



Commission on Veterans Affairs



MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair

PLEASE NOTE: Given the concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission on Veterans Affairs will be meeting virtually via Zoom.

Join the meeting via ZOOM

<https://zoom.us/j/91533367547>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 915 3336 7547 followed by #.

If an attendee would like to speak during the meeting, they can raise their hand if on video and Chair will recognize you or you can use the “hand raise” function under the reactions tab at bottom of page. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the middle of the page and the functions will be at the bottom of the page. Use the Zoom app to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press *9 to raise your hand. Those calling into the meeting can press *6 to mute or unmute their phone.

**6:00 Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance,
Approval of February 2021 Meeting Minutes – Wayne Miller, Chair**

6:05 Veteran Eviction Prevention – John Mendez, Executive Director, Bethesda Cares

**6:15 COVID–19 Vaccinations for Veterans and Related Info – Cynthia Izuno Macri, M.D., FACS,
FACOG, CAPT MC USN (Ret.)**

6:45 The American Minorities Veterans Research Project (AMVRP) – Dr. Elwood Gray
AMVRP has been working with the African American Health Program to assist minorities, especially Veterans, with testing and vaccinations, and food insecurity.

7:00 Vietnam War Veterans Day, March 29, 2021 Recognition Events – Wayne Miller and all

7:20 Updates

7:30 Adjourn

If you need a sign language interpreter or any other accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov.

**Commission’s Website – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva
Veterans Network Directory – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/vnd**



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
March 16th, 2021**

****MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM****

I. Call to Order

Wayne Miller, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Wayne asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Wayne recognized prisoners of war and asked for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged.

II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the February 2021 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the February 2021 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Veteran Eviction Prevention – John Mendez, Executive Director, Bethesda Cares

Website: www.bethesdacares.org

Through a contract with Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Bethesda Cares has eviction prevention funding designated for Veterans. This funding can assist a Veteran household that has received an eviction, about to become evicted or is about to become homeless. Caseworkers can present an eviction notice issued by the landlord. Funding available is between \$500 to \$1,500. Funding is paid directly to the landlord as long as there is an agreement from the landlord that the Veteran will not be evicted. Veterans who need more funding are connected with the DHHS's housing stabilization unit which can work through those higher amounts. Veterans can request a phone interview with DHHS by calling 311. To be eligible for Bethesda Cares funding, the Veteran must have served in active duty for at least one day. Military discharge is not a factor for approval. Loss of income does not have to be COVID-19 related. John noted that this funding is for armed services. It also cannot be used for National Guard or Reserve members who do not have active duty service. Case workers can contact Bethesda Cares for more information and to apply for funds – 301-907-9244, info@bethesdacares.org.

Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, reported the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a refundable tax credit for low- and moderate-income workers, was expanded in the recently passed American Rescue Plan. She noted that EITC may be another source for Veterans. She is working with a community-based organization in Frederick that has received a grant to provide community education on EITC. According to this organization, approximately 95% of persons eligible for EITC did not know about the tax credit. John said EITC could help Veteran households as well as the recently passed child tax credit or stimulus funds if the Veteran is eligible.

Stan Siedel, Maryland Veterans Commission (MVC), reported the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund has increased their eligibility requirements that an applicant's income may now not exceed 250% of the federal poverty guidelines. For a one-person household, 250% of the federal poverty guideline is \$31,900. There is currently \$180,000 in available funding. The program is mostly used for assistance with rent, mortgage and utilities. For more information and to request an application for the Veterans Trust Fund contact the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Grant Administrator, Mark Hendricks at 800-446-4926, ext. 6460 or by email mark.hendricks@maryland.gov.

IV. COVID-19 Vaccinations for Veterans and Related Info – Cynthia Izuno Macri, M.D., FACS, FACOG, CAPT MC USN (Ret.)

PowerPoint: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A&D%20Docs/CVA/INFORMATIONFORVETERANSCOVID19.pdf>

Please review PowerPoint for information on COVID-19.

Dr. Macri stated that while the vaccines may be effective against the development of severe disease and death from COVID-19, it is still important to continue mitigation and prevention strategies including wearing masks while in public and avoiding large crowds.

Dr. Macri shared several websites that Veterans can use to stay informed:

- www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine
- www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/stay-informed
 - Sign up for this
 - VA will call you when it's your turn if you are registered with a VA facility/eligible for VA care.
 - If you have not done so yet, complete the paperwork to become a VHA member!
- www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html

Veterans can also contact the DC VA Medical Center Vaccine Appointment Line at 202-745-4342. Hours: Monday – Friday, 6am – 4pm, and Saturdays, 9am – 4pm. Eligibility Criteria: They are scheduling enrolled Veterans who meet the following criteria; age 65 and older, homeless, essential frontline workers, primary and secondary caregivers, have spinal cord injuries/disorders or are 50-64 with CDC-defined risks high-risk conditions such as: cancer, chronic kidney disease, COPD, heart conditions, obesity, pregnancy, sickle cell disease, smoking and type 2 diabetes.

The DC VA Medical Center will be offering a Saturday vaccination appointment at the following VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC):

- Saturday, March 20: Charlotte Hall, MD
- Saturday, March 27: Montgomery County, MD
 - 202-745-8000, Option 2 (Hours: 7am to 4:30 p.m, Monday through Friday)
- Saturday, April 10: Fort Belvoir, VA

Betsy Luecking, Staff, said the VA CBOC in Martinsburg, West Virginia is vaccinating Veterans 55 and older. Their number is 304-263-0811.

Dr. Macri noted that the Chinese Culture and Community Service Center (CCACC) located across the street from the Montgomery County CBOC in Gaithersburg will also be holding a vaccination clinic on Saturday, March 27th. CCACC was identified as an organization that could provide vaccines to an at-risk community.

V. The American Minorities Veterans Research Project (AMVRP) – Dr. Elwood Gray

Website: <https://americanmvrp.com/>

AMVRP works to provide the highest quality of service, support, and research data for all Veterans, especially minority Veterans. They will provide referral service to the National Archives, the Library of Congress and the Military Personnel Records in Missouri along with other state and federal agencies for Veterans, surviving spouses and their dependents to ensure quicker access to personnel records unfolding the awards, decorations, citations and/or ribbon to include the presumptive benefits to which they are entitled. Dr. Gray noted that AMVRP is all-inclusive and will assist any Veteran who needs assistance.

AMVRP has partnered with colleges and universities, including Morgan State University, Coppin State University, and University of Maryland College Park, to research and collect data on minority Veterans as well as their accomplishments. Specifically, the program is seeking to identify all American minority Veterans, including the posthumous recipient and to assure their just recognition as results of service to the United

States of America and its citizenry. AMVRP also provides internships to local Montgomery County high school students. Elwood added that through student intern research his father, who served in World War II, was posthumously awarded a Silver Star.

AMVRP has been working with the Montgomery County African American Health Program (AAHP) to assist minorities, especially Veterans, with testing and vaccinations, and food insecurity. AAHP has been tasked with identify African Americans who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. AMRVP and AAHP in partnership with Montgomery College (MC) will be hosting community events on May 22nd and June 26th at the MC Rockville Campus to provide COVID-19 testing, food packages, school supplies, and COVID kits for the first 200 to 300 participants.

AMVRP has identified a property located in Bethesda to be used as headquarters. They are negotiating with Montgomery County Public Schools which owns the property. The space will be used to provide seminars and workshops as well as be available to students at area colleges such as American University, Howard University, and Catholic University to study and receive community service or credit hours in consultation with the Dean or President of those universities. There is also an opportunity to provide office space to other organizations including the Maryland Military Coalition and Vietnam Veterans of America. Mike Subin, Commissioner, asked Dr. Gray to contact him about potentially finding property through Montgomery County Department of General Services.

AMVRP will be hosting an event on April 10th dedicated to Vietnam Veterans and Buffalo Soldiers. They will also be hosting an event on June 12th dedicated to women Veterans.

VI. Vietnam War Veterans Day, March 29, 2021 Recognition Events – Wayne Miller and All

National Vietnam War Veterans Day is observed every year on March 29. Wayne acknowledged the Vietnam Veterans who serve on this Commission. He noted that Gilchrist Hospice Care will be holding a free [virtual Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Celebration](#) on Sunday, March 28th at 3pm.

Bill Gray, former Chair, announced the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) will be hosting a virtual commemoration on March 29th at 1pm: www.honorvietnamveterans.org. Betsy submitted a video on the Montgomery County's Vietnam Veterans memorial dedication that was held May 2018. The video has been featured on VVMF's Facebook page. This video along with several other videos can be viewed on our Veterans website under the tab Vietnam Veterans Memorial: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans.

Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair, said of the nearly 3 million Americans who deployed to Vietnam less than one-third are alive today, largely due to the effects of Agent Orange. The VA now recognizes 14 different conditions that are associated with Agent Orange, most of them cancers. There are also a number of non-profits that now recognize the contribution of Agent Orange to ongoing morbidity and are helping Vietnam Veterans specifically with those related to cancer.

Betsy reported Carly Clem, staff, created a website for National Vietnam War Veterans Day which features profiles of Montgomery County Vietnam and Vietnam-Era Veterans: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/vietnamveteransday. Betsy was contacted by Senator Jim Webb and asked to include language paying tribute to the South Vietnamese who fought alongside the U.S. Military. Tony Bui, former Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Veteran, provided his input as well and language was added to the website. Cynthia recommended the documentary, The Lucky View, about the USS Kirk, a U.S. Navy destroyer escort ship, played a little-heralded role in the evacuation of some 30,000 South Vietnamese men, women and children, including many members of that nation's navy, as the communists took over in the last days of April 1975.

Stan announced Mission BBQ will be offering free sandwiches to Vietnam Veterans at all their locations.

VII. Chair and Vice Chair Report

The next Commission meeting will be held Tuesday, April 20th.

Wayne suggest that the next Commission meeting focus on the needs and issues of women Veterans. Betsy suggested inviting former Commissioner Jane McCarthy to speak. She noted that the Audobon Society will be presenting at the April meeting about their project for Veterans. Cynthia suggested inviting someone to speak about health disparities of women Veterans and the disability compensation rates being disproportionately calculated compared to men. Betsy suggested inviting Michael Heimall, Medical Center Director, DC VA Medical Center. Stan said real change is needed and suggested speaking to the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and asking them to hold a hearing on the unequal treatment of women Veterans. Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, offered to invite the owners of Women's Veteran Interactive, an organization that works to address the unique, and often unrecognized, challenges facing our nation's woman Veterans as they return to civilian life, and Final Salute, an organization that assists women Veterans and their children who are currently homeless, those that are facing homelessness, and those that are under financial strain.

Wayne would like to start a discussion on installing a memorial for women Veterans in Montgomery County. Mike suggested working with Betsy to create a subcommittee to work on this issue. Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, offered to join the subcommittee.

VIII. Updates / Announcements

Mike has spoken with Wayne about taping a new Homefront show focused on women Veterans.

Betsy was contacted by a Silver Spring resident who said a friend of his who went to school at Gonzaga and lived in Aspen Hill was killed in Vietnam. The person is not listed on Maryland service or killed in action records. He is listed as being a resident of Ohio and his name is listed on a memorial wall at Ohio Veterans Memorial Park as well as the Vietnam Wall in Washington, DC. Betsy has asked for further information and will notify Commissioners on the outcome. There are concerns as it is not a family member asking for inclusion on the Montgomery County Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall and the individual has already been named on a wall by another state.

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, April 20th, 2021 via Zoom from 6pm to 7:30pm. Please view the agenda for information on how to join the meeting. Agenda to be announced.

Respectfully submitted: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I; Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Josephine Bahn; Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Robert Koffman; Cynthia Macri; Wayne Miller; Reggie Mitchell; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Michael Subin; Michael Wilson

Commissioners Absent: Jonathan Alfaro; Dan Bolling; James Campbell; Hannah Dibonge; Susan Webman

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes); Austin Morris (Senator Chris Van Hollen)

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Joseph Eyong (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Ken Reichard (Senator Ben Cardin)

Commission Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I