currently \$720,744</p>	<p>Liz</p>

<p>6. Good of the Order</p>	<p>There will be a car show sponsored by VVA on Sunday, July 22 in Barkley Village (2211 Rimland Drive, 10am-2pm)</p> <p>Veteran's Picnic at the Lairmont Manor on August 21 at noon to honor WWII and Korean War Veterans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This event is free for the veterans. The cost for guests is \$25. Please make reservations before August 15th. CALL: DJ Kent at Lairmont Manor, 360-647-1444 Email: info@lairmontmanor.com Please provide the following information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Name(s) and number of guests, dates of military service and contact information. 	
<p>7. Next Meeting</p>	<p>Next meeting will take place on August 13, 2018 from 10:00-11:30</p>	<p>Ongoing homework assignment: submit to Liz for discussion at next meeting ideas to engage veterans in activities they like to do.</p>
<p>8. Adjourn</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting was adjourned at 11:30 	