



## Veterans Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

- Meeting Date/Time/Location:** April 8, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.  
Hybrid Zoom Meeting – WCHD, Girard St & Zoom
- Committee Members Present:** Robert Wilson, Allan Jensen, Lynne Graham, Christopher Brown, Dick Conoboy, Joe Shepherd, Andrea Vance
- Committee Members Absent:** Brent Waggoner, Wes Weston
- Staff/Guests:** Liz Witowski, Whatcom County Health & Community Services  
Sean Dalgarn, Whatcom County Health & Community Services  
Beth Decker, Whatcom County Health & Community Services  
Cori Bryant, Opportunity Council  
Paul Pelot, Worksource  
Mike Slocum, VVA  
Peter Ahn

Agenda Item	Discussion
<b>1. Call to order</b>	Meeting called to order by Lynne
<b>2. Roll Call</b>	A quorum was present.
<b>3. New Business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Open Public Comment               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Peter and Mike introduced themselves</li> </ul> </li> <li>ii. Approve December minutes               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Chris asked for clarification on the December meeting minutes that noted 2023 was the first year they ran out of assistance. Liz explained that they have a spending authority each year, and for 2023 it was \$150,000. They spent \$200,000 in direct assistance after moving \$50,000 from an unspent contract to direct assistance. They also amended the direct assistance limit to \$200,000 in 2023, anticipating similar needs this year.</li> <li>b. Chris asked for a breakdown of the \$100,000 that went to the Opportunity Council (OC). Liz explained that \$70,000 went to direct assistance and the rest went to a 4% COLA. OC was unable to spend the Veterans and Family Assistance (VFA) due to low hourly wages making hiring difficult.</li> <li>c. Chris asked if the contract would be renewed until the initial money was spent. Liz explained that the contract was renewed for 2024 at an increased amount, plus they have a little left over from 2023 to spend. The spending authority is biennial, and they are authorized to invoice up to a specific amount. OC does not physically hold on to the money.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>d. Chris asked if it's draining the VAF. Liz clarified that it is not draining the VAF. Cori added that the spending of the funds with OC is dependent on how many clients and cases are eligible for VAF, so it ebbs and flows.</p> <p>e. December meeting minutes were approved. <b>Aye: 7, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0</b></p> <p>iii. Roll call of Board members and their respective Nationally Chartered Veterans Organization memberships</p> <p>a. Liz advised that the RCW requires that the majority of the board members be part of a nationally chartered veterans' organization. There were a few members that she needed to verify.</p> <p>i. Joe advised he was with VFW</p> <p>ii. Bob advised he was with VFW</p> <p>iii. Chris confirmed he was with IAVA and DAV</p> <p>iv. Welcome new member Brent Waggoner</p> <p>a. Topic tabled for next meeting as Brent was absent.</p> <p>v. Appoint chair and vice-chair for 2024</p> <p>a. Lynne asked for nominations for Chair and Vice Chair</p> <p>b. Bob stated he wanted to get more involved in the VAB and nominated himself as Chair.</p> <p>i. Lynne called for the vote for Bob Wilson as Chair. The board voted and Bob was voted in as Chair for 2024. <b>Aye: 6, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0</b></p> <p>c. Andrea said she would be interested in continuing on as Vice Chair.</p> <p>i. Lynne called for the vote for Andrea Vance as Vice Chair. The board voted and Andrea was voted in as Vice Chair for 2024. <b>Aye: 6, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0</b></p>
<p><b>4. Reports &amp; Discussion</b></p>	<p>i. VAF Application review and approval</p> <p>a. Liz explained that the document before the board was the application used when someone is seeking direct assistance, rent, mortgage, etc. and it was time for an update</p> <p>b. Finance has seen a lot of turnover in staff, there was a lot of historical knowledge that was lost and newer employees were unsure on how to interpret county and state code so some issues getting rents paid on time.</p> <p>c. It was decided that the form would be updated with guidelines on who can receive assistance and what services would be covered. The board would vote on the changes.</p> <p>d. Allan asked if the form would be provided through the treasurer's office or through Liz's office.</p> <p>i. Liz clarified that the form would be provided through her office, and not the treasurer's office or any other county office.</p> <p>e. Liz explained that the fund qualification is based on two criteria: If someone makes less than 60% of the area median income (AMI), they qualify for the fund. If someone is over 60% AMI but cannot afford moving costs, they can also qualify for the fund.</p> <p>f. Liz mentioned that the dental bills and child care were capped at \$3,000 because they can be ongoing.</p>



- i. She Suggested raising the cap to \$4,000 or \$5,000, but also expressed uncertainty about whether the fund should cover ongoing dental work.
  - ii. Dental needs are more common than child care needs among veterans who can access the fund.
  - iii. Allan suggested to establish a cap and then allow an additional amount on a case-by-case basis for emergencies.
  - iv. Liz advised that is how they were operating and where the problems came in Finance and why Finance is asking for clear guidelines.
- g. Finance will honor the letter of what is approved today. For example, if you make the dental cap \$5000, but routine dental is capped at \$3000 we can do that.
- i. Liz used rental assistance as an example of what to do for the dental assistance,
    - 1. Assistance looks different for various individuals, such as those on subsidized rent versus veterans living independently
- h. The board deliberated on the dental assistance cap, considering whether to set it at \$4,000 or \$5,000. They discussed the possibility of defining the cap based on the type of dental service, such as screenings, denture processing, or routine cleanings
- i. It was acknowledged that the high availability of dental care for veterans in the community, including free care offered by some dentists. However, they recognized that not all veterans' needs are met this way
- j. They discussed raising the dental assistance cap and how it might affect the distribution of funds. They considered setting different caps for major restorations and routine cleanings.
- k. The board discussed the dilemma of prioritizing stable housing over dental care when allocating funds
- l. They discussed defining dental assistance categories to prevent misuse of funds. They considered consulting a dental office or the VA for definitions
- m. The board agreed to rewrite the dental assistance provision to state that emergency or major restorations are capped at \$5,000 and dental is not for ongoing services
- n. Chris raised a concern about the term "financially needy" in the eligibility requirements. It was suggested to change it to "financial status".
- i. It was explained that the term "financially needy" is pulled from the RCW and County code, and is a qualifier for the fund. Changing it might require changing the RCW.
  - ii. The board agreed to change "financially needy" to "financial status" and to vote on this change.
- o. Allan made a motion to approve the suggested changes to the form, which was seconded by Andrea and Chris
- i. Motion passed to approve the VAF Application with included language changes. **Aye: 7, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0**

	<p>ii. VAF Cash Balance as of 4/1/2024: \$871, 578.19</p> <p>a. Liz reviewed the VAF cash balance and advised the available cash does not imply immediate spending capacity. The funds that can be used immediately are those authorized in the budget authority.</p>
<b>5. Good of the Order</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cori shared that the planning for the Stand Down is going well.</li> <li>• Everything has been donated. WTA is providing free rides. Mount Vernon is coming up to do the health care services. There will be over 20 service providers.</li> </ul>
<b>6. Next Meeting</b>	The next meeting will be held Monday, June 8, 2024 – hybrid.
<b>7. Adjourned</b>	The meeting was adjourned at 11:06 am.