

Veterans' Committee Minutes
December 7, 2011 – 2:30 p.m.

Present: Chairman M. Johnson; Supervisors Collyer, Wright, Yepsen, Kinowski and Wood; Ryan Moore, Mgmt. Analyst; Steve Dorsey, County Attorney; Andy Davis, Frank McClement, Veterans' Agency.

Chairman MaryAnn Johnson called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

On a motion made by Mr. Collyer, seconded by Mr. Wright the minutes of the November 7, 2011 meeting were approved unanimously.

Mr. Dorsey distributed a handout of the proposal for the establishment of the Veterans Trust and Agency Fund to all committee members for their review. He said the purpose of the fund would be to the benefit of the Veterans' and their families. To be eligible to receive a disbursement from the fund you need to be a resident residing in Saratoga County or a Veterans' group that is located in Saratoga County or a Veterans' group that is requesting assistance for a Veteran that lives in Saratoga County. An application is being put together, with one form for individuals and a different form for organizations. With regard to the applications for individuals, it will be based on a needs based decision with requests made for financial information including tax returns and bank statements for three months. If the individual is looking for medical assistance verification will be required with regard to non-reimbursed expenses or verification of the medical problem that funds are being sought for. With regard to applications by organizations, the process will focus on the merit of the program

The applications process will require that all applications be submitted to the Veterans' office where a review will be done to determine if they are complete. They will then be ranked and recommendations will be made to the Veterans' Trust Fund subcommittee. The subcommittee would then meet before the monthly meeting of the Veterans' committee and make their recommendations to the full committee.

Mr. Dorsey said he would like to make a recommendation that the process for final approval end with the Veterans' Committee to avoid, on a monthly basis, having to go to the Board and drafting a resolution every month.

Mr. Dorsey requested that in the authorizing resolution issued by the Board, delegates authority to make decisions on applications to the Veterans' Committee. The recommendation is to limit disbursements from the fund to Veterans' and/or dependents to \$500 every three years with a cap of \$1,000 for Veterans' organizations with no time limit. If a Veteran's organization has two good projects in a year there would be no reason to limit them to just one application in a year. If there is a need to exceed those amounts, if what is being requested is a meritorious project in the committee's opinion

and were to exceed the \$1,000 limit, it is requested that the option be held open to exceed that limit in deserving cases.

The Treasurer's office would be responsible in receiving all contributions to the fund. Disbursements from the fund would be made by the Treasurer's office upon receiving written authorization from the Chairman of the Veterans' Committee. A request would be made to the Treasurer's office to submit monthly reports to the Veterans' Committee detailing receipts, disbursements and the current balance of the account.

Donor receipts and thank you notes will be issued by the Clerk of the Board, with the expenses paid out of the Veterans' Trust Fund. Mr. Dorsey said all administrative expenses would be covered out of the fund.

Ms. Yepsen stated that this is a wonderful service to provide to Veterans' communities. There are a lot of entities giving money right now to Veterans' and to organizations that are supporting them. When people have to make a decision as to where to put their money and for what cause, she is concerned that when the money comes to the Veterans' Committee that there will be a perception that we are competing with other organizations donors for Veterans' services programs. Ms. Yepsen said the county would have to be proactive and communicate the critical need in order to see this fund grow. Mr. Dorsey said the Veterans' Trust Fund will be put on the County website and it will be shared with all the funeral homes in the county, Veterans' organizations, and the Veterans' Director has proposed the idea of a 5K race with a sponsor already lined up.

A motion was made by Mr. Wright, seconded by Ms. Yepsen to authorize the creation of a Veterans' Trust and Agency Fund, and delegating the Veterans' Committee to make the final decisions on applications for the disbursements from the fund. Unanimous.

Mr. Davis presented a brief video of the attack on Pearl Harbor to the committee. He said that we are losing 740 WWII Veterans' in the country on a daily basis.

Mr. Davis gave a brief budget overview from the Veterans' Department as follows: He said Saratoga County is home to approximately 16,870 Veterans' with the Veterans' office having served approximately 8,000 of them in the last two years. Those individuals are responsible for approximately \$50 million coming into the county. Mr. Davis said 5% of his total budget of \$318,000 is used to serve Veterans. The following is a list of changes that have been made in the Veterans' Agency since September.

- **Postage** – eliminating mailing an postage costs by using computers and reducing the amount of appointments that people make
- **The VA** – is looking to by 2017 to unveil a paperless claims system, and the Veterans' office is ready for that.

- **Training** – Historically, the Veterans’ office and most offices around the county send people to training for one to two weeks in either Syracuse or Buffalo with the American Legion. When that happens, the office either shuts down completely or is just down to an Administrative Assistant. This costs a significant amount of money in meals, lodging and training. This process has stopped and the Veterans’ office is no partnering with the NYS Office of Veterans’ Affairs, training in Albany twice a year for one day when the office is closed. Monthly sustained training is conducted via webinar BTC and phone conference to sustain the training level, saving considerable money.
- **Central Stores** – Computers are being used for most of the generation instead of creating large paper files.
- **Association Dues and Publications** – Historically, the county and the Veterans’ office was paying for the staff’s membership to the American Legion and VFW. The policy now in the office is to pay your own way
- **Fuel Charges** – Mr. Davis said fuel charges will continue to go up, but changes in the Van Service has helped to alleviate some of those costs.

Projected Needs:

Mr. Davis said the last van was bought in 2008 with an average of 60,000 miles a year. The van currently has 300,000 miles on it and will need to be replaced soon.

Mrs. Johnson asked if there were grants that could be sought for the purchase of a new van as they do with the Senior Vans? Mr. Davis said he would look into it.

Mr. Davis said the telephone system in the Veterans’ office has become a problem with Veterans’ calling in and saying they have been trying for 30 to 40 minutes before they get through.

Mrs. Johnson said there is a Saratoga war-horse Program being established to help Veterans reconnect when they come home from war. The founder is Bob Nevis, a very highly decorated Vietnam War Veteran and also prominent horsewomen Marilyn Lane. This will also help the racing industry as it is taking a lot of retired horses and using them in the program.

On a motion made by Mr. Collyer, seconded by Mr. Wright the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Sansom