

West Suburban Veterans District – February 11, 2021

Location: Remote Zoom Meeting

Present: Kate Fitzpatrick, Leon Gaumont, and Meghan Jop

Also present: Nancy Blanchard, Chris Coleman, Katie King, Timothy McDonald, and Sally Rose

Call to order: Meeting called to order at 1:10 pm.

Business:

1. Citizen Speak

None

2. Minutes

The Board voted (3-0-0) to approve the minutes of the December 3, 2020 meeting.

3. Outreach Events

Nancy has been receiving many calls regarding scheduling a Covid-19 vaccine. If a veteran is enrolled in the VA Healthcare System S/He should receive a letter or a phone call when they are eligible to come in for a vaccine. Veterans, age 50 and over, can call 857-203-3919 to schedule an appointment at the West Roxbury VA.

Free tax return preparation for Veterans-the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) Programs offer free tax help for taxpayers who qualify -- and they want to be sure that eligible local veterans also benefit from this service. The IRS sponsors these programs through certified volunteers on their website that allow Veterans with income under \$57,000, or disabled veterans, to file their tax returns for free. This program runs from February 12 – April 15, 2021.

Because the 3.5 day VSO conference that usually occurs in Leominster, MA in October didn't happen Nancy has been watching mini-training sessions over zoom throughout the year. She has found these to be informative.

Nancy reminded those present that the Coats for Vets program is ongoing with the Needham Police Department. If a Veteran, you know needs a winter coat please contact Nancy or the Needham PD.

Nancy participated in a Welcome Home Ceremony that took place outside the home of a Wellesley Navy Seal. Fire Engine #2 drove by along with other vehicles. Nancy said the family was very appreciative and that it was nice to see that, despite the limitations of social distancing, the community was able to come together to pay tribute to the service of this returning Navy Seal.

Nancy has been having hour-long coffee sessions at the COA where she discusses issues of importance to veterans and their families. She has had two coffee meetings and more are planned

for one Wednesday a month. Aicha Kelly, the Needham COA Director, has been running these activities.

4. Director's Update

Nancy provided updates regarding the January recertification of CH 115 recipients. Currently, the District has 5 CH 115 recipients: 2 in Wellesley and 3 in Needham. One applicant is pending in Weston. Nancy is processing a burial allowance for a widow of a Wellesley veteran who recently passed. Another Wellesley veteran has been approved for a 100% biannual annuity payment.

Nancy recommended that graves officers should order flags for Memorial Day. She has received an invoice from the Weston DPW for graves flags. She will ask Richard Turner in Wayland and Kristin Scoble in Needham to place flag orders.

Nancy is in contact with Regis College and their Operation Moneywise program that helps Veteran students with funds they may need. She has been talking to Wellesley Media and filmed a brief segment showing the services that the District can provide to Veterans and their families. Nancy wants to reach out to Needham, Wayland, and Weston's media programs to film similar informative segments.

Maura Renzella and the students in the High School Key Club created care packages- for military residents of Wayland, Wellesley, and WSVD director, Ms. Kalpee. All of these individuals are currently deployed overseas.

Meghan said that a letter requesting that Westwood be added to the District will soon be filed with Cheryl Poppe, the Commonwealth's Secretary for the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS), at the State. Chris needs to supply some additional information before the letter can be finalized. Depending on whether or not Westwood gets approval will determine the operating amount each town will be expected to contribute for FY22. The Board discussed and approved (3-0-0) the FY22 Budget, which included a with and without Westwood Operating Budget breakdown. Because mailings will be made to inform Westwood Veterans of the change to how the town provides services to them, Meghan suggested that the postage line be increased. Funds can be rearranged within line items, and the consensus was that the existing budget is sufficient to absorb any additional costs associated with adding Westwood. Nancy said that the Town Clerks have all sent her updated lists of Veterans.

Kate said she would be interested in learning the number of Veterans within MA by gender and race. Nancy said she could provide her with that information.

5. Old/New Business

Meghan suggested the Board schedule the next meeting for Thursday, May 13th at 1:30 p.m.

The Zoom meeting was adjourned at 1:40 p.m.