

VETERANS AFFAIRS Transcript 4/5/2021

SPEAKERS

Ed Kinowski, Mo Wright, Dan Pemrick, Michael Hartnett, Preston Allen, Michael Prezioso, Frank McClement, Several Supervisors, Tom Richardson

Tom Richardson

Okay. Good afternoon, everyone and welcome. Attendance has been taken. And we need approval of the minutes from the March 1 and the March 8, 2021 meetings.

Mo Wright

I'll move those.

Tom Richardson

Thank you. Second, Dan. All in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Tom Richardson

Any additions, deletions or anything? Okay. By the way, anybody who's on the telephone have feel free to speak up if you have a question or thought as we move forward. Okay? So, Frank, do you want to give us a Veteran's report.

Frank McClement

Thank you, Supervisor. Good afternoon, everyone. A copy of our report has been distributed to the Veterans Committee and put out what the minutes. Feels like we're picking up a little bit in the office with regard to inquiries for assistance with claims and whatnot. So things are starting to pick up in that regard. We did 35 new claims, that number doesn't necessarily reflect, there's a lot of ancillary work that goes on when you take on a claim, there's follow up steps that need to be taken, depending on the nature of the claim. So those are new clients, but not necessarily the only clients that claims work is done throughout the month. So we've been picking up a little bit, though. Still some frustration in our office with the National Personnel Records Center being closed down. So we've been having some difficulties with veterans who want to request their discharge paperwork. And even if it's for an emergency right now, they're only fulfilling emergency requests. But they're not even doing that very well. So that's frustrating, but we're just dependent upon the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, and their shutdown. So kind of speaks to the importance of our Favor program here at the Clerk's office actually. We participated in as much online training that's offered to us. New York State's been doing a really good job of offering more online web based training. So that's been great for us. So we did a webinar that talked about common law marriage at the beginning of last month. We participated in some VA Town Hall meetings. And then our County Veteran's Service Officer

Association training and meeting as well. So that's been good. They did start doing the Transition Assistance Program up at the Naval base, that picked up again so we go up there and support sailors and even some Guard members in active duty, Army, or Air Force also sometimes transition out of the Naval Support Unit up on 29. So we have a good relationship with the folks that run that program and we actually go in, the VA goes in, but then we go in and give a briefing about benefits and claims work and answer questions for those that are transitioning out. So that's been good, because they're up and running again. So that's nice that we're able to help those folks. And if they're not going to be in our area, we don't necessarily take them on as clients, but we connect them to somebody like us, we advise them of who those people would be in that geographic area and try to help them out. Van rides are pretty static, just not a high demand down at the VA, a lot of the programs aren't running, a lot of the groups, a lot of the things that some of our van ridership normally participates in are still closed down to the pandemic. So the demand just isn't there. But we're there Tuesdays and Thursdays were available, our driver is available every Tuesday and Thursday. So if we do get somebody that calls for a ride, we try to work with them to schedule that appointment on one of those days, that he's made himself available, and then we just give him a call and set it up. So I think it's working fairly well right now, just again, not a real hard demand. I can move on if you'd like for the Trust fund report, sir, I know it's listed as a separate thing.

Tom Richardson

Go right ahead.

Frank McClement

So as of right now, we have a balance on hand of \$96,860.18 as of last report, and in the month of March, a client of the office made \$1,000 donation to the trust fund. So very generous, a veteran made a donation to us. And we're very appreciative of that, he wanted to try to help another veterans family and I told him about the fund and what we do and he made a donation. So that was nice. With our Peer to Peer program, I know it says, that's a typo. It says virtual coffee night and she's actually going back to in person on Tuesday nights at Saratoga Coffee Traders. So since Saratoga Coffee Traders was able to reopen on Tuesday evenings for our program, they have been conducting an in person so they practice all of the precautions wearing masks and whatnot and veterans are able to get together. We've even seen some new veterans since we've reopened the program. So that's good. And just for those that aren't familiar with our coffee night, it's run through the Peer program. There's no agenda. It's just veterans gathering. Amy is there, a program coordinator is there on hand, and she'll answer questions. And it's a good way for folks who are interested in learning about our program just to kind of come and get some information. And there's not really any kind of a commitment on like I said, no real agenda. And they're able to connect with other veterans and just have a cup of coffee on us. So it's been great. And Saratoga Coffee Traders supports us as well. And so that's been a good partnership there. Amy conducted a couple of fitness classes, over Zoom. And she also conducted a health and wellness presentation in the month of March. And she had some folks log into those classes and those presentations. One of our volunteer veterans is a certified personal trainer. So she offered to give a couple of classes and Amy set that up via Zoom and it went well. And then of course our honor deceased Veterans Program continues to be postponed. We'll be looking at it again in June, possibly. So that's my report.

Tom Richardson

Anybody have any questions for Frank?

Mo Wright

I just have one quick question. I know last year, we talked about possible use of Lyft for van rides. Did we ever do anything with that or ever see the need for it?

Frank McClement

We're prepared to do it Sir, but I haven't really utilized it because we haven't really had the need. And we're ready to do it at any point. I've got all the information and all I have to do is create an account. The demand has just been really low because of the closings of the programs at the VA and we've been able to meet the need by working with the individuals using our van which is the better option so we haven't had to do that but we are ready if we need to.

Tom Richardson

Anybody on the phone have any kind of questions they'd like to ask Frank?

Ed Kinowski

Yeah, this is Ed Kinowski. Hey, Frank. I don't know if we've done this and I'm trying to check my memory here but to expand the program that you run at the coffee shop and Saratoga, would it be possible maybe to on a monthly basis as such rotate a program light program maybe once a month in each of the Cities or Towns. And if it needs sponsorship, I'd be happy to do the first sponsorship in Stillwater.

Frank McClement

I can certainly discuss that with Amy, we average, right now I've got to see where her numbers are at. That's something that we can certainly talk about. The one thing about that is, Amy, it's the same, when we do it at Saratoga Coffee Traders, I know it's not in every Town, but it's in the same place and time every week. So the veterans that do come, some might have something going on this week, and they don't next week, so that it's the same time and channel, they know that they can pop in at any time. But that's certainly something that can be discussed and looked at, and an option and give it a shot. I would think maybe if we were going to look at individual communities, that might be something we might want to talk to some of our Legion and VFWs and see, because they're entrenched in the veteran community in your Town. So as far as working with them to get the word out. If the committee wants I have the County Legion meeting will be this Wednesday, and I'll be attending that. So I can talk with the County American Legion leadership and see if there's any interest.

Ed Kinowski

I'm not suggesting changing the one that you have. Just adding to it. Because even though the veterans organizations that are entrenched in every Town, the County brings new information and other information that they don't normally have right at their fingertips. And so if they arranged one night every month at same time, same place similar to the City, it might become a vital program. So it's just the thought.

Frank McClement

Sure.

Ed Kinowski

That's all I got Tom.

Tom Richardson

Okay, thanks Ed. Anybody else got anything for Frank, at this point? Okay, we'll move on to the next item. The next item is the honoring veterans grant the discussion. It's been brought to my attention, and that's why I wanted to talk about this today, it's been brought to my attention by a couple of Supervisors that when we first set this up, and we were talking about honoring a vet, or veterans in some way shape or form, and it's been brought to my attention by a couple of people that some of the veterans organizations have buildings, and the buildings maybe have a problem, they may be in disrepair, or they may be having a problem as far as the building is concerned. So for example sake, a lot of these American Legion buildings they hold, there might be a wedding held there or a graduation party and things of that nature. And so specifically, Tom Woods said to me that the Legion in Schuylerville has a problem and they need some work to be done, and that this \$2,500 would be something that would pretty much cure some of the problem because of the building. And he's saying that in reality, the Legion isn't able to put on these parties this coming year, hopefully when and if they can, because there's some problems with the building. So I don't know if we can expand the idea of saying, Hey listen, if they need to fix their buildings, they can use the \$2,500 to fix their buildings, or if we leave it specifically to just honor veterans. So I just thought I'd bring that up and see what everybody had to think about that or any thoughts?

Mo Wright

Don't we give people the opportunity to put an application into the Trust Fund for stuff like that? I know, part of the Trust Fund we hit we set aside certain numbers for individuals and another number for like legions of VFWs couldn't they put an application in the Trust Fund for something like that for a one time shot on a building? Wouldn't that be a more appropriate place to look for money for this than for, I thought this was for some kind of celebration for the honor....

Tom Richardson

And that's exactly how we started it. But this was brought to my attention, and

Mo Wright

I just think if a group is struggling that much that would be more of an application for the Trust Fund than it wouldn't be for this grant program. That's a question, I don't know what the

Several Supervisors

(Mr. Wright and Mr. Richardson speaking at the same time)

Tom Richardson

Would that fit the trust fund, Frank, I guess is our question.

Frank McClement

I don't know that providing funds for repairs that buildings of places like Legion and VFW posts would be something, we haven't done anything like that with the Trust Fund. Like we've given grants to? We've repaired individual veterans houses. Correct.

Tom Richardson

Mo, use your mic please.

Mo Wright

Their houses in their cars, I would think.

Frank McClement

Right.

Mo Wright

And I'm not saying that somebody's going to put an application in for \$10,000 for a building, but a couple \$1,000, we've set that limit for those community organizations in the past, they have a higher limit than the individual. I would think if they make an argument that their building is that much of disrepair, that would be more something for the Trust Fund than it would be for this grant program. That's just my thought.

Ed Kinowski

Tom, Ed Kinowski. Thank you. I went back and read the resolution. And then I read Frank's grant program. And in Frank's, it even mentions construction of such monuments or such places that could be supportive to our veterans. I truthfully feel, and I talked to Tom Wood earlier today, I truly feel that the language that's in both provides enough room for creative writing and not to take it down a different road, but to be supportive of our of our veterans for their honoring. For instance, here's a for instance, if you have a memorial hall that's in disarray, and you use it all the time for productions and ceremonies for our veterans, and it needs to be spruced up for that event, I would think that would go a long way, in similar nature to building a monument in a particular area. So it's about writing for the grant. And I think the language is good enough as written to be supportive of certain events that might contribute towards the facility in itself, because it is honoring the veterans. Just a thought.

Tom Richardson

Thanks Ed. Back to Mo's question . Mo brought up I thought a good idea. If we do veterans homes and things of that nature, do we have a limit on what we would spend on a veteran's home if we were fixing up their home?

Frank McClement

With the Trust Fund yes, it's a \$750 individual grant. So it's \$2000 funds

Mo Wright

It's \$2,000 for a group, for organizations could put an application in also?

Frank McClement

I don't have it in front of me, I'd have to get that out and look at the way that it reads. But it says something along the lines of program...

Several Supervisors

(Mr. McClement and Mr. Wright speaking at the same time)

Ed Kinowski

I think we started the full program, grant program that we're discussing, I don't think we had the funds available at the time to you consider different things. And the Trust Fund has grown due to the hard work of everybody along the lines so maybe it's time to consider things of that nature. Because we have grown and maybe even support other donations to our organization because of it. So it's worth, I think it's worth an approach.

Tom Richardson

Thanks Ed. Dan has something that he'd like to offer.

Dan Pemrick

Yeah, I'm not sure I can express it, but I'm uncomfortable with that idea of expanding that to what I see as really a business. Aren't really most of the Veterans of Foreign War or whatever the organization may be, although it's for veterans, and they do things for veterans, it's still a business, a 401c they have some sort of designation like that. And what Frank does through his office is more personal and family oriented. And I think that was my read and the intention of that money, that the \$2,500 was more of a personal expression of honoring individuals within a community as opposed to a club, so to speak. Albeit good things they do in their community, and maybe conceivably, there's a program that they run out of a VFW or something like that might attract some of that money, but it would have to be personal. To me anyway, it would seem to be more per person in nature.

Mo Wright

I'm not against it, don't get me wrong when I spoke, I'm not against using, if somebody is struggling to come up with an event or something, I would rather see myself personally, every Town uses this \$2,500 and then let it go back. If they are struggling to come up with a plan and their VFW, American Legion needs it to do something, I'm not against that. That's not why I said that. But I just thought that a more appropriate place for them funds would be from the Trust Fund.

Tom Richardson

So I guess Mike has a question. Go ahead, Mike.

Michael Hartnett

Thank you, Supervisor, if I just may for purposes of the discussion, in reviewing resolution 107-2021, which authorizes this grant program, it is a municipal reimbursement. So to Supervisor Pemrick's, a VFW or similar organization, which I understand are private organizations, it would have to be a municipal expenditure that's being reimbursed. So something to think about with considering an expansion of this program. Thank you.

Tom Richardson

Thanks, Mike. So let me get back to Frank then with somebody, for fixing people's houses, there's the Trust Fund, does that put us in a position where they might be able to apply if your VFW or your American Legion building has a problem, or does that fit or it does not fit? I guess? Or if you're not sure, that's fine, too.

Frank McClement

To be honest, I'm not sure.

Tom Richardson

I don't want you to put your foot in forget your mouth, that's all, so.

Frank McClement

I think that the way that the Trust Fund was originally written, there was some leeway for the Veterans Committee and the Board of Supervisors, there may be a little bit of leeway in there, I guess we would have to look at a little closer. But the other thing that I wanted to bring into this discussion that I'd like to look into and I need to do some research. But like the American Legion, the VFW, they're part of national, they are nationally chartered organizations. And when you have buildings that are owned by an American Legion or a VFW post, those buildings are actually not owned by that local post, it is, but if say the local post folded up, and they had no members and the local post folded up, that building, representatives from the American Legion, the VFW at the State, you know it goes up the chain of command, they essentially would come in and take ownership of that property. So I know that there are national level grant programs for veterans, for families through the Legion through the VFW. So I'm curious to see if there are programs, emergency relief programs. I know like Home Depot, I was just trying to look up because I remembered in my mind, I don't know if it's current, but I know for a while the Home Depot Foundation had a \$1 million grant program for the American Legion for individual posts. So there may be a national fund for the post to apply to the fund for things like that. So I think we just need to look into that. And then the committee can continue the discussion, I suppose.

Tom Richardson

Okay,

Mo Wright

I just would, I hate to say no to somebody if they are in that dire of need, I think it would be our best interests are in our best interest to help them out any way we can to, you know, if Frank can help them out by trying to get a national grant or, if at a last resort that we have to use part of that grant money. I mean, I hate to say no to any veteran anybody in Saratoga County myself.

Tom Richardson

I had that same sense.

Preston Allen

Mr. Chairman?

Tom Richardson

Yes Preston.

Preston Allen

Didn't we just do something similar to this last Fall for like four of, like Hadley VFW didn't we do?

Mo Wright

Yeah, we did \$2,000 grants for Christmas program, for different programs that the VFWs and different veteran groups were doing for community. Like the Hadley VFW does the Christmas basket program, they use the money for that. I think that's what you're, but that was for different organizations that were doing community efforts for the veterans in the community. It wasn't, they didn't just take that money and put it in their bank account to spend on anything, that was for a specific purpose, and I believe they spent the money on specifics.

Ed Kinowski

Hey Tom?

Tom Richardson

Go ahead Ed.

Ed Kinowski

Hey Dan, when you mentioned about you spoke to this, I got confused a little bit between the two different programs, the one that we've been running for individual help of the veteran and versus this new grant. This new grant isn't individualized it's open to a plethora of ideas for supporting of veterans memorials. Was that the case? Or did you take this as individual as well?

Tom Richardson

Microphone Dan please.

Dan Pemrick

No, I'm aware that it is for veterans in general, a body of some individuals as a group, okay, as opposed to a household or a building or structure of some sort, especially those that are related to businesses. I read it so that monies by a Town could be spent to support something all veterans could participate in, as Mo says, a celebration, or a recognition of every veteran within a community, not a specific building or group, if you will, or place so to speak.

Ed Kinowski

Got it just checking. Thank you.

Tom Richardson

So let me say this then, if you don't mind, if anybody has any comments, please chime in. Let's continue to go with the grant as we initially proposed it, okay? And Frank, maybe you could do some investigative work to find out if there's any place that a veterans organization might be able to apply for

money should they be in a situation where their building is, has a need. And then you can email that out to everybody, except for me, of course. So does anybody have any objections doing it that way? Okay. Alright, so I guess we'll leave it the way it was. Is there any other discussion? Anybody else want to bring anything up on that? Okay, seeing none. Is there any other business to come before us today? Dr. Prezioso, I'm sorry, come forward. Sorry Mike, use the microphone right there.

Michael Prezioso

Mr. Chairman, thank you. I just wanted to pass on to the group that similar to some work I've done in the past, tried to lay the groundwork to move forward with a project. The first step is going to be this coming weekend, I'm working with a local gym, actually it's one of the places that opened up, the place that we worked with on our veterans project a couple years ago, they actually had to close during the virus, and they were not able to reopen. So the initial step is to do a fundraiser that will take place this Sunday, there'll be two sessions eight o'clock in the morning and 9:15. We'll pass those proceeds along to the Veterans Fund, would like to make the donation in the name of Private First Class, Nate Brown, who is a Glens Falls native, who was killed, actually, it was 2004, on April 11th, was close to I know a number of County employees. So I want to do that as a first step, and as I develop my relationship with this particular gym, look to see if we can expand the program into something similar to what we did a couple of years ago, involving some health and wellness and nutrition, that kind of stuff like that, just building some resilience for the veteran. So I just want to pass the word that that's going on this weekend. And hopefully, it can make something else happen.

Tom Richardson

So somebody might make a donation, where would they send check?

Michael Prezioso

Well, I'd like to see you there Sunday morning, because we'll be

Tom Richardson

What time did you say?

Michael Prezioso

We will actually be doing workouts. So it's a regular session that they operate at the gym, but they've got a volunteer set of instructors to come in to operate each one of the two sessions. So I was being a little a little facetious about it. I don't know that any kind of donations that people would be able to make, just to write a check. I wouldn't know how to do that. I'd have to defer to Frank about what the best way would be to do that. But what will happen is, the membership of the gym, and it is open to the public, you can download their app and sign up if you're interested in doing that. And then everyone who registers for the class will be paying a \$25 contribution to participate in that particular class and then the sum total of all the contributions will be made to the donation that I mentioned. I don't know if that helps.

Tom Richardson

What time were the sessions again?

Tom Richardson

I'm sorry. This is going to be in Clifton Park. It's at a place called Metabolic Meltdown, on Liebich Lane, and I think that because of their COVID restrictions, the only folks they'll be letting in, just to maintain distancing and so forth, the way that they run their operation is that if you're signed up, then of course, you'll be allowed to participate in the class. So I think that that's the way that that will end up being on that Sunday morning. Okay.

Tom Richardson

What time were the sessions Mike?

Michael Prezioso

One's eight o'clock and the other is 9:15.

Tom Richardson

Thank you.

Michael Prezioso

And I hope to raise maybe about \$500, maybe more, keep your fingers crossed.

Tom Richardson

Okay. Great.

Tom Richardson

Thank you. Any other business? Frank?

Frank McClement

Thank you. I just wanted to provide the Committee with an update with the PFC Joseph Dwyer funding in the State budget process. I communicated with Josh Fitzpatrick at Senator Jordan's office today, and the last word that we've gotten is that the program has been put into the Senate and the Assembly version of the Bill. And so State budget negotiations are ongoing as you all are probably aware. So far the Senate and Assembly has requested the funds in both versions of their budget requests, so we'll keep you posted as I get new information, but that's where we stand.

Mo Wright

The last I talked to anybody in Albany they did say it looked like it was going to pass through at this point.

Tom Richardson

Thanks, Frank. Anybody have anything else? If not, a motion to adjourn, please? Second, Dan? All in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Tom Richardson

Thank you all, I appreciate it. Thanks for coming.