



Commission on Veterans Affairs



MEETING AGENDA **Tuesday, May 17, 2022** **6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**

Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair

Join the meeting via ZOOM

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87334039399>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 873 3403 9399 followed by #.

If an attendee would like to speak during the meeting, you 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 April 2022 Meeting Minutes – Wayne Miller, Chair**
- 6:10** **Accessible Kayak/Canoe Launch at Riley’s Lock (Seneca Landing Special Park) on the C&O Canal - How You Can Get Involved with Team River Runner– Joe Mornini, Chief Executive Officer, Team River Runner, and Bob Green, Senior ADA Compliance Project Manager, Montgomery Parks, M-NCPPC <https://montgomeryparks.org>**
- 6:45** **Memorial Day Activities**
- 7:00** **Updates**
- 7:00** **Commission Planning for Next Meeting – Wayne Miller**
- 7:30** **Adjourn**

ADA Reasonable Accommodation: If you need a sign language interpreter or any other reasonable accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov or 240-418-4865.

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

****See duties on next page**

Duties of the Commission on Veterans Affairs

The Commission duties include:

1. research, assemble, analyze and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of veterans and their families;
2. institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans;
3. advise the Executive and the Council on the status of programs and services in the State and County related to the needs of veterans and their families; and
4. assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
May 17, 2022**

****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 April 2022 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the April 2022 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Memorial Day Events

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund will be hosting a Memorial Day ceremony Monday May 30 at 1pm at The Wall in Washington, DC. Former Commissioner and Captain Jane McCarthy, USA (Ret), will be a featured speaker. To learn more about, RSVP to the event, or learn how to watch live that day, visit vvmf.org/2022-Memorial-Day/.

A [press release](#) was sent out for the Montgomery County Fallen Hometown Heroes website which honors County servicemembers killed in all wars from WWI to present and current operations. The website features [detailed tributes and photos](#).

Bill Gray, former Chair, reported Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter 641 will participate in the City of Rockville's Memorial Day parade on Monday May 30 from 9am to 1pm at Rockville Town Center Park, 131 Gibbs Street.

Scott Schlesinger, Commissioner, reported the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Kemp Mill Jewish War Veterans Post #360 are hosting a Memorial Day event on Monday May 30 at 11am at Wheaton Veterans Urban Park featuring a speaker, music and refreshments.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, reported the Japanese American Veterans Association (JAVA) will be hosting their 74th annual Memorial Day service on Sunday May 29 at 10am at Arlington National Columbarium. The service will be both in-person and virtual. For more information, visit <https://java.wildapricot.org/2022-Memorial-Day>. Dr. Macri also reported a photo exhibit honoring the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated Japanese American unit during World War II, will open on June 8 at the Japan Information and Cultural Center in DC.

Wayne reported Vet Center staff will be at Arlington Cemetery, the Vietnam Wall Memorial, the World War II Memorial, the stage near the Washington Monument and RFK Stadium to provide counseling and support.

Lachrishia Parker, Public, is the Community Engagement Manager for the Military Women's Memorial. A 25th annual remembrance ceremony will be held on Monday May 30 from 3pm to 5pm at the Military Women's Memorial, Memorial Avenue & Schley Drive, Arlington, VA.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported these events as well as others being held throughout the County and the region will be posted on the Commission's website and the Montgomery County Fallen Hometown Heroes website.

IV. Update on Women Veterans Workgroup

Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, reported the Workgroup met with Lourdes Tiglaio, Director, and Elizabeth Estabrooks, Deputy Director, VA Center for Women Veterans, to discuss women's health care and how to better promote VA healthcare. She and Dr. Macri will be attending a meeting at the VA that will focus on women veterans. She noted that the VA has updated their [women veterans health care website](#) to be more user-friendly. The Workgroup continues to discuss how to convene focus groups to identify specific needs of women veterans in Montgomery County. The Workgroup would like to connect with the Vet Center and Montgomery College to identify women veterans. The Workgroup is also working on ways that women veterans can serve as their own advocates.

Dr. Macri introduced Lachrisa Parker who is an Army veteran and a member of the VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. Dr. Macri was also appointed to this Advisory Committee in March 2022. She is a member of the health subcommittee which has discussed issues including women's care in general, specialty women's care, fragmented services within the VA, and mammogram test results not being shared with VA primary care providers. The subcommittee has requested additional information from the VA regarding their proposed plans to build a new VA Medical Center in DC. Dr. Macri also introduced Dr. Farzaneh Sabi, a gynecologist who works for Kaiser and previously was a resident in the Navy. She can provide insight from working in the civilian sector and can help identify the unique needs of veterans.

Dr. Macri said even though national data exists, Montgomery County is one of the most diverse counties in the country and national statistics may not match our County's demographics. That's why it is important that Montgomery County establish the unique needs of women veterans that live here.

V. Accessible Kayak/Canoe Launch at Riley's Lock (Seneca Landing Special Park) on the C&O Canal, Bob Green, Senior ADA Compliance Project Manager, Montgomery Parks, M-NCPPC, and How You Can Get Involved with Team River Runner – Joe Mornini, Chief Executive Officer, Team River Runner

Betsy Luecking, Staff, said Joe Mornini, Team River Runner (TRR), gave a presentation to the Commission in June 2016. TRR is a non-profit organization that provides adventure and adaptive paddle sports to veterans and their families with 62 chapters in 34 states. TRR's mission is to provide all veterans of all eras, active duty servicemembers and their families an inclusive opportunity to find health, healing, community purpose, and new challenges through adventure and adaptive paddle sports.

At the June 2016 meeting Joe noted that there were issues of accessibility and erosion at the boat ramp at Riley's Lock. The site, located in Poolesville, is one of the busiest access points to the Potomac River and adjoins the National Park Service's popular C&O Canal. The existing boat ramp was being used by both kayakers and those unloading power boats which is a safety issue especially for persons with disabilities. Betsy had been working with Bob Green, Montgomery Parks, on the Project Civic Access settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). She knew Bob had been interested in working on a project for veterans and Betsy told him about the issues at Riley's Lock.

Bob said he first went to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to solicit some assistance in terms of funding and design and to determine what permissions Montgomery Parks would need to have in order to install an accessible launch. While DNR was not able to provide funding, they did have a grant for almost \$100,000 that Montgomery Parks applied for and was awarded in 2018. While awaiting the grant funding, Montgomery Parks worked on the design of the accessible launch and submitted a joint permit application to the state which then gets sent to several state and federal agencies to be processed. The joint permit was approved in early 2019. Due to where Riley's Lock is located just above the C&O Canal, the stream fluctuates up and down by five feet and the design was redesigned and the gangway was lengthened to allow it to function with the fluctuations and to not be destroyed during flood events. Bob thanked Betsy and this Commission for their advocacy which enabled Montgomery Parks to secure funding for the project.

Construction on the accessible launch began in early 2020 and was and first launch was completed in June 2020. Another launch will begin construction in the fall.

The accessible launch, which is like a floating rubberized dock with a kayak launch attached to it, has proven to be extremely popular. During the summer the parking lot can become full with cars lining up for a parking space. The launch has been used by individuals from Annapolis all the way up to Hagerstown. People with and without disabilities have been taking advantage of the accessible launch. With the previous launch it could take individuals with disabilities up to an hour to get into the water and now they can board their kayak or paddleboard in a matter of minutes. The dock is available for use year-round and has become quite an asset and a real benefit to the community. Several television stations have interviewed Bob, Joe and veterans who were using the launch.

As part of the project, Montgomery Parks also installed an accessible drop-off area and walkway, three accessible parking spaces and a fully accessible picnic area with tables and grills. A second phase of the project is scheduled, which will include accessibility upgrades to improve safety, increase capacity and enhance accessibility of the existing boat ramp for motorized boats. The design is completed and is currently in the bidding process. Bob would also like to install a shade shelter over the picnic area, but Montgomery Parks does not have the funding. He asked for suggestions to fundraise for a shade shelter.

Joe helps run TRR's Walter Reed-Bethesda Chapter. TRR has been working with Walter Reed since 2004 and works with patients in the pool at the hospital. The Chapter hosts a free kayak program at Riley's Lock on Sundays at 2pm from May through October for veterans, veterans with disabilities, and non-veterans with disabilities who are taught to kayak by veterans. TRR partners with Calleva which provides adaptive paddling equipment. Individuals with disabilities should pre-register for events to ensure enough adaptive equipment is available. Through the program Veterans are giving service to the community and also become a part of the greater paddling community. TRR also works with active duty servicemembers and veterans from Walter Reed a few times a week during the day, including several veterans who have mobility or neurological issues.

TRR's goal this year is to teach professional certification in swift water rescue to 100 veterans to certify them as instructors. Joe said some veterans think the paddling program is only for the younger veterans but it's for veterans of all ages. He noted that an 87-year old Marine veteran paddles with TRR and a World War II veteran participates in the paddling program in San Diego. Betsy suggested TRR develop a training video that could show a person with a disability how an individual enters and exits a kayak, what the TRR kayaking program looks like, and the accommodations available. This could help individuals feel more at ease with participating in the program. Joe agreed a video would be helpful and could help show that TRR is a safe and welcoming place. Joe said more outreach is needed. He would like to outreach to the VA Gaithersburg Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), the Silver Spring Vet Center, or programs that serve individuals with spinal cord injuries and multiple sclerosis to connect with veterans. If Commissioners know a veteran that would benefit from the program, let them know about TRR so they can come and paddle them. Joe stressed the importance of a warm hand off and suggested that rather than just telling someone about the program that they bring them to a Sunday paddling session. TRR also needs volunteers to paddle with veterans.

Many veterans carry an invisible weight. Last Sunday's paddle session began with a short presentation on suicide prevention and recognition. Betsy suggested Joe connect with Dr. Anneke Vandenbroek, Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals, and Dr. Bob Koffman to discuss ways to make veterans feel less anxious about trying something new as people who are depressed often withdraw.

Joe is often asked what makes an accessible launch and he said there are three criteria: good parking, an accessible bathroom, and a respectful way for an individual to enter and exit the matter as independently as possible.

Children are welcome to paddle with TRR, but Joe asked that everyone pre-register for events to ensure equipment is available. Children must paddle with an adult that they know. Another need is for volunteers to help watch children or service dogs.

Joe thanked Bob and Betsy for their work on this project. He agreed that a shelter shade would be beneficial, especially to provide shelter when it rains. He will try to attend more Commission meetings in the future. For more information, visit TRR Chapter: www.teamriverrunner.org/get-involved/chapters/maryland-walter-reed-national-military-medical-center-wrnmcc/. Anyone interested in volunteering or participating in paddling can email info@teamriverrunner.org or call 301-233-8882.

Betsy said she has been out to Riley's Lock multiple times since the accessible launch was installed to take photos and has spoken with several veterans who were there to paddle including a veteran from Norfolk, Virginia who had been a patient at Walter Reed and was an amputee. He very much appreciated having a safe and accessible way to enter into the water. Betsy said this project shows what can happen when this Commission involves others and works to create more opportunities for veterans.

VI. Chair and Vice Chair Report

Wayne will not be attending the June meeting. The Commission does not meet in July or August.

VII. Future Meetings

Betsy asked for suggestions for speakers for future meetings. Due to the current resurgence of COVID, the June meeting will remain virtual and we will have to re-evaluate in August to determine if we will meet in person for the September meeting. We need to ensure everyone is safe and willing to attend.

Michael Wilson, Commissioner, suggested having someone talk about available programs that can assist veterans with purchasing a home.

Dr. Macri reported the Chinese Culture and Community Service Center (CCACC) is providing boosters (Pfizer and Moderna) and shots for kids 5 to 11 at their clinic on May 27. Individuals can register online: www.ccacc-dc.org.

Jameelah suggested have a discussion concerning reproductive rights, how the Supreme Court is set to vote to strike down the Roe v. Wade decision near the end of June, and how that will affect women in the military. At least eight states have passed anti-abortion restrictions this year: Arizona, Idaho, Florida, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wyoming, Kentucky and Tennessee. Some of those laws have no exceptions for rape or incest. At least two states, Michigan and Wisconsin, have only state laws banning abortion that were passed before Roe and could take effect if the decision is overturned. Another seven states — Arizona, Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas and West Virginia — have both pre- and post-Roe bans on the books, and which one they will choose to observe remains unclear. Dr. Macri suggested inviting the new President of the American College of Surgeons, who is also a Navy Veteran and a graduate of the Bethesda Naval Hospital. She added that military bases are federal facilities and medical personnel on bases may be subject to prosecution or at risk of being arrested for performing an abortion, even if it's due to miscarriage or other medical risks. It will also affect the patient. Dr. Macri said during her time in the military she encountered female servicemembers who had received abortions in the civilian sector and who were not able to receive follow-up care and ended up with serious infections or sepsis which can cause permanent infertility. Active duty servicemembers do not have the choice of where they are stationed.

Wayne suggested having a presentation on end of life for veterans and death and burial benefits given the increasing aging veteran population. Two veterans in his support groups passed away this week. Jameelah offered to invite her friend who is a retired Navy JAG attorney that can present on end-of-life preparations.

Betsy said the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) offers assistance with the transition from caregiver to survivor and provides valuable insight on how to best support military and veteran survivors throughout the journey of loving, caring, losing, grieving, and living on. Dr. Macri said she has been having issues trying to get information from Arlington National Cemetery on how to have her father's ashes transferred from another state to be interred there. Scott added that FEMA provides a reimbursement up to \$9,000 in funeral expenses for anyone who passes away from COVID.

VIII. Updates / Announcements

Betsy reported that the Commission was contacted by the Monocacy Cemetery asking to remove the Monocacy Monument from the County's Veterans Network Directory category listing of County Memorials, Monuments and Veterans Parks as it is a confederate monument that had been recently vandalized. As a result, we also removed two other confederate monuments from the listing.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported the Gaithersburg Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) is not accepting new clients until September. Betsy suggested reaching out to Michael Heimall for clarification.

Austin Morris, Representative of Senator Chris Van Hollen, reported Senator Van Hollen is hosting a service academy information night for interested high schoolers or parents on Thursday May 20 at 4pm. The event is virtual. Austin added that Senator Van Hollen is doing well after suffering a stroke last week.

Joseph Eyong, Representative of Congressman Jamie Raskin, shared that Congressman Raskin shares his greetings with the Commission.

Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Ben Cardin, reported Senator Cardin and Senator Van Hollen have submitted almost 500 funding requests for community projects to the Senate Appropriations Committee for Fiscal Year 2023. These requests are investments designed to benefit the state and communities.

Jason Marshall, ServingTogether, reported will be having their 10-year anniversary celebration on Thursday June 23 from 5:30pm to 6:30pm. It will be a hybrid event with in-person held at the Military Women's Memorial. The program will highlight the contributions of our funders, partners, and ServingTogether's incredible work supporting the military and veteran community over the last ten years and for decades to come. Dr. Macri will be the keynote speaker.

Scott reported that the American Legion Post in Wheaton recently has had an issue with parking. It used to be free to park in the evenings and weekends and now there is a fee to park. He noted that a non-profit on the same street was given free parking by the County. Scott asked how the AL post and other veteran services organizations could receive this same exemption. Mike suggested contacting County Executive Marc Elrich, County Council President Gabe Alborno, and Councilmember Craig Rice. He noted that the American Legion Post 41 in Silver Spring was given several spaces at a downtown garage to allow free parking for their members.

Adjournment

7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting:

Tuesday, June 21, 2022, 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: Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Robert Koffman; Cynthia Macri; Wayne Miller, Chair; Reggie Mitchell; Scott Schlesinger; Lisa Schuster; Joanna Starling; Michael Subin; Anneke Vandenbroek; Susan Webman; Michael Wilson

Commissioners Absent: Josephine Bahn

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Joseph Eyong (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Austin Morris (Senator Chris Van Hollen); Ken Reichard (Senator Ben Cardin)

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes)

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