

# *Calhoun County Veterans Affairs Committee Meeting*

## **Minutes: May 7, 2015**

Veterans Affairs Committee meeting called to order by Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman, Rodger Seidel at 9:01 A.M.

Pledge of Allegiance–Moment of Silence.

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

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

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

- |                            |                     |   |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---|
| • Director                 | Aaron Edlefson      | Present   |
| • Service Officer          | Kristina S. Higgins | Present   |
| • Administrative Assistant | M. Luann Cape       | Excused Absence from Meeting, Present in Office |

### **County Administration Staff:**

- |                                   |                 |         |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| • County Assistant Administrator  | Brad Wilcox     | Present |
| • County Counsel                  | Richard Lindsey | Present |
| • County Administrator/Controller | Kelli Scott     | Present |
| • Human Resources Director        | Kim Archambault | Present |

### **Strategic Planning Facilitator:**

- |                     |                     |         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------|
| • Staff–Humanenergy | Michelle Vandermeer | Present |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------|

### **Agenda Changes:**

Vice-Chair Hunn suggested adding to the Agenda, under New Business: Honorable discharges including “under honorable conditions” and general discharge. The wording in

the Trust Fund statute vs. the Soldier's and Sailor's Act. Who is eligible for benefits? County Counsel, Richard Lindsey agreed to look at the statutes, Vice-Chair Hunn agreed to e-mail him the information.

**Welcome the New Director:** County Assistant Administrator, Brad Wilcox, welcomed the New Director, Aaron Edlefson. Director Edlefson introduced himself: In 2002 he joined the Marine's. He was deployed two different times to Iraq. Director Edlefson received his Bachelor's degree from Western Michigan University in Criminal Justice and he is working on his Master's degree in Public Administration there. He started as the Service Specialist in the Kalamazoo County Office, and then he became the Coordinator (just like the Director) there. He spent a month in Kalamazoo training the new Specialist, Brien Brockway, before he started in Calhoun County. He looks forward to the challenges that are ahead.

**Citizens Time:** none.

**Correspondence:** none.

**Administrative Updates:** County Assistant Administrator, Bradley Wilcox shared an update, which will be his last, since Mr. Edlefson will be giving Director updates from this point forward. First thing on the updates is the Quarterly Financial Report. Mr. Wilcox summarized the current budget. The Committee authorized a new position and that is currently costing the County \$51,000. The fund balance at the end of the year would be \$110,000. Whatever we do not spend stays in the Veterans budget. We budget for \$160,000 in salaries, with \$83,000 in benefits, which amounts to about 75% of our budget. We have currently used only 10% of the Burial Budget.

**Minutes from April 8, 2015:** Mr. Beam moved to accept the minutes as written. Ms. Philo seconded that motion. All were in favor, motion passed.

**Veterans Relief Applications:** Application 15-01 is from a combat Veteran who was abandoned by a spouse that cleaned out their bank account. She is 100% disabled, in a wheelchair. The Veteran requested \$150 for food, \$40 for gasoline. Service Officer Higgins contacted Mr. Wilcox, who contacted County Counsel Lindsey who both approved the application. Ms. Higgins obtained a Meijer's gift card for \$190. Mr. Wilcox reminded the Committee of previous decisions by the Committee to allow the Service Officer or Director to ask County Administration for approval of an emergent need for \$250 or less.

Application 15-02 requested \$2290 for a vehicle with insurance included. His former vehicle was sabotaged, towed away and crushed. He needs the car to get to work. Discussion ensued. Applicant denied with the suggestion that he re-apply for bus passes and a two week

stay at a local motel near the job. The Committee also required proof that the applicant had applied for the job.

Director Edlefson pointed out that there needs to be policies to govern the fund's application process. Mr. Wilcox reiterated the need to have a better application process with objective criteria. The only current standard is what is set forth in the State law.

County Counsel, Richard Lindsey reminded the Committee that in the future no Social Security Numbers on the application, as well as names. Chairman Seidel reminded everyone that we need a privacy page added to the packet.

**Old Business:** Committee by-laws. County Counsel, Richard Lindsey started the discussion with reference to Article II that refers to the Office being maintained and equipped by the County Board of Commissioners, leaving the location open. Why are the job descriptions included in this document? It was suggested that it could be added that from time to time the County Board of Commissioners could change the job descriptions, along with the Committee, as needed. So we would not need to change the by-laws every time there needs to be a change in the job descriptions.

Mr. Lindsey stated that the title, "Director" needs to be consistently used.

Article III, the mission statement concerning the Committee assisting the Office on a day-to-day basis. This is questioned, and discussion ensues.

The issue of whether or not Committee members should ask the office to handle their disability claims. It should at least be disclosed to the Committee.

Secretary Gray and Vice-chair Hunn expressed the need to have access to the Applications for the Veterans Relief Fund. Mr. Wilcox explained the forms will be available on-line in the future. As for now, if a Committee member takes on the roll of being an advocate for a Veteran, then it would become a conflict of interest to make a decision on that Veteran's Application. As the office collects the information, they use the interview process to determine how to best advocate for the Veteran. There would also be an issue with liability, since the Committee members are not covered by the County policy. Discussion ensued.

County Counsel Lindsey offered to draft a policy statement concerning the above issue. Mr. Lindsey suggested that we add a 3 minute public comment time to our by-laws for part of our regular meeting. He also suggested that we add back in some comments about the Open Meeting Act. Article 9 is fine. Emergent Need policy may not need to be in the By-laws final copy to be approved at the next meeting.

**New Business:** Vice-chair Hunn: Under the Michigan Trust Act it mentions “Honorable Discharge” , later it states “Honorable Conditions”. Some say that would include “General discharge under Honorable”. We need clarification. Mr. Lindsey stated he would look into it. Chairman Seidel suggested consulting a Military JAG officer.

**Good of the Committee:** Mr. Beam welcomed Chairman Seidel back in the State of Michigan. Mr. Gray brought up the Cereal Festival on June 13<sup>th</sup>. He suggested that we participate as a vendor similar to how we joined in the Senior Fair. It’s from 8-noon at McCamly Park. He offered to fill out the paperwork.

Chairman Seidel stated that he would have a proposal at the next meeting about shirts with the County logo.

Vice-chair Hunn mentioned the VA 2K run, the Stand Down 2015 in Kalamazoo. Director Edlefson mentioned that he and Kristina would be attending the Stand Down on Friday, May 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Adjournment:**

Mr. Beam made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Gray seconded the motion. All were in favor, motion passed. Meeting adjourned 10:02 A.M.

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Chairman Rodger Seidel  
Calhoun County Veteran Affairs Committee

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Aaron Edlefson  
Director, Calhoun County Veteran Affairs Office