

# *Calhoun County Veterans Affairs Committee Meeting*

## **Minutes: September 10, 2014**

Veterans Affairs Committee meeting called to order by Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Rodger Seidel at 2:30 P.M.

Pledge of Allegiance–Moment of Silence.

### **Roll-call of committee members:**

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|--------------|--------------------|---------|
| • Chairman   | Rodger Seidel,     | Present |
| • Vice-Chair | Jack Hunn          | Excused |
| • Secretary  | Samuel Gray,       | Present |
| • Member     | George “Rob” Beam, | Present |



### **Calhoun County Veterans Affairs Office Staff:**

- |                            |                     |         |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| • Director                 | Scott C. Losey      | Present |
| • Service Officer          | Kristina S. Higgins | Present |
| • Administrative Assistant | M. Luann Cape       | Present |

### **Calhoun County Administrator’s Office Representative:**

- |                           |             |         |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------|
| • Assistant Administrator | Brad Wilcox | Present |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------|

### **Citizens’ Time:**

Mr. Terrance Gardner is a Veteran with 23 years of service. Mr. Gardner just left the service in June, 2014. He was a guest in our meeting today under the presupposition that he was simply curious as to how the meetings transpired.

### **Applications for Emergency Assistance from the Calhoun County Veterans’ Relief Fund:**

None

**Correspondence:**

Service Officer Higgins informed the Committee of active attendance and subsequent participation within the newly created Veterans Resource Team meeting. Service Officer Higgins disseminated that those with whom attend the Veterans Resource Team meetings represent a vast litany of various agencies; most of which are uniquely created to serve the veteran population. The primary purpose of the Veterans Resource Team is to provide a network of referrals that can engage veterans needs in a professional and educated manner. Because the Veterans Resource Team is still in its infancy in development and procedural establishment, each participating organization is engaging in the process of understanding the purpose and eligibility criteria specific to each participating agency. Service Officer Higgins stated that, presently, there are approximately 20 different agencies currently represented on the Veterans Resource Team. Again, given that the Veterans Resource Team is still early in the developmental process, Service Officer Higgins believes that there may very well be over 100 agencies and organizations within the Team's network

Discussion ensued about the purpose and scope of the Veterans Resource Committee. Chairman Seidel addressed some concern over the Veterans Resource Team's overall command and control especially as more agencies and organizations continue to express interest in being represented.

**Old Business:**

Calhoun County Assistant Administrator, Brad Wilcox, summarized a fundamental overview of the county wide budgeting methodology. He discussed general fund vs. millage fund. He also went over the parameters set up by the board concerning adding personnel. There is already provision for one director and two Service Officers.

Director Losey presented thoughts relative to the Calhoun County Burial Benefit. Director Losey reminded both Mr. Wilcox and the Committee that the Calhoun County Veterans Burial Benefit, an unfunded state mandated benefit, constitutes a benefit more in principle than practical when juxtaposing the average funeral bill of \$11,000 to the Calhoun County Burial Benefit of \$300. Service Officer Higgins stated that the office is facilitating, on average, of seven (7) applications per month. Director Losey stated that the current \$65 Calhoun County Headstone Setting Reimbursement Benefit could be increased to assist in

offsetting the prices for interring a Veteran in a private cemetery. Director Losey informed that approximately 35 letters delineating death benefits, both county and federal, of potential consequence are sent out to the informants listed on each death certificate per month. This solicitation of services and advocacy is of substantial consequence and has paved the way for well over a 1,000 Calhoun County Burial Benefits over the past 10-Plus years in addition to the hundreds upon hundreds of federal death benefits secured over the past 10-Plus years.

Mr. Wilcox stated that while \$45,000 was budgeted, approximately \$5,000 has been paid out. Director Losey disseminated his procedural protocol pertaining to the “inexact science” of projecting the number of Calhoun County Veterans who will not only pass away in the year 2014, but, also, satisfy the eligibility requirements as stipulated within the Michigan Compiled Laws. Director Losey added that given the average life expectancy when factored into the indisputable fact that many veterans who are passing away served on active duty during the period between the federally defined end of the Korean War Era and beginning of the Vietnam War Era, active duty military service during this time period does not satisfy the primary eligibility criterion necessary for the Calhoun County Burial Benefit (must have served during a recognized period of war).

Mr. Wilcox, continued his overview of the budget. He pointed out that every department has a \$22,390 yearly overhead that include all the professional services the county provides.

Director Losey stated the budget he authored was well researched; incorporated realistic spending trends; and accounted for insuring that county tax payer dollars were to be well spent. Director Losey further added, however, that an understandable amount of monetary funding must be considered for modernizing the office. In other words, Director Losey stated that he and Service Officer Higgins will be dedicating a fair amount of time to learning about the various software packages currently on the market specifically designed for county veterans affairs offices coupled with revamping the Calhoun County Veterans Affairs Website through a professional website designer.

Committee member, Mr. Beam, inquired as to where the employee training expense was allocated in the budget. Director Losey explained that the State of Michigan historically

appropriates–NOT GRANTS (appropriates requires either the State House or the State Senate to Approve or Deny as opposed to grants that can be arbitrary and capricious)– a set amount of monetary funding to sponsor a four (4) day Spring Training Seminar and a two (2) day Fall Training Seminar facilitated by the Michigan Association of County Veterans Counselors. The Calhoun County Veterans Affairs office staff are currently working with the Phil Smith, Vietnam Veterans of America State Service Office – Detroit, Director to work us for accreditation. Fortunately, the fees are minimal. The budget is flexible in the way that if we need to move around a line item, it should not be a problem.

Chairman Seidel brought up the need to tackle the administrative backlog. He knew of a couple of people at the base who might be willing to come on a volunteer basis.

Mr. Beam motioned that we accept the budget, Mr. Gray seconded the motion. The budget was passed.

Director Losey stated that many county veterans affairs offices have initiated the policy of paying the entire cost of interring an eligible veteran into a private cemetery–i.e. placing the vault, closing the grave, and placing the marker. The Committee had no comment regarding this issue.

Mr. Wilcox informed that the Calhoun County Veterans Relief Fund surplus that was rolled over from previous years currently amounts to approximately \$58,000. Mr. Wilcox further added that if the trends of prudent consideration of county tax dollars continue, \$50,000 will be added; hence, resulting in a fund balance of approximately \$108,000. He emphasized the importance of responsible spending with tax payers in mind. Discussion ensued concerning moving monies around within the budget and the amount of burials we have facilitated.

Colonel Seidel went over the purpose for the metrics and then an idea for improvement might be to add dashboard capability. He commented that we need to limit the amount of metrics that the office was required to keep track of. He also gave a general explanation of what a dashboard is.

Mr. Wilcox offered that the website designer has offered to put dashboard capability onto our website.

It was mentioned that it may be time to schedule a presentation for Director Losey at the Air National Guard base and to make sure that Fort Custer (Army) is included.

Discussion concerning the possible sources for the Veterans Benefit Booklet.

**New Business:**

The committee opening has been advertised. It was mentioned that it would be nice if an OEF/OIF Veteran would step forward. Two applications have been submitted.

Committee Secretary Sam Gray stated that a Veterans Stand Down was scheduled for tomorrow and that there is a candidate/political forum happening on October 20<sup>th</sup> at the 1<sup>st</sup> United Methodist Church for the 62<sup>nd</sup> District Race from 5:30-7:30.

**CALHOUN COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETING:**  
**MINUTES UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED WITHOUT CHANGE OR EDIT**

**POWERPOINT OVERVIEW ENTAILED THE FOLLOWING:**

- Metrics
- Director Losey and Service Officer Higgins commented on recent county statistics just released by the State of Michigan. Compared to similar size counties, the statistics provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office indisputably establishes Calhoun County as the most effective county in terms of the Compensation and Pension dollars brought into Calhoun County when juxtaposed with all other county veterans affairs offices in the State.
- Chairman Seidel brought up the point that it is more important to him the amount of Veterans we serve as opposed to, primarily, the amount of money garnered from our Service-Connected Compensation claims advocacy.

- Director Losey answered Committee member Beam's questions regarding making the temporary position permanent. Director Losey advised Committee member Beam that because the temporary to permanent position is a union position, it must be posted and advertised as an opening. Director Losey assured Mr. Beam and the rest of the Committee that he is working with Ms. Archambault, Director, Human Resources on the correct procedures relative to the process.
- Chairman Seidel requested a copy of the by-laws, 2010 word if possible. In Chairman's Seidel's opinion, the current By-Laws are woefully ambiguous and require a complete rewrite.
- Mr. Wilcox offered to assist Director Losey and Service Officer Higgins in contacting the Website designer that the County employs for the purpose of re-creating the Calhoun County Veterans Affairs office Website.
- Director Losey offered to do a presentation at the Michigan Air National Guard Base.
- Secretary Gray had a question that led to a discussion concerning the effect of the property tax exemption for Veterans who satisfy the eligibility requirements necessary to have their property taxes waived. Secretary Gray wondered if their will be a discernible impact on the property values within Calhoun County and conversely a decrease in funding of the Calhoun County Veterans Affairs office.

**Adjournment:**

Mr. Beam made a motion to adjourn, Secretary Gray seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned 4:01pm.

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Rodger Seidel  
Chairman, Calhoun County Veterans' Affairs Committee

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Scott C. Losey  
Director, Calhoun County Veterans' Affairs

