

## November 6, 2017 / Meeting Minutes

Old Business: Bill presents on the Memorial Day stating that all permits and contracts are in order, and the last item needed is the selection of a speaker. The event is on track and the request to JBER National Armory for Chairs needs to have someone check in. The next update will be given at the following meeting Jan 8<sup>th</sup>.

12:10 Guest Presentation: Dr. Poole presented on the new approach to care at the VA for substance abuse and homeless concerns among veterans. This a new focus on long-term care the commissary has been operating at 90% capacity (where previously is was 52%). An average of 45 veterans are being assisted on a daily basis, 92% are dealing with substance abuse issues and 88% have signs of PTSD. The two priorities of the VA are access to mental health services and suicide prevention, all of the work they do within the domiciliary is directed by those goals. To do so efficiently, they identify at risk populations and shift their programing for that outreach. It is based on statistical analysis.

- Initial contact is coordinated by the State of Alaska and outreach occurs in both rural and urban locations.
- Discharge planners facilitate release and reentry, and stays typically range from 4.5 months
- Residency in the program is voluntary and it is not a detox center, but they do help patients to recover from substance abuse (mainly alcohol)
- They are not at 100% capacity because of the continual ebb and flow of patients that shifts with housing needs. Six beds are provided for females, but rates of female entry are much lower (1-3 patients at a time).
- The VA treats substance abuse as a disease so reentry is not frowned upon.

12:30 Final Comments: The changes to the system in the past years have helped to facilitate veterans in achieving their versions of success. The program looks at homelessness fixes in terms of a holistic approach and not a Band-Aid. Staffing can be hard to fill in the mental health portion of the VA , but they have increased the

staff from 82 to 118 employees. Turnover is normal but no issue as they are looking at long range recovery. Service animals are allowed.

12:35 New Business:

- (a) Tabled the election of a new Commission Chair until the Jan. Meeting
- (b) Review of Woman's Veterans Day event - November 9<sup>th</sup> 2-6 pm
- (c) Veterans Day Nov. 11<sup>th</sup> - 10:30 Remembrance Day with the Canadians will follow at the Cemetery. Please note many locations serving free meals to veterans on this day. Golden Corral will also serve meals free to veterans 5-9pm on the 13<sup>th</sup>. No veteran should go hungry.

12:45 Legislative Affairs Update: Bill Huber presented the following.

- (a) The Governors Payroll Tax has not put forth any consideration on how it will impact Military personnel and veterans. It will likely not receive any time in the Senate because of SB91 but the commission has decided to draft a letter to inform senate and house members on the need for provisions protecting said service members. Letter will be sent to the Mayor as well.
- (b) The AFN director hosted a round table regarding the rural presences and outreach of the National Guard. Considerations focused on abandoned armories within the state as points of stay, and disaster response is the driving force for this conversation of rural presence. Recruiting restriction eases were also addressed to allow young convicted felons a path to service.
- (c) JBER Hospital tour will commence on Dec 14<sup>th</sup> 7:30-9am. Aubrey Herman is the contact

12:55 Action Items: The commission is waiting on the following requests put into the Mayor's Office:

-Signed thank you letters for Memorial Day - Commissioner and Staffer updates -Website Updates of Commissioners

Next Meeting is Jan 8<sup>th</sup> 2017

1:01 Around the Horn

Moment of Silence

1:05: Pam Beale adjourns the meeting.