

Veterans' Affairs Transcript

2-1-2022

SPEAKERS

Ed Kinowski, Steve Bulger, Mo Wright, Michael Hartnett, Mike Marcotte, Frank McClement, Several Supervisors, Tom Richardson, Bridget Rider

Tom Richardson

So welcome to the Veterans Committee meeting. First one of the year. Attendance has been taken. We need approval of the minutes from the December 2nd meeting.

Mo Wright

So moved.

Tom Richardson

Thank you, Mo. We have a second.

Tom Richardson

Can I second?

Bridget Rider

You can.

Tom Richardson

I'll second that motion because some of the people who are here were not on the committee last year. Any additions or deletions? If not, we're going to move forward. Okay. We're going to have the appointment of Vice Chair, Mo, would you be willing to do that again this year?

Mo Wright

Sure Tom.

Tom Richardson

Okay, thanks very much. So Mo Wright will be the vice chair. So we're going to hear from Frank McClements in regards to the veterans annual report.

Steve Bulger

You gotta take a vote on accepting the minutes.

Tom Richardson

Oh, wait a second. We need a vote on accepting the minutes. I'm sorry.

Bridget Rider

It's a voice vote.

Tom Richardson

So it's a voice, yeah. So it's a voice vote. Everybody in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Tom Richardson

Opposed? Okay, now we'll move on. I'm going too fast here, I guess. Okay. So Frank, you want to give us the annual report, please?

Frank McClement

Sure. Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Frank McClement, Director of the Saratoga County Veterans agency for those that are on the phone. A copy of our annual report has been distributed to members of the committee and the county administrator's office. For brevity sake, I will not go through the entire report. I'd be happy to answer any individual questions regarding any of the content in the report. A couple of things that I want to point out to the committee, I find of importance. First, our veteran population in the county. We did see a slight decrease in veteran population in Saratoga County in 2021. Actually, we've been fairly steady. Over the last several years in Saratoga County over the last 10 years really we've kind of gone up and down a little bit, but this is our first significant decrease that I've seen in my tenure here. We are, according to VA vet pop figures from fiscal year 21, we are home to roughly 15,636 veterans that does not count family members. But that is our total population. We are ranked 14th in New York state counties. And just for comparison, Albany County 15,820 Rensselaer County 10,049, Warren 4,544, Washington County around the same 4,449, and Schenectady County 8507. So actually, this is the first time in a few years we've dipped below Albany County in veteran population I attribute that to aging. Our veteran population is aging, and New York State continues to see a slight decline in veteran population overall. Some other highlights, I'm looking at the by the numbers page, our veteran's transportation, our numbers were still low, just due to COVID. The number of clinics and activities going on at the VA hospital in Albany has, you know, limited those individuals needing to go down. And I also attributed a lot of folks we found have sought other avenues of transportation or utilize their own transportation because of COVID. So we hope to see those numbers pick up next year and hope everything starts to get back to normal. I'd like to point everyone to the VA expenditures \$96,153,000. That's the number that the Department of Veterans Affairs spent in Saratoga County in fiscal year 2021. That's a significant sum. And over 45 million of that in direct cash payments to actually over 47 million in direct cash payments to veterans and veteran family member claimants in Saratoga County. So that is cash that is injected into our economy here by the way of tax free VA benefits. And our agency, I like to think we have a significant impact on that number in the claims work in the claims representation that we do. That number has climbed every year since I've worked here, and hope that it continues to climb only because that shows that folks are being made more aware of their benefits and their services that they've earned. And we are connecting them

to that through the VA. And also it eases the burden on our local services that they may otherwise need to tap into, because we're connecting them to federal benefits. But it's a significant number and I think it's important for the board to be aware of that. Our peer to peer program remains strong. We've got 205 active peers involved. Veterans claims, we doubled our claims almost from last year. So well, our numbers were down significantly because of COVID in 2020, we did 242 claims. This year, we process 401 new claims. So that number is strong and will continue to go up, I hope. And again, that speaks to that \$96 million number, you know, connecting individuals to their benefits only, only is a benefit to them and their families, but to all of us. So we're pretty happy to continue to put focus there. Last year, we did see the retirement of Amy Hughes, our Peer Program Coordinator, we were happy to bring on board someone who's been involved with the program for many years, Christina Holst. In the report, in Appendix C, you will see an annual report from our peer program that highlights some of the activities. And we're happy with the success of that program and the continued success, I should say. And then finally, in the trust fund, our fund remains strong. As of close of business at the end of the year of 2021. We were left with a balance of \$114,946.12. So a viable fund that we're able to assist a lot of individuals and organizations with, and I hope that we continue to see support for the fund and success in those endeavors in the future. Any questions of me?

Tom Richardson

Anyone have any questions? Okay, let's we'll move on. The 2021 honoring veterans grants approvals. Frank.

Frank McClement

Yes, Mr. Chairman, we did receive some applications still trickling in for our 2021 honoring veterans grant approval program. We have four on the agenda. The first is Clifton Park. Clifton Park has allocated funds \$2,500 towards upgrading their Veterans Memorial on the Clifton Common and they also intend on initiating a new ceremony program to honor Clifton Park veterans. So they were forced to postpone the ceremony portion of it. And I spoke to Supervisor Barrett and money has been allocated to spend on this program. So that's a \$2,500 grant that they're requesting assistance with. Moving on to Galway, Galway is requesting a total of \$2,500. And the \$2,500 is a Town support to the Galway Veterans Committee. And that is to assist with the endeavors of the creation and expansion of a Veterans Memorial in front of town hall in the town of Galway and I've had the pleasure of sitting on some of those committee meetings at its very inception. And they've got a great group they're doing a, they're doing a buy a brick campaign to help support as well so the town of Galloway has cut a check to that organization for \$2,500. Moving on to the Town of Moreau. The Town of Moreau is requesting a reimbursement of a total of \$2,448, and the Town of Moreau purchased 432 US flags, 22 bronze flag holder grave markers for veterans that served in World War One, World War Two, the Korean War, Vietnam and the Revolutionary War and they were to be placed on veterans' graves by local American Legion Mohican post 553. So another good use of the grant, and then finally on the agenda, the Town of Waterford and the Town of Waterford is requesting \$2,500 The Town, the Town placed a down payment for a Global War on Terror monument that will match monuments for the other conflicts and wars that our country has been involved in, and they intend to do something for the global war on terror, and it will come in in the spring. The cost, the total cost of the monument is over \$5,000 but the Town provided a \$2,500 down payment, to a monument company to order the materials, the stone, the granite monument itself, and then plans will be finalized in the spring for the design and the language

that's actually on the monument. Also, if it would be, I'm not sure if it'd be out of order, we did have one come in since our agenda went out. If you'd like to enter it under other business, Mr. Chairman, would that be appropriate?

Tom Richardson

I think we can add it. Can we just do it now with the four we just did?

Michael Hartnett

I would to defer to you as Chair, if you'd like to do it under other business.

Tom Richardson

I'd like to do it right now, under what we're doing, under the Veteran Grant approvals. That way we can agree on all of these or disagree.

Frank McClement

Okay, sure, this, this application comes from the Town of Ballston, and the Town of Ballston has a project, the Veterans Field of Flags, and they did a commemoration of veterans across the country, through the creation of a field of flags in front of town hall. And a total of 50 flags were quote, planted to represent each state in the nation. And they are requesting a reimbursement of \$1,622.45. And that accounts for some vinyl signs with stakes, the American flags and flag poles.

Tom Richardson

So we don't need a resolution to accept these, we just need everybody to, I guess, to agree to accept these. So if we're all in agreement, I think we could just say aye.

Mo Wright

Tom, can I ask a quick question?

Tom Richardson

Yeah, sure. Mo, go ahead.

Mo Wright

I'm gonna vote yes, for this. But I've just wanted to ask Frank, how much is left on the grant money from last year that we can put towards the trust fund? Do we know at this point?

Frank McClement

I have a rough number here, I brought a spreadsheet with me, Supervisor, ah, without, let's see, without the Town of Ballston, because it wasn't in there when we did this spreadsheet, we had accounted for a total of \$35,183.76 for a total of the 50,000 remaining of \$14,816.24. So take away the 1622.45 from that, so we're looking at roughly \$12,000. Public school math here, so.

Mo Wright

Do we know if anybody else is, do we have any more late ones coming in? Or is that pretty much what we're going to put in the trust fund?

Frank McClement

I have not heard from other Towns. What my intention was, was to get with the Administrator and let them know, you know, here's the final spreadsheet, and then we can determine next steps from there, if that's appropriate.

Mo Wright

Okay.

Frank McClement

Certainly, I'll bring the number with me to the next Veterans Committee meeting so that all the committee members and Supervisors are aware of exactly how much we have left.

Mo Wright

Okay. Thank you.

Tom Richardson

So I'm, I guess I'm hoping that you're going to be in touch with the municipalities that did not use the money.

Frank McClement

We can certainly, we can certainly send the reminder out. I'll work with Therese and Bridget and get a reminder out for a last call, there would be five that that we haven't heard from.

Tom Richardson

Committee approval on all five?

Michael Hartnett

On all five.

Tom Richardson

So we, alright, so on all five of those applications, we need committee approval. So we just need the yes vote to accept these. So all in favor? Yes.

Several Supervisors

Yes.

Tom Richardson

Anyone opposed? If not, okay, we'll accept those. But I'd like your Frank to or Steve, somebody to get in touch with the communities who did not use their money to see if they have something pending. And if they have nothing pending then let's if we can put the money in the trust fund and move forward. Anybody have any other thoughts or any other questions in regards to that?

Mo Wright

Tom, I was just curious if we're going to do it again this year? Do we know if it's in the budget?

Tom Richardson

I was going to kind of bring that up to see if we could possibly do this again. I know a lot of the communities really benefited from this and I thought when Matt Veitch brought this forward last year that it was a great idea. And I was hoping that we might be able to do it again this year. So, you know, we'll have conversations with the County Administrator. Go ahead, Steve.

Steve Bulger

Yeah, I would say, as an alternative, the Board of Supervisors approved the \$2 million COVID Relief plan that opened, for nonprofits, that open today. So any of the veterans organizations that are a registered nonprofit, or have nonprofit status, are eligible to apply directly for that money. So I would, you know, I did want to mention that. The program was not included in the budget for this year, but there is this alternative that could benefit a lot of our veterans organizations, and we hope, as many of them as possible do take advantage of that. And those grants range from \$500 up to \$50,000.

Tom Richardson

So Mo, Mo, did you catch all that? Mo, are you there?

Mo Wright

And I've already I've already talked to some of my organizations about that. I know some of the Towns were using it not just for veterans organizations. I mean, obviously, we use ours for a Town wide veterans celebration. So you know, I think it's still worth us looking into see if we can't find some money somewhere to do something for our program again this year, even if it's not the full \$50,000.

Tom Richardson

Well, we can we can have those conversations, and we'll see where they lead us to.

Mo Wright

Okay, that sounds good, Tom.

Tom Richardson

Okay. All right. Thanks, Mo. Does anybody have any other business to come before us today? Yeah, oh, yeah. Forgot the honors deceased veterans. We've been having a problem with this for the past couple years. So I guess it's up for discussion in regards to when do we think we should begin to do these again? From what I understand the COVID numbers are coming down. I don't know what the actual requirements are to use this, how many people we can use, coming into this building here, to use for Veterans Day? Do we have a number? We have no restrictions at this time. So I guess maybe we should start off. This is the beginning of February. Maybe we should start off in March or April, and start the veterans, deceased veterans ceremonies again. Anybody have any other thoughts about that?

Mo Wright

Sounds good to me.

Tom Richardson

So do you think we could get them started in March? Frank, we have somebody that's pretty much set to go though, right?

Frank McClement

If I could make a recommendation?

Tom Richardson

Sure. Go.

Frank McClement

Rather than February, I would say we do it in April, because what we've got to do is we've got to give notification to the other elected offices and get it in their calendar, get it in their schedule. And I'd like to give them as much time as possible to start to pencil us in, because, you know, we bumped it down and, and whatnot,

Tom Richardson

Right.

Frank McClement

And then also give time for the families to know that we're doing this and we could still run into somebody not being comfortable with that. And we'll handle that accordingly. I'll work with the individual supervisors and those families and figure out what's appropriate. And if there is an appropriate solution for that, if we run into that. haven't seen it yet, but we never know.

Tom Richardson

So that sounds reasonable. So does. Mo, did you hear that? Ed did you hear that? That will started in April?

Mo Wright

Sounds good to me?

Tom Richardson

Does that sound good? Okay, everybody in agreement with that? Everybody's nodding our heads, yes. Okay. So that's great. So, Frank, what we need to do, though, for the board meeting coming up here in the next couple of weeks is to have the schedule of communities who, who's coming in April and through the end of the year, so that everybody can start to get prepared. And that we'll start off where we left off, what was it, two years ago now or whatever it was a year and a half ago. And we'll start off where we left off, and we'll start that, whatever that community was in April. That sound fair.

Several Supervisors

Yes.

Tom Richardson

Okay. All right. Sounds fair. So, Frank, Frank will have the list for us when we come to the board meeting here in the next couple of weeks. And everybody will get a copy of that. And we'll just mention it on the floor that day, so everybody's aware of it. Okay. All right now, any other business?

Mo Wright

Mr. Chairman, my guests here would just like to thank the committee.

Mike Marcotte

Thank you for letting me sit in. This is Mike, the Commander of Post 862. And thank you for letting me sit in it was very informative.

Tom Richardson

Anytime, like feel free to visit us anytime you'd like. Thank you. So we need a motion to adjourn.

Ed Kinowski

I'll make a motion.

Mo Wright

So moved.

Tom Richardson

Okay, we got it, Ed and Mo, first and second. And all in favor, aye.

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Tom Richardson

And look forward to seeing you look forward to seeing us in the next few weeks. Thank you. Thank you, everybody.