

VETERANS AFFAIRS Transcript 3/1/2021

SPEAKERS

Preston Allen, Steve Bulger, Mo Wright, Matt Veitch, Benny Zlotnick, Jack Lawler, Several Supervisors, Tom Richardson, Frank McClement

Tom Richardson

I'm going to welcome everybody to the Veterans Affairs Committee, March 1st. Welcome, everybody. Attendance has been taken. Could I get approval of the minutes from the February 1 meeting?

Mo Wright

I'll move those.

Tom Richardson

Mo, thank you a second?

Benny Zlotnick

Second, Zlotnick.

Tom Richardson

Thank you, Benny. Any additions or deletions to those minutes? If not, all in favor, aye.

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Tom Richardson

Any opposed? Okay, we passed. We're moving on. Veterans Office Report. I'm going to turn it over to Frank. And by the way, I should mention also, if anybody would like to say anything on the telephone, or here in the building. Please make sure you're on your microphone. Thanks. Go ahead, Frank.

Frank McClement

Good afternoon Supervisors. A copy of the Veteran Service Officer summary report for January and February has been distributed to members of the Committee. If anybody has any questions on that, I'd be happy to answer them. Otherwise, I will just kind of highlight. We've been actively trying to take advantage of training throughout the COVID and a lot of stuff, it's actually worked in our favor with that regard, because there's been a lot of opportunity for virtual training opportunities. So we've tried to take advantage of as many of those as we could. You can see on our transportation still relatively low ridership numbers just that's based upon demand. So we're doing the best we can with demand. And then how to deal with some COVID related quarantine issues with a part time driver. But right now we have one part time driver. And we he's on call for us Tuesdays and Thursdays as per the Veteran Committee's guidance a couple of months ago, and we continue to operate in that way. If it picks up,

we'll certainly adjust and come back to the Committee and let everybody know what we're doing and how we're doing it. But that's where we stand right now. Just moving on to the trust fund, you can see no activity for the month. We did get a donation from the Spirit of Life Church back in December for \$300, which was nice. So that leaves us a balance on hand of \$95,860.18, and that does reflect the disbursements that we made last December. So we're there. Our Peer to Peer program, which we're going to talk about a little bit more continues to operate. What we're doing right now is a virtual coffee night. Saratoga Coffee Traders, for a period of time, was unable to host us in the evening just because he couldn't staff, he was having a hard time staffing his shop. A lot of his employees and his customers are related to Skidmore and Skidmore had a deal where their students were limited to campus and things of that nature. So he's hoping to bring us back but right now we've got some issues with that we're going to talk about with the funding and the Peer program. We have been doing some virtual stuff, coffee night's been virtual. Amy hosted the mentor training virtually. And then we've started some nutrition and fitness classes. So we did a mindful eating virtual health class to kind of piggyback on some of the things we did with Dr. Prezioso a year or so ago and then she's starting a couple of exercise classes that will be conducted via Zoom. So still trying to continue to stay engaged with folks and working hard on that. So that's my report there Supervisor.

Tom Richardson

Thanks, Frank. Anybody on the phone have a question for Frank? Okay, hearing none, we'll move forward. We want to talk about the Peer to Peer program funding. What's happened is that the money that we usually get is held up at the state. And we're anticipating getting that hopefully within the next couple of months. In the meantime, we don't have the funds to continue to move the Peer to Peer program. So I guess our discussion is going to start off by me saying that, we're hoping that the County will fund the Peer to Peer program temporarily until we get the funds from the State. And then we would obviously pay the County back, whatever the County used, and then move forward from there. So Frank, you have anything else you'd like to add?

Frank McClement

I could just jump in Supervisor just for everyone. To give you a little bit more detail on where we're at the PFC Joe Dwyer Peer Program is funded through the New York State Senate. We were one of the four original pilot counties, and historically, we've received funding every year. Even last year in the budget, we were allocated funds in the past State budget. Like a lot of other State grant programs and nonprofits, we have not received the nickel of the money allocated to us in last year's State budget cycle. So which brought us to a position that we've never been in before, where we are out of money, as we sit here today, we are out of money. And we do have a past budget that we adopted based upon the anticipated revenues from the State. So what we're asking is the Supervisors to consider a Resolution to fund the program, either through the end of the year or for a designated period of time, until we can find out where we're at with the State. The last word I got from Senator Daphne Jordan's office, who's been advocating quite hard for us is that finally the Senate Majority requested that the funds be released. And they're currently being held up by the Department of Budget at New York State. So I haven't gotten an update since mid to late last week on that. And so I've been checking in with Josh Fitzpatrick at Senator Jordan's office regularly who's been working to get updates for us, but that's where we stand today.

Mo Wright

I just had a couple of questions. How much how much money are we waiting out from the State right now? From last year's budget, how much were we supposed to get?

Frank McClement

Ninety six five.

Mo Wright

And there's obviously there's nothing in the Governor's budget, but it is on the list of Senate buybacks, correct?

Frank McClement

That's correct.

Mo Wright

And we don't know where that stands at this point?

Frank McClement

It was requested to be released. And again, it was awaiting on Department of Budget.

Mo Wright

No I mean for the 21 budget. I mean, for this budget going forward. I know it's on the Senate buyback is in the budget negotiations. But you haven't heard any, whether or not they're going to actually do it or?

Frank McClement

For this year?

Mo Wright

For 21? Yes. I mean, 2020 has already been budgeted. That money's got to be

Frank McClement

That's right. It's already been budgeted and it hasn't been released.

Mo Wright

That'll come out of the DOB eventually.

Frank McClement

If we got last year's money, that would cover us through the end of this calendar year.

Mo Wright

But then we're out of money again, if the if the Senate doesn't buy it back for 21.

Frank McClement

That's correct.

Mo Wright

What is the total buyback number for 21, do you know for the complete Joseph Dwyer program, not just for Saratoga County? Do we know what that number is?

Frank McClement

Four and a half million

Mo Wright

4.5. Okay. Thank you.

Tom Richardson

Somebody on the phone that had a question?

Jack Lawler

Yeah. Hi Tom, Jack Lawler. Frank, how many veterans are served in the Peer to Peer program?

Frank McClement

Supervisor right now we're at approximately 250 active participants in the program.

Jack Lawler

That's a lot of people. That's a lot of people to be left hanging at this, especially when there's other economic problems in the country right now. I would feel comfortable asking the whole amount to be budgeted. To be, excuse me, not to be budgeted, to be allocated from the surplus to fund this program and that (illegible) State money which we would use that money to go forward when we got it.

Tom Richardson

So Jack, if I hear you correctly, because you're breaking up a little bit your motion is to, to use \$96,000, what it is \$96,500? \$95,600 out of surplus, get us through this year. And then when we get reimbursed the money, then we'll make the adjustments with the County.

Jack Lawler

Exactly. That's it Tom. Thank you.

Tom Richardson

Thank you. Frank has a question.

Frank McClement

Well, if I could just jump in just to let the Supervisors know, if the Board votes to cover what we budgeted for 2021. It would be a budget impact of \$82,513 to Saratoga County. We had \$11,322 that carried over from previous years money that we had received. So our impact to cover what was budgeted through our County budget process last year, it would be \$82,513. That would that would be what we'd be asking the Board. And then of course, I would work with the County Administrator in the

Veterans Committee to determine what we would do for 2022's budget during our normal budget process. And then we would find out where we stood with revenues and all of that stuff.

Jack Lawler

Well that's my motion then.

Tom Richardson

Okay, that's the number for your motion. Wait Mo has...

Mo Wright

No I would I just have a second to that motion

Mo Wright

Mo's going to second it.

Mo Wright

To supply the money, then at budget time we will definitely know what's going on with the 21 budget for the State and we can address it at that time. This is a great program if we have to, even if we have to just straight up fund part of this program, or even 100% of this problem as a County. I think it's money well worth spent on our Veterans in this County.

Tom Richardson

I agree. 100%. So we have a motion on the floor with a second. So we'll take a vote. Everybody in favor, Aye?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Tom Richardson

Any opposed? Okay, so the Motion passes. Thanks very much. I appreciate it, gentlemen. The next thing on our agenda is a discussion on funding, a funding request by Saratoga Springs for their Memorial flags. We have Matt Veitch here in the room. So Matt, do you want to give us whatever information you have in regards to that?

Matt Veitch

Sure, thank you, Chairman Richardson. Yeah, this is a little, a little bit different. I'm actually not, it kind of started off as a request from the City of Saratoga Springs to help fund Veterans Day flags. One of the things that we do is we put some money in our budget every year at the City for this purpose. We have several grave sites in Saratoga Springs, and each Veteran gets a memorial flag put up at their headstone in our cemeteries every year. And the City fully funds that project that we do every year. So it's something around about \$5,000 in our budget to do that, seems like a lot, but we got a couple of pretty large cemeteries in Saratoga Springs that we do that for. And so with our budget issues that we're having in the City with tax increases, and things like that, we were unable to fund that at the full amount for this year. And so as we get near Memorial Day, we're not going to be able to meet that thing

that we do every year for our Veterans. So the original request was to come and ask for some funding for just the City to do that project. But I did start talking with the Director McClement and he and him through the Chairman, Supervisor Richardson and think maybe a different idea here that might make this work a little better is to put some money, set some money aside for all the communities to do something veterans related this year. As a fund so my proposal would be to put somewhere maybe around \$20,000 into our budget, move it from a contingency line or some other line, put it into the Veterans Fund and each community could get some money for a veterans proposal or program that they do. I did ask if you recall through Pam what each community does for this kind of thing and some put money in some didn't respond, some don't they use their VFW and other things like that. So it'd be great I think if we could help each community out at a certain level. However we want to do that whether it's based on population or tax formula, or however we do distribution, to have each community do some program, whether it's putting on a parade or doing the flags, or whatever they need to do in honor of veterans this year from the County. So that's my request. I'm not on this Committee. So hopefully, you guys can discuss it. And I appreciate your consideration. Thank you.

Tom Richardson

Thanks, Matt. Does anybody have any questions for Matt? Anybody on the phone first?

Jack Lawler

I guess, Tom, Jack Lawler. Matt I'm much more comfortable doing something Countywide than for one particular municipality. So I think that trying to do with County wide is, is a better idea. At least for me it is. But I'm a little unsure of the formula. I would say, Tom maybe you could appoint a subcommittee to come up with a formula, whatever along your lines best fit your population, I guess. So that there'd be some methodology to how much each community got, or come up with length time for each community? You know, if Saratoga Springs gets \$5,000 then give everybody \$5,000 something for Veterans in their Town. Some kind of a formula.

Tom Richardson

OK, anybody else have any thoughts? Mo?

Mo Wright

Well, I was just going to ask, I mean, are we going to do this, like as a grant program, are we going to make sure that people are spending it on Veterans, are we going to have some kind of accountability? I think logistically, there's some things you have to work out here to kind of make this work and make sure somebody isn't just putting it towards your fund balance or doing something that doesn't have to do with veterans. I mean, I'm not opposed to this. Obviously, anything we do for veterans is definitely a positive for this County. I do agree with Jack, I think it should be County wide, I think I don't know if we should be picking and choosing what communities we give money to, but I do think there needs to be a certain amount of accountability, that money is going towards, whether it's strictly for Memorial Day events, or something that along for veterans or whatever. So maybe Jack's right, maybe we need to look into it a little bit closer and, report back next month, but obviously, Memorial Day is coming up, we can't wait too long and not have that money. We're going to need at least a month or so to be able to spend that money before Memorial Day. So if you were going to do it, I think it needs to be something that's going to be on the agenda by the April, the latest absolute latest.

Jack Lawler

I was just thinking something along the lines of similar to the Economic Development program, where we had that \$7100 grant, and each community just filled out a form. Here's how I'm going to use the money for Economic Development. The forms came back, they're still coming back, and that was the trail for money being awarded. Something like that? Would that work?

Tom Richardson

I was thinking about that myself, Jack. But wait one second, Matt has another comment. I'm going to let Matt comment. Go ahead, Matt.

Matt Veitch

Actually, I was just going to say it was right before this meeting, I was thinking the exact same thing. The idea was the idea as I was walking into the room, and then I said, Well, wait a minute, how are we going to ensure that each community is using the money for what we're intending it for? Right. So and I think, Jack your idea is great about maybe just having some kind of a form that they fill out to say, we're going to do this with it, and then turn them in and ask for a certain amount and do it that way. And I think that's a good idea.

Tom Richardson

Jack, last year, we use the number of \$7,100 for the Economic Development. I'm wondering if anybody has an idea of what dollar value we might want to place on this.

Mo Wright

I think it depends on how much money we've got. I mean, it's going to be up to the Administrator, probably the Chairman or somebody come up with an idea what, how much money the County's comfortably spending at this point. I mean obviously I would love to spend \$10,000 on a veteran's in the Town of Hadley, but I think it's going to be a little kind of an outrageous ask at this point. So I think it's going to be up to somebody that knows what's going on with our budget and our fund balance to kind of come up with a number what's going to be comfortable for us to work with.

Tom Richardson

Okay, thanks, Mo. Jack, you have a comment, Jack?

Jack Lawler

Well, I mean, I only said 5,000 because that's what Matt (inaudible) for. Usually the County, when we deal with something like this, there's usually like a 50% match. We put half of what the municipality does, whether it's 2,500 or 5,000. I don't really care. I mean, it seems to me like every month now, we're passing resolutions that are incurring reductions in the surplus. The surplus is pretty healthy. When I look at the fact that every month now we're dipping into the surplus, and for good reasons, I'm not being critical to reason. But I think this is a good reason as well. So I again, Tom maybe my suggestion would be for you to consider because you're the Chairman, consider appointing a committee of a couple of folks on from this committee, to have them come up with a dollar amount and,

and take a look at the Economic Development. Set it up so it comes to the Veterans Committee and then (inaudible) Economic Development (inaudible) you know, do something like that.

Tom Richardson

Jack, seeing how you came up with that idea, if you were on that committee, and I'm going to ask Mo sitting here, I'll ask Mo if he would like to take the time. And Preston, are you still on the phone?

Preston Allen

Yeah I am.

Tom Richardson

Preston, would you like to get involved? I'll have you three gentlemen, take a look at that and see how we should move it forward. And you guys can take a look at what kind of dollar values that we should be talking about. And you can work with the County Administrator. That sound fair enough?

Tom Richardson

It's a good way to make sure you don't get any more good ideas though Tom.

Tom Richardson

(laughter) I got it Jack.

Jack Lawler

I'm happy to help. If you want me to Tom, we might be able to get this done quick enough to have a second meeting, a quick second meeting of the Committee to still getting on the March agenda.

Tom Richardson

That would be terrific. Steve Bulger is going to chime in here one second. Go ahead, Steve, please.

Steve Bulger

Yeah that sounds good. Just for reference, the 7,100 came out, that was \$150,000 total. So just using that as a reference point. One thing to consider, which we don't know, 100% yet, but the legislation coming out of DC is going to be providing both the County and municipalities, assuming it passes, with a fair amount of money. And this is the exact type of expense that would qualify, because in Saratoga Springs, the reason they cannot move forward like they normally do is because of COVID impacts. And theoretically, then we could potentially justify that with any other Towns. I do like the idea of a match of some degree, I think that would be a possibility that the Committee can look at as well. And I think we'll need to determine what is it? What is the scope? Is this just for flags, or is it for parades, what's the scope that we're looking to use the money for? But all that are details that can be worked out? My office stands ready to help.

Tom Richardson

Very good. Thank you, Frank, turn on your microphone. Frank has a comment.

Frank McClement

Just information and I'll put this together for the subcommittee and the rest of the Veterans Committee. It was interesting when Supervisor Veitch brought the idea up, I was doing some research on the subject as well. In the state of Ohio, it seems to be an unfunded mandate, but the state of Ohio has a program similar to what supervisor Veitch is proposing here, for sort of a reimbursement for, and they describe it as Memorial Day activities. So I'll put some information together on that program and others that I can find, and I'll get with the County Administrator and the subcommittee, and share that as soon as possible this week.

Tom Richardson

That would be great. Thanks, Frank. So with any luck, Jack, we'll be able to move this forward, and we could have a second meeting prior to the Board meeting to have this on as a Resolution. That sounds good? Okay, very good. Thanks Jack.

Matt Veitch

Mr. Chairman, I just want to thank the Committee for considering it, so appreciate that. Thank you.

Tom Richardson

You're welcome Matt, that's a good idea. And I think one of the things that we're here for certainly we have a lot of veterans in Saratoga County, we want to make sure that we do the right things by them. So, Matt, thanks for bringing that forward. Does anybody have any other business? Okay, hearing none. Motion to adjourn.

Mo Wright

So moved.

Tom Richardson

Second?

Preston Allen

Second.

Tom Richardson

Okay. Thanks, Preston. All in favor aye?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Tom Richardson

We'll put a date together before the next Board meeting. That sounds great. Thanks so much everybody, appreciate it. Have a great day.