

“Unapproved”
Veterans’ Committee Minutes
September 12, 2011- 2:30 p.m.

Present: Vice Chairman Wright; Supervisors Collyer, Lucia, Thompson, Yepsen, and Wood; Ryan Moore, Mgmt. Analyst; Steve Dorsey, County Attorney; Andy Davis, Veterans’ Director; Jennifer Ciulla, Publication Specialist; Press.

Vice Chairman Wright called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

On a motion made by Mr. Collyer, seconded by Mr. Lucia the minutes of the July 6, 2011 meeting were approved unanimously.

Mr. Dorsey said the committee would need to decide as to how to separate the funds in the Veterans Trust Fund and what the process will be to approve applications. He asked if it was just going to be primarily for programs and organizations for the benefit of Veterans’ or will applications from individual Veterans’ and their dependents be accepted?

With regard to eligibility requirements, would there be a restriction requiring that Veterans and dependents be Saratoga County residents in order to receive benefits? If it is an organization or program, does it have to be designed to benefit Saratoga County residents or does the organization or program have to be Saratoga County based in order to be eligible?

With regard to the application approval process, who do you want to make responsible for those decisions? Would the applications come to the Veterans’ Committee or the Veterans’ subcommittee? Would final determinations have to be made by final approval from the Board of Supervisors as they are with the Animal Shelter trust fund?

Mr. Thompson asked how much money was currently in the Veterans’ Trust Fund? Mr. Moore said, \$795.

Mr. Wright requested that committee members’ review the information distributed to them from the County Attorney with regard to the Veterans’ Trust Fund and bring any questions they may have to the Veterans’ meeting in October.

Mrs. VanOrt presented the program for the Veterans’ Concert at SPAC to the committee for their review. She stated that everything is ready to go, and the band is all set with SPAC. There have been approximately 330 tickets sent out to various groups, including Senior Homes. Advertising began over the Labor Day weekend, and radio, newspapers and websites have advertising on line. Doors will open at 12:30 p.m. on Saturday.

Mrs. VanOrt stated that the concert is under budget by approximately \$11,000.

Mr. Davis said the second honor flight of the year will take place on Saturday, September 17th. The first Veteran will be picked up at 4:50a.m. and meet at the Wesley Community Center in Saratoga Springs. There will be approximately 13 Veterans that will be taken in two vans to the Albany National Airport where there will be a ceremony sending them off. They will then go to Washington D.C. to the WWII Memorial, Changing of the Guard at Arlington and the Iwo Jima Memorial. Transportation will be provided from the airport back to the Veterans' residence.

Mr. Davis said in addition to several other Veterans', there is a female gunnery instructor Marine from WWII who is 94 years old, and a D-day 101 First Airborne Paratrooper from the Band of Brothers Unit.

Mr. Davis said there are currently approximately 2,230 WWII Veterans living in Saratoga County.

Mr. Davis said the Veterans' Agency has taken some time over the last few months to scrutinize the Veterans budget. One program that has been offered for approximately 10 years is daily van transportation to ambulatory Veterans of Saratoga County to the Albany VA Medical Center. Approximately 10 Veterans are taken per day from various points in the county and back home.

Mr. Davis said this is the biggest cost in his budget serving a very small percentage of Veterans, and he is looking to see how some changes could be made to serve more Veterans. Generally, the same 150 Veterans are served throughout the year every day. Those 150 make up approximately 0.8% of the total Veterans population.

Historically, the service began 10 years ago and was designed to provide healthcare access to rural Veterans lacking transportation. The service was solely pickup points for 5 years, but the exception then became the rule, with 90% of the Veterans being picked up at their residence. Mr. Davis said Saratoga County is currently the only county in upstate New York that is still providing multiple pickup points.

Mr. Davis highlighted the following problems with the current pickup schedule.

- Veteran's appointments must be only at Albany – Stratton VAMC and must be between 9:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
- Cannot conduct same day pickups in corners of the county
- Exceptions have caused unrest on Van and towards VSA Staff
- Cost of fuel and maintenance have caused service to overtake budget
- Have made exceptions for non-ambulatory Veterans causing unnecessary risk
- Cannot transport to other VA facilities Vet Center/Homeless Outreach Program

Mr. Davis said that approximately \$50,000 has spent been spent over the 10-month period on the van service and approximately \$63,000 - \$65,000 is spent yearly.

Mr. Davis is proposing the following changes:

- Transition beginning immediately to pick-up points only
- After 60-days, restructure pick-up points if necessary
- Phase in transportation to VA Vet Center
- Expand appointment slots from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Mr. Davis asked for cooperation from the various Town Halls where parking lots are plowed to provide designated locations as pickup points for Veterans to park their vehicles.

Mr. Davis said the goal is to expand the service, while providing it at a lower cost.

Mr. Davis said Veterans Assistance Night is still progressing nicely. There are posters displayed at Stewarts, Hannaford and Price Chopper stores in the county. The event will honor approximately 54 Korean War Veterans, with citations, and liberty awards coming from all of the State Officials, as well as, Congressman Gibson and Congressman Tonko.

Mr. Davis requested the committee's consideration on years when the Veterans Assistance Night takes place, which are the odd years, that we don't do a large Veterans' ceremony at the county on those years. Mr. Davis pointed out that most of the communities have their own Veterans' Ceremonies. He said it would be easier to plan a large event on the years where there aren't any large events taking place.

On a motion made by Mr. Thompson, seconded by Mr. Lucia the meeting was adjourned unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Sansom