

The Minutes of the Meeting

STATE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

April 25, 2018
9:00 A.M.

An official meeting of the State Veterans Affairs Commission (VAC) convened on Wednesday, April 25, 2018 at the VFW State Headquarters, Raleigh, NC. Attendance as noted:

Commission Members

Jimmy G. (Tony) Braswell, Chairman
Elree T. Smith, Vice-Chairman
Etteinne (E.T.) Mitchell (Absent)
William Shillito
Leonard (Mike) Scruggs
Carol Phelps
Terry T. Hales
Joseph (Joe) W. Adamczyk
Gregory R. Woodard
Rev. Lenwood V. Long, Sr. (Absent)
Michael Worley (Absent)
John C. Boesch (Absent)
Larry Townsend

Advisory Committee Members

Jeffrey D. Jones (Absent)
Marine Corps League
Jacob Roth, Commander (Absent)
American Ex-Prisoners of War
Carol Barker, Commander
The American Legion
Buddy Waller (Absent)
AMVETS
Jeremy Roberts, Adjutant
Disabled American Veterans
Greg Stafford, Commander
Veterans of Foreign Wars
James Hicks
Military Order of the Purple Heart
Rossie M. Nance, Jr.
Vietnam Veterans of America
David Lee, President
North Carolina Council of MOAA

Assistant Secretary for Veteran Affairs
Deputy Director, NC Division of Veteran Affairs
NCDVA Facilities Manager
Program Manager, State Veterans Cemetery
Administrative Assistant
Processing Assistant, State Veterans Homes
Administrative Assistant
Administrative Secretary
Processing Assistant, State Scholarship Program
Contractor, State Scholarship Program
NCDVA Region I Manager
NCDVA Region IV Manager

James (Jim) Prosser
Martin Falls
James (Jimmy) Woodard
Keith Whitfield
Diane Norris
Taylor James
Ken Castille
Angela Heilig
Nicol Jones
E. Wayne Peedin
Crystal Anderson
Don Evans

Guests

Mr. Robert Boyette, Johnston County Veterans Service Officer
Mr. Dezelle "Bull" Durham, Sergeant Major, USMC, Retired
Mr. Jim Jackson, NC VFW Chief of Staff

Chairman Braswell opened the meeting at 9:01a.m. with the Veterans Affairs Commission and asked Secretary Prosser to conduct a roll call to determine if there was a quorum of the Commission present. After determining a quorum was present, Chairman Braswell called the attention of the Commission regarding any conflicts of interest and if any should arise the affected Commission members would reuse themselves from any discussion and deliberations. Chairman Braswell then called for a motion of the Commission to enter into Closed Session to begin a review of State scholarships. A motion was made by Commissioner Shillito and seconded by Commissioner Townsend. After a unanimous vote, the Commission entered into Closed Session at 9:03a.m.

After Scholarship discussions, a motion was made by Vice-Chairman Smith and seconded by Commissioner Hales to exit from Closed Session. The motion was approved and the Commission exited Closed Session at 10:10a.m.

After a short break, Chairman Braswell called the meeting back into Open Session at 10:20a.m, then called on SGT MAJ(Ret.) Bull Durham to lead in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and asked Mr. Wayne Peedin to give the invocation.

Chairman Braswell asked Assistant Secretary Prosser to conduct a roll-call of the Veterans Affairs Commission Advisory Board to assess attendees.

Chairman Braswell called the attention of attendees to the minutes of the previous Veterans Affairs Commission meeting held on February 7, 2018 that was previously sent to everyone then asked if there were any corrections or revisions. There were none and a motion was made by Commissioner Shillito to accept the minutes as printed. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Adamczyk and approved by the Commission. Also, Chairman Braswell referred to the published Agenda that was previously emailed and asked if there were any items that needed to be added or removed. With no changes requested, a motion was made by Commissioner Phelps and seconded by Commissioner Adamczyk the approved by unanimous vote.

Secretary Prosser then called on members of the Advisory Committee in attendance to give a report on their organization's activities and legislative goals.

Commander Barker announced that the American Legion is preparing for Legislative Day at the General Assembly and the State Convention in June. She also stated Legionnaire Bill Oxford is a candidate for National Commander of the American Legion for 2019-2020. Additionally, the American Legion is preparing for their 100th Anniversary in 2019 with celebrations nationwide.

Adjutant Roberts reported the NC Disabled American Veterans organization is preparing for the 96th Annual Convention to be held in Greensboro, NC at the end of June. He announced the NCDVA Spring Conference was held last month in March with resolutions adopted to present to their National Convention with regard to the Veterans Administration to accept more presumptive conditions for the Camp Lejeune Water claims.

Commander Stafford announced a successful year with the VFW with a focus to help veterans instead of just programs. He stressed his emphasis is with North Carolina legislation and asked where they could concentrate in more areas such as full funding for the State Cemeteries, full funding for NCDMVA, oversight with construction of the new State Veterans Homes that are being planned for Wake and Guilford Counties and current legislation currently in committee in the NC General Assembly.

Commander Hicks of NC MOPH reported their state convention will be held in May and return to the next Commission meeting with more.

President Nance of the NC Vietnam Veterans of America stated there weren't any legislative events for the Commission but gave a report on his education efforts with Agent Orange throughout the State and increasing numbers of Vietnam Veterans coming forward. He also announced a 7-state convention will be held next year in March for Vietnam Veterans in Durham.

President Lee of NC MOAA reported on National MOAA's efforts to "Storm the Hill" in Washington, DC and contact all Legislators to support pay raises for active duty enlisted in the military and the offset of military retirement benefits for medically-retired members. Additionally, he mentioned his organization's efforts with Fourth Branch to affect changes in NC law and legislative affairs.

Chairman Braswell then asked Deputy Director Martin Falls to introduce members of the NCDVA Staff in attendance then called on Secretary Prosser to give a report of NC DVA.

Secretary Prosser began by announcing the position of Assistant Secretary of Military Affairs is still vacant, the Installation Coordinator position was recently re-posted. Ms. Kelly Jackson was hired from a temporary position to a full-time position as the Family Member Services Coordinator. Secretary Prosser stated that he has received inquiries from the Governor's Office regarding appointments of Commission members but said Secretary Hall has emphasized the current appointments are satisfactory with no need for immediate change until congressional districts are finalized. Also, Secretary Prosser announced the upcoming Legislative Day on June 6th and NCDVA's agenda for adoption of fully funding the State Veterans cemeteries, complete restoration of room & board allowances for State scholarships and fully fund the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. Secretary Prosser then briefed on the work being done to acquire two new State Veterans homes.

Secretary Prosser gave an update on good working relationships with the County Veterans Service Officers and NCDVA in light of their recent conference held last month and their attendance at the NCDVA State Conference held last October and again this upcoming October.

Secretary Prosser reported that a recent announcement that the Military Order of the Purple Heart organization will no longer employ Veterans Service Officers to assist Veterans in filing claims effective June 1st. They emphasize they will still continue to support Veterans but cannot support VSOs due to funding. Also, he discussed the recent nomination for appointment of Secretary of the Veterans Administration and the temporary Secretary from North Carolina.

With the recent utilization of software for the State Scholarship program, Secretary Prosser presented to the Commission a request for a motion to amend the current rules for submission of applications to the State Scholarship program from paper submissions to full electronic submissions. A motion was made by Commissioner Townsend and seconded by Commissioner Woodard. After a short discussion, a vote was taken and approved by unanimous vote.

Chairman Braswell then called on Deputy Director Falls for a report on personnel. Deputy Director Falls provided information to the Commission on recent hires, current vacancies and upcoming moves. Also, he gave a report on state-wide training held and scheduled for State and County VSOs leading to accreditation and acquisition of continuing education credits. A report was given on activities past and future throughout the four regions across the State that were held to educate, support and recognize Veterans.

Director Falls provided the Commission a report of NCDVA's work with DHHS, Duke EPIC and NC Department of Commerce on joint training and discussions to train and support VSOs and Veterans.

Director Falls asked the Commission to support NCDVA by attending high school graduation awards ceremonies in their districts to present scholarship awarded from the State.

Director Falls provided the Commission with information from the State Service Office in Winston Salem regarding claims processed and hearings held over the past quarter.

Director Falls recognized Angella Heilig, Crystal Anderson, Don Evans, Nicol Jones and Wayne Peedin for their hard work and long hours working with the State Scholarship Program.

After this report, Mr. Wayne Peedin asked Chairman Braswell and the Commission to call for a vote on the recommendations made by the Commission earlier in Closed Session. A motion was made by Vice-Chairman Smith and seconded by Commissioner Townsend to approve the Class II and Class III scholarship recommendations. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

Ms. Heilig brought to the attention of the Commission a recommendation to revoke a scholarship previously granted to a recipient who submitted false information on their application. A motion was made to revoke the scholarship by Commissioner Woodard then seconded by Commissioner Townsend. A vote was taken and approved by unanimous vote.

Also, Ms. Heilig requested a vote by the Commission to either revoke or suspend a scholarship that was awarded in 2016 to a recipient who has since received a GPA of less than 2.0 in two consecutive semesters. Ms. Heilig stated that telephone calls and email correspondence has been unanswered. Chairman Braswell called for a vote to either revoke, suspend or delay until July this scholarship. A motion was made by Commissioner Shillito and seconded by Commissioner Townsend to suspend this scholarship then review in July with possible revocation. After discussions and clarification, a vote was taken and passed with seven affirmed and two opposed (Commissioner Woodard and Commissioner Hales).

Following discussions regarding email versus certified-receipt mailing, a recommendation was made to send notices to scholarship recipients via U.S. mail and certified-receipt.

Chairman Braswell called on Mr. Keith Whitfield to give a report on the State Cemetery Program. Mr. Whitfield referenced the handout provided and updated the Commission on current expansion projects and Mr. Woodard assisted by explaining more of the projects and the current funding of the cemetery program. Secretary Prosser further explained burial cost and receipt funding and the relationship with current budget allocations.

Mr. Woodard provided a report of the State Veterans Home Program.

- In Fayetteville, the current project to replace the HVAC system through R&R funding has been designed and the general contractor contract is under review. The project to replace/repair the emergency fire alarm panel has been completed; the sprinkler system being scoped for inspection.

- In Salisbury, the elevator replacement project is in the design phase; work on the renovation & activity room project is moving slowly, the generator addition project is ongoing and 90% complete

- At Black Mountain, the security project work is underway and about 95% complete.

- In Kinston, the emergency sprinkler system is approximately 98% complete; the roof repairs are awaiting a study on the leaks; and the geothermal study is still being studied. The security project is approximately 99% complete.

Mr. Woodard informed the Commission of a meeting he had with Pruitt Corporation to return management of the State Homes to a regional director that had previously served in this position. As a result, Pruitt agreed and has restructured their management for better oversight.

Mr. Woodard stated the North Carolina has been notified that we could receive a grant from the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, State Home Grant Program for two new State Veterans homes if we could meet certain goals. He pointed out that the current grant requests were \$38,890,800.00 for each of the two locations but asked the Commission to increase the amounts by 10% (\$1,361,178.00) for each location

due to the increase in construction costs. He pointed out that amount may not be needed but will prevent having to come back and request more after bidding goes out.

After further explanation, Chairman Braswell asked for motion to request an additional 10% to the VA funding grant. A motion was made by Commissioner Woodard and seconded by Commissioner Townsend. A vote was taken and unanimously approved.

Mr. Woodard informed the Commission on his intent to raise the per diem rate paid by the Veteran in the State Veterans Homes by \$5.00 due to cost increases. He further explained that private companies are raising per diem rates by 3.5-4.5% and this amount equates to approximately 4%. He also reminded the Commission, he was given permission to raise per diem rates and was only notifying the Commission of his intent to do so.

Regarding the search for property to locate the two new State Veterans Homes, Mr. Woodard provided aerial and topographical maps of sites being currently looked at with two sites located in Wake County off Edwards Mill Road in Raleigh belonging to the State and a site in Guilford County off State Road 66 owned by a private developer. Discussions regarding suitability, infrastructure and costs were held and Mr. Woodard stated he will continue to search.

Chairman Braswell asked for a motion to direct Mr. Woodard to search for suitable land for future construction of two State Veterans Homes. The motion was made by Commissioner Woodard and seconded by Commissioner Adamczyk. After a vote was taken the motion was approved.

After thanking the committee formed to develop a strategic plan as tasked by Senate Bill 62 of the NC General Assembly, Chairman Braswell asked Vice-Chairman Smith to provide a report on the committee's progress. Vice-Chairman Smith provided copies of the draft plan for review and went on to explain and highlight key items that will be addressed and the need to collect data for the required annual reports. He asked if there was any content that needed correction or modification, changes should be submitted for revisions of the draft by June 30th.

Chairman Braswell thanked the State VFW Headquarters for accommodating the Commission's meeting and being gracious hosts. Announcement was made that the next meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission would be on July 19th at the VA Medical Center in Salisbury, NC with further details to follow. Then, Chairman Braswell asked if there were any comments from Commissioners, Advisory Board members or visitors in attendance.

Mr. Boyette asked if there was any statute that prevented the location of one of the new State Veterans Homes to a county other than Wake or Guilford. Chairman Braswell explained the location was determined in the original grant request.

Mr. Durham suggested the Commission reach out to the local veterans organizations to assist in making scholarship presentations at the high school graduation awards ceremonies to gain visibility for the State Scholarship Program

Commissioner Hales asked Advisory Board members to take the Strategic Plan back and ensure their organization's information and leadership list is up-to-date.

With no further discussion or items of consideration, Chairman Braswell asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Woodard presented a motion that was seconded by Commissioner Shillito. After a vote was called, the Commission unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 12:20p.m.

Jimmy G. Braswell
Chairman

James E. Prosser
Assistant Secretary for Veterans Affairs