

Scituate Veterans Advisory Council, April 17, 2012

SCITUATE VETERANS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes – April 17, 2012

Location: Scituate Maritime Center

Members Present: Joseph Kelley (Chairman), Edward Covell (Vice Chairman), Michael Scott (Secretary), Robert McHugh (Treasurer), Vincent Fountaine, James Hunt, Richard Johnson, Karen Kelley, Jack Manning, John Miller, Dennis Badore

Members Absent: Thomas Edwards, Ben Summers, Richard Faust, Robert Young, VFW Commander

Guest Speakers: Coleman Nee (Secretary, Department of Veterans Services)
Keith Jermyn (Veterans Services Officer and District Director for
Hingham/Scituate District)

Meeting called to order at 7:05 pm by Chairman Kelley

Pledge of Allegiance recited

Chairman Kelley took-up the Meeting Agenda

Minutes

Mr. Manning made a motion to approve the 4/3/2012 meeting minutes as drafted

Motion seconded

Motion passed unanimously – minutes approved and accepted

Cemetery Flags

Chairman Kelley noted that many flags are in poor shape and need to be replaced

Chairman Kelley solicited assistance from the Boy Scouts and requested a May date

Mr. Johnson suggested that the Council pick a date and he will inform the Boy Scouts

Mr. Hunt stated that the cost of the flags needs to be determined and he noted that flags traditionally are replaced twice each year

Mr. Jermyn and Mr. Nee noted that the state will reimburse a town for 75% of the cost of the flags

General discussion of the flags at various cemeteries in town and the procedure to follow to swap out flags

General discussion of the economics/financing of flag purchasing

Mr. Jermyn discusses military markers at gravesites

Mr. Johnson suggests that Council set a schedule for flag replacement and then he will contact the scouts

General discussion that Groveland and Cudworth cemeteries are all set

Chairman Kelley sets date as May 5 for flag swap out – begin at 8 am Town Hall

Chairman Kelley mentions May 26 flag replacement ceremonies in Bourne

Mr. Fountaine mentions that according to the town archivist there is a military veteran's grave marker at the DPW that should be investigated

Business Cards

Chairman Kelley reports that the Town Administrator said "no" to town-sponsored business cards for Council members because it would set a bad precedent with other town boards

Veterans Outreach Event – April 25

Veterans Services Officer Update

Treasurer McHugh expresses disappointment that the Council was not included in the planning of the outreach event

Chairman Kelley states that the program was planned before the Council existed

Secretary Nee of the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services was recognized and by way of background he explains the scope and purpose of G.L. chapter 115 and the provision of veterans services to local military veterans

Secretary Nee explains that Scituate is part of the newly created Hingham/Scituate veterans district

Secretary Nee states that Keith Jermyn is the district director and Don Knapp is an employee of the district who reports to Mr. Jermyn; Mr. Jermyn and Mr. Knapp are both veterans services officers but Mr. Knapp reports to Mr. Jermyn

Secretary Nee states that our Council is an advisory board so either Mr. Jermyn or Mr. Knapp should be at all of our meetings

Secretary Nee explains that the veterans outreach event is aimed at veterans and dependents of veterans and he opines that the Council should be involved with this event

Director Jermyn discusses the process he uses for identifying veterans eligible for benefits; general discussion and review of handouts

Director Jermyn encourages the Council to raise its visibility in the town by getting on the town website

Mr. Hunt mentions DAV benefits and the issue of dual compensation for retirees

Further general discussion of 4/25 outreach event, including discussion of fundraising through VFW and American Legion

Secretary Scott inquires about the organizational structure of the Hingham/Scituate veterans services district

Director Jermyn explains that he is a 40 hrs/wk employee who is paid by Hingham and Scituate and that Scituate employs a clerk for 10 hrs/wk (Christine Chessia) and a veterans services officer for 20 hrs/wk (Don Knapp)

Director Jermyn suggests that veterans services advocates exhaust state, local, and non-profit resources before turning to private fundraising efforts

Chairman Kelley notes that Council meetings will be conducted on the third Tuesday of every month and he directs Director Jermyn to instruct Mr. Knapp to get the Council on the town website and to help the Council raise its visibility in the town

Director Jermyn says that the Council's April 3 meeting minutes need to be publicly posted and added to the town's website

Secretary Nee stresses that local boards of selectmen do not control veterans services or make eligibility determinations, the state Department of Veterans Services (through its local districts) does

Director Jermyn notes that his annual budget is in the neighborhood of \$300,000 and presently there are 28 people in Hingham and 8 people in Scituate receiving chapter 115 veterans benefits

Secretary Nee notes that the state reimburses the town for 75% of benefits paid and the town must find the money to pay benefits to eligible veterans

General discussion of the process for applying for benefits and appeal process for a veteran denied benefits; town must pay benefits if state/district says veteran is eligible

General discussion of payment of benefits if outside of budget (deficit spending) and need for additional appropriations at special town meeting

Mr. Hunt expresses frustration that town has denied benefits in the past and states that he has been told that there will be no special town meeting for veterans benefits

Mr. Hunt notes that at the recent town meeting the budget for veterans services was only \$70,000, which is not enough in his opinion

Chairman Kelley discusses Military Friends and its focus on Guardsmen and Reservists and the need for space at Heritage Days

Memorial Day Speaker

Chairman Kelley announces that the Memorial Day Speaker will be General Tom Sellers from the National

Guard and he solicited suggested speaking points from the Council

Mr. Fountaine suggested that General Sellers discuss the citizen soldier and the unique challenges faced by guardsmen and reservists

Mr. Badore took exception to separating a citizen soldier from a regular soldier, noting that "we were all brothers"

Director Jermyn suggests that Memorial Day ceremony include reading the names of all veterans who died in town since the previous Memorial Day

Secretary Nee notes that veterans can obtain a designation on their drivers license for free

Treasurer McHugh mentions that Scituate has several veterans events and procedures in place (such as events run by his American Legion post) that the veterans services officer should consider and/or adopt
Vice Chairman Covell discusses relieving Mr. Badore of the solo duty to organize the Memorial Day events as designated by Director Jermyn

Director Jermyn suggests that the Council pick a chairman on a rotating basis to organize Memorial Day and Veterans Day events

Public Comment

Secretary Nee encourages the Council and acknowledges that growing pains come with pulling a group together to serve veterans first

Director Jermyn says that things will change in Scituate now that "the cat is out of the bag" concerning veterans services and benefits; he predicts that that old way of doing things is over

Mr. Hunt says he hopes so because in the past it seemed to him as though the Town Administrator was the veterans services officer

Next meeting date set for May 15, 2012, at 7 pm, at Maritime Center

Motion to adjourn meeting made and seconded; vote unanimous and meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Scott, Secretary