



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
**VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
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**Meeting Minutes**

<b>Meeting attended by</b>	Fred Scheffler, Richard Marcelynas and Owen McCurty
<b>Date</b>	March 19, 2015
<b>Time</b>	10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
<b>Location</b>	Eagle's Nest – 1195 NW Fairgrounds Road, Bremerton, WA
<b>Call to Order</b>	Meeting called to order by Fred Scheffler Invocation by Owen McCurty Pledge of Allegiance by Richard Marcelynas
<b>Welcome &amp; Introductions:</b>	<p>Fred Scheffler made the welcome and introductions of VAAC Members present at the Town Hall Meeting</p> <p>Gary Condra – WDVA Deputy Director gave an agency update. 1) Last February the agency hired a new superintendent for Washington Veterans Home – Ron Bergstrom, 2) WDVA received the Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Award from the US Department of Veterans Affairs in the innovative state programs with the work with Military Transition Council, 3) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Veterans Supportive Campus. There is 50 vet corps members embedded in different universities and colleges in our state. 4) Agency Budget - a Client Management System is part of the budget submission as well as capital projects funding: study for second state veterans cemetery, replacement/renovation of Soldiers Home in Orting, 5) Walla Walla Veterans Home – ground breaking scheduled for July 2015 and should open in 2016.</p>
<b>Presentations</b>	<p><b>Edward Wolfe - Kitsap County Commissioner</b></p> <p>Welcomed attendees and thanks the VAAC for doing one of their Town Hall meetings in Kitsap County. There are several military/veterans events in Kitsap County this year: 1) Military Appreciation Day – March 28, 2015 at Kitsap County Fairgrounds, 2) Stand Down For Veterans – April 4, 2015 at President's Hall located at 1250 NW Fairgrounds Rd, Bremerton,</p> <p>3) Veterans State Department Opportunity Event – April 10, 2015 at Worksource Bremerton, 4) The Unforgotten Run to Tahoma VI Celebration of Life Ceremony – May 23, 2015 which will start at Kitsap County Admin Building in Port Orchard. Commissioner Wolfe mentioned the Kitsap County Veterans Assistance Fund – this fund is dedicated in assisting veterans and families in Kitsap County. For 2015 \$295,000.00 is set aside to this fund. There is a 15% increase in veterans and/or their families applying for assistance from 2013 to 2014. \$212,707.00 in assistance provided in 2014</p>

**Katie Stewart & Jodie Stewart – Behavioral Health**

Both are WDVA contracted behavioral health counselors. WDVA maintains one of a kind state funded outreach/counseling program designated to provide confidential counseling services to veterans and/or their family members with war –era and PTSD related issued. Both also provide counseling for veterans that have gone thru the Veterans Court in Kitsap County. There is an increase of veterans from Vietnam era veterans seeking behavioral health counseling.

**Heidi Audette – Legislative Update**

Heidi gave a legislative updates. Legislatures are in session until April 26, 2015. Here are some veterans bills:

ESHB 1424 – Concerning Suicide Prevention - Delays the requirement that certain health professions complete one-time training in suicide assessment, treatment, and management. Requires trainings in suicide assessments, treatment, and management to meet minimum standards adopted by the Department of Health. Clarifies that a disciplining authority may not grant a blanket exemption from the training requirements to broad categories or specialties within a profession based on training and experience

HB 2040 – Initiates a campaign to increase veteran employment. Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to maintain a database of campaign participants

SB 5127 - Providing that veterans with total disability ratings and their surviving spouses and domestic partners are eligible to qualify for a property tax exemption without meeting certain income requirements

SB 5171 - Concerning the definition of veteran for the purposes of the county veterans' assistance fund. This bill Modifies the definitions of "veteran" and "family" for the purposes of the Veterans' Assistance Fund

HB 5633 - Creates a coordinator for the national Helmets to Hardhats program in the Department of Veterans Affairs

SB 5958 – Changes the membership of the Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee and designates liaisons from the Committee for each of the state veterans' homes

**Andres Talmadge and Lynda Reese – WDVA Building 9**

Building 9 is a Veterans Transitional Housing Program located on the grounds of Washington Veterans Home in Retsil. Building 9 is a unique 60 bed residential program for homeless veterans with a focus on breaking the cycle of homelessness. Veterans are surrounded with supportive staff and wrap around services such as: case management, on-site chemical dependency services, on-site mental health counselling, job center and transportation that help the veteran complete the program and eventually a successful return to the community. Most veterans in this program are referred by the Federal

VA Medical Center Homeless Liaison Officer.

There is also a Service Center that assists veterans and their families with filing state and federal benefits they might be entitled to. Between 2013-2014 the estimated claims income generated was approximately \$7,127.935.00 – money which is reinvested back in the local economy. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) gave funding to be able to administer a program called SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) – with this program Bldg. 9 is able to increase access to disability income benefit program administered by Social Security Administration.

Bldg. 9 also has a bike shop that produces refurbished bikes for veterans thru VetBike.org

Along with the SOAR partnership with SAMSHA, a grand program called CABHI-BRIDGES (Cooperative Agreement to Benefit Homeless Individuals Bringing Recovery Into Diverse Groups thru Engagement and Support). This jointly funded program will enhance and develop infrastructure of States and their treatment service systems to provide accessible, effective evidence based treatment services, permanent support housing, peer to peer support and other critical services to veterans who experience chronic homelessness or at risk of homelessness with substance abuse and mental health issues.

#### **Michelle Hodges – Kitsap County Veterans Board**

Kitsap County is dedicated to providing information and assistance to veterans, active members of military and their families that lives in the community. The county provides four direct services: temporary emergency assistance (rent, food, mortgage, utilities, etc.), informational e-mails, co-produces spring and fall stand downs, on Saturday of Memorial Day Weekend – co-host The Unforgotten Run to Tahoma where the remains of deceased veterans are escorted to Tahoma National Cemetery. Kitsap County Department of Personnel and Human Services administers the Veterans Assistance Fund for the county. For 2014 the county received 555 application for assistance and 525 was accepted and given assistance and 30 application was denied and referred to other service provider in the community.

#### **John Beckham – VA Puget Sound Health Care System**

Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 known as the Choice Program and Health Care Collaboration. On 8/7/14, President Obama signed into law the above act for the Department of Veterans Affairs to continue to provide timely, high-quality health care to veterans. Section 101 of the act, requires VA to establish a temporary (Choice Program) to improve veterans access to health care by allowing eligible veterans to elect to use Non-VA health care provider for up to 3 years, based either on the distance a veteran lives from a VA facility or if they are experiencing wait times beyond the 30 day standard. This is referred to as the Choice Program. Veteran who meet certain eligibility requirements will be able to elect to receive care from eligible non-VA providers through this program. TRIWEST is contracted to administer this program. To know more about this simply log on to:

<http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/>

	<p><b>Jerry Peters – Bremerton Community Based Outpatient Clinic</b>  The clinic offers the following to veterans enrolled at this CBOC: primary care, mental health services, nurse services, social work services, laboratory services and routine prescriptions are processed through the mail. Current location of the CBOC, the lease will expire in 18 months and new location has been determined – the layout of the new clinic will be similar to the CBOC in Mount Vernon. After hours care is being administered by Harrison Hospital (veteran has to be enrolled at the Bremerton CBOC). The CBOC is currently recruiting for primary care provider.</p>
<p><b>Issues Discussed</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. New Location of CBOC – community opinion was not solicited.  Response – The US General Service Administration administered leasing of offices for the government.</li>   <li>2. Choice Card – confusion on the eligibility usage of the card.  Response – a page material was provided (quick facts about veterans' choice card). Before a veteran could use the card all guidelines that is provided on the choice act facts have to be met. Since date of inception, Puget Sound VA has not declined any referrals.</li>   <li>3. Flag at the CBOC – DAV had donated a flag to be flown/displayed at the CBOC unfortunately CBOC staff was not able to keep up with it.  Response – Jerry assured that a flag will flown/displayed.</li>   <li>4. Confidential Behavioral Health Counseling – is it being offered/available to active duty service members, veterans.  Response – Yes it is available. Patient has to sign consent to disclose.</li> </ol>