

## NH STATE VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

**Meeting Date: 1 December 2020**

**Location: Virtual ZOOM**

### **OFFICERS and VOTING MEMBERS in attendance ( ✓ ):**

Paul Lloyd - Chair  
 Diane Domenicis - Vice Chair  
 Denise DeBlois - Secretary  
 Joseph DiChiaro, Jr. - Chaplain  
 Kelly Dobens - Treasurer  
 David Kenney - Chair Emeritus

#### **Air Force Association**

✓ Kevin Grady (prim)                      Gavin MacAloon

#### **Air Force Sergeants Association**

Bob Heichlinger (prim)                      Ray Hayes (alt)

#### **American Legion**

✓ Mike Lopez (prim)                      ✓ Bill Roy (alt)

#### **AUSA Col. Cross Chapter**

✓ Greg d'Arbonne (prim)                      Ed Harrington (alt)

#### **Catholic War Veterans**

✓ Denise DeBlois (prim)                      ✓ Robert Guldner (alt)

#### **Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association**

✓ Ray Schwendeman (prim)                      Larry Ward (alt)

#### **Disabled American Veterans**

✓ Andrew Patterson (prim)                      ✓ Robert Guldner (alt)

#### **Korean War Veterans**

✓ Mike Lopez (prim)                      Conrad Perreault (alt)

**Marine Corps League**

Shawn Carboni (prim)      Mark Lindsley (alt)      ✓ Chris Pierce (alt)

**Military Officers Association (MOAA)**

✓ Peter Burdett (prim)      ✓ Joseph DiChiaro Jr. (alt)      Warren Coulter (alt)

**Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)**

Patty Fowler (prim)      Tony Fowler (alt)

**National Guard Association of NH**

✓ Peter Duffy (prim)      Roy Hunter (alt)      Mike Horne (alt)

**NH Army Retiree Council**

✓ Frank Musmanno (prim)      ✓ Mike Rice (alt)

**NH National Guard Enlisted Association**

✓ Mike Lestage (prim)      ✓ Mike Rice (alt)      Jack Howley (alt)

**NH Veterans Association**

✓ Kelly Dobens (prim)      Mike Young (alt)      Doug Crooker( alt)

**Reserve Officers Association of NH**

✓ David Kenney (prim)      Mike Horne (alt)      BG John Pappas (alt)

**Rolling Thunder.**

✓ Bruce Garry (prim)      Keith Hurrell (alt)      ✓ Diane Domenicus (alt)

**Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)**

✓ Paul Lloyd (prim)      ✓ Darwin Beeman (alt)      Russ Norris (alt)

**Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA-41)**

✓ Ray Goulet (prim)      Alan Grant (alt)      Patti Fowler (alt)

**Legislative Members (Voting):**

✓ Al Baldasaro  
 ✓ Regina Birdsell  
 Bob Guida  
 Patricia Klee

**LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS: (non-voting):**

**Governor's Office** - Jane Graham  
**Senator Maggie Hassan** - Justin Troiano

**Senator Jeanne Shaheen** - Chris Scott  
**Congressman Chris Pappas** - Patrick Carroll  
**Congresswoman Annie Kuster** - Tom Giancola

**COMMITTEE ADVISORS/AGENCIES:**

Kevin Forrest, Director, VAMC Manchester, NH  
Dr. Brett Rusch, Director, VAMC White River Junction, VT  
BG David J. Mikolaities - Adjutant General NHNG  
Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General- NHNG  
Shawn Buck, NH State Veterans Cemetery  
Margaret LaBrecque, NH Veterans Home  
Amy Cook, DHHS  
John Reed, Martin's Point  
Barry Conway, Sage Emeritus  
Jorge Dreusicke, American Legion

**GUESTS:** Dave Gray

**Note:** The minutes are from the Secretary's written notes only. There were technical difficulties with the Zoom Cloud recording. Please email the Secretary at [dmdeblois65@gmail.com](mailto:dmdeblois65@gmail.com) if you have anything to add to your December 2020 reports. Written reports would be very helpful and much appreciated. Thank you.

**OPEN MEETING/CALL TO ORDER:** Paul Loyd, Chairman, convened meeting at 1700.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Chairman

**Invocation:** Joseph DiChiaro, Jr.

**Moment of Silence:** For all service members who have passed since our last meeting.

**Welcome - Remarks of the Chair:** Paul welcomed everyone.

**Introduction of New Members/Guests:** No new attendees.  
One guest was introduced - Dave Gray from the NH Chapter of Fallen Outdoors.

**Secretary's Report:** Meeting had a quorum. A motion to accept the minutes of November 10, 2020 was made by Al Baldasaro, 2nd by Ray Goulet. Unanimous. Motion carries.

**Treasurer's Report:** Kelly reported a balance of \$802.67. We did not spend any money since last month.

**Comments from Chair Emeritus:** Dave Kenney announced that the Cemetery Association launched a biannual newsletter this week. They have a new interactive calendar. Go to VHLC.org.

**Guest Speakers:** Dave Gray

He is the Chapter President and opened the NH Chapter of the Fallen Outdoors.

It is a nationwide non profit 501c3. The Fallen Outdoors program helps to get veterans and active duty members outdoors. It helps to prevent a high side rate. It is all volunteer. In 2019, there were 55 veterans in the outdoors. In 2020, there were nearly 70 veterans in the outdoors.

The Fallen Outdoors has a website and Facebook page. The program is primarily for hunting and fishing. They accept donations to cover cost of guide services, boats, etc. The requirement to go on trips is to be honorably discharged or serving on active duty. It is 100 percent no drugs and no alcohol. All trips need to be staffed. The staff goes on the trips. They are treading water now with COVID.

Contact information for David Gray: Telephone 603-973-4661  
Website: NH.Lead@the [fallenoutdoors.com](http://fallenoutdoors.com)

Warren Perry commented that trips are free. Get the word out. He thanked David Gray for coming.

Al Baldasaro added that there is information available on how to get free licenses.

Paul Lloyd told David Gray to let him know if he has anything to post.

## **SUPPORTING AGENCY REPORTS:**

**Manchester VA Update:** Kevin Forrest

He said that he hoped everyone had a happy and safe Thanksgiving.

The Manchester VA is bracing for the post Thanksgiving spike in COVID cases. The positivity rate is about 5.5 percent. The VA is looking at 10 percent. The VA has an intense screening program. They are continuing with face to face appointments. The post 5 day Thanksgiving spike would be in the next few days. A hospital acquired outbreak would be hard to recover from.

Appointments are required for all care except Urgent Care. Clinics call patients before appointments. Hospital type masks are worn in the VA. Screening is 100 percent at the entrance. There is a no visitor policy except in extreme situations. Veterans need to go

to their appointment and then exit the VA. Do not visit other areas. The patient advocate is completely virtual via VA Video Connect.

Challenges are with labs and x-ray. These are by appointment. Use mail order for pharmacy. Staffing is ok. Fifty percent of appointments are done face to face. The VA has been supporting other folks. Staff has been helping Peggy at the NH Veterans Home. Bed availability is concerning in the VISN. Measures are in place to stay open.

Ray Schwendeman asked how a veteran could transfer to Somersworth. Kevin responded that a transfer can be done virtually by sending an email.

Kevin Grady asked about the COVID vaccine. Is the VA going to have its own allocation? Kevin responded that this is determined by Central Office.

Bill Roy asked how the expansion is going. Kevin responded late spring. They need to do more blasting. The ribbon cutting needs to be in a non COVID environment.

Al Baldasaro asked if we can do a Zoom meeting with the new legislators in the second week of January.

Dave Kenney asked what is the next phase for the opposite side of the building. Kevin said they are waiting for a final design. There are more issues with the rock ledge on the Mountain side. The concern is that is where the handicap entrance will be.

Kevin added that the VA has a new endocrinologist and a urologist. They are recruiting for more.

### **White River Junction VA Update:** Dr. Brett Rusch

He said he hoped everyone had a joyful Thanksgiving. This is a challenging time for folks and veterans. The resources for veterans are in crisis. We need to look for signs of crisis. He said to put the Veterans Crisis Line telephone number on your smartphone. The number is 1-800-273-8255.

He discussed the construction projects at White River Junction. It is underground. There is new infrastructure. The pipes that came out to the road were about 100 years old. They are putting in a second chiller above the OR to provide longevity. The OR's are out of service right now. Emergency surgeries need to go to Dartmouth-Hitchcock or West Roxbury.

They are moving forward with inpatient renovation. There are logistical challenges. It is a 2-3 year project. They are rebuilding the entire hospital

Visitation restrictions and standard visitation policy is the same as other area hospitals in Vermont - blind, deaf, severe cognitive impairment and end of life.

The hospital is safe. There is no COVID in the hospital or clinics. Getting care is safe. The hospital is staying open. Hang in there. Encourage other veterans to do the same. There are hopeful messages about vaccinations. We do have some trying weeks ahead. There is light at the end of the tunnel. This is not the time to let your guard down.

Andy Patterson mentioned concern about the Vermont/New Hampshire border. He asked if there are plans to open community care for those veterans. Dr. Rusch responded that people coming to medical appointments (from New Hampshire) are not subject to Vermont restrictions.

He encouraged folks to come to the VA.

**DMAVS Update:** Bill Gaudreau

There are some changes in policies for DEERS ID cards in Concord, Pease and Littleton. It is by appointment. Hours of operation are alternating weeks.

Dependent ID cards are extended to January.

The NH Office of Veterans Services continues to do everything by phone. Contact Cynthia.

There is an uptick in VA appeals. There are 20 appeals and veterans are being contacted.

The Wreaths Across Boscawen at the NH State Veterans Cemetery is on December 5th at 10:30 am. There is no parking at the storage facility properties.

Al Baldasaro asked if Londonderry still does ID's. Dave Kenney responded that the office is closed. The person who did the job in Londonderry quit. The office is unmanned. Bill added that appointments are needed.

**NHVV Update:** Peggy LeBrecque

She reported on the COVID update. This is day 21 and there are now 46 active COVID cases; 7 have recovered; and 15 have passed away. The positive cases are segregated. The first case appeared on November 10th.

There are 40 staff members with active COVID; 24 have recovered; 13 part-timers have stepped away. The Manchester VA sent 5 staff members to help on a 14 day deployment. VISN 1 also sent 5 staff members for 14 days. The VA Infectious Disease Nurse will help with infection control.

Thank you to the State of New Hampshire. The state sent rapid test cards for staff and provided PPE from the state warehouse.

Peggy is looking for thoughts and prayers.

Al Baldasaro asked how many died. Peggy responded that a total of 15 passed away - 13 at NHVH and 2 at Lakes Region Hospital.

Al Baldasaro asked why most did not go to the hospital. Peggy responded that the NHVH follows the wishes of the veteran. Their Durable Power of Attorney specifies comfort care or hospital care. Oxygen is provided with comfort care but not intubation or ICU in the hospital.

### **OLD BUSINESS:**

**Letters of Appointment:** Paul Lloyd requested that all organizations submit Letters of Appointment for this fiscal year. Some are still needed.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

None.

**LEGISLATIVE BRIEFINGS:** Kevin Grady - Legislative Chair

LSR's - low on action.  
Five are being tracked.

Regina Birdsell asked about the Gold Star Family bill. Kevin responded that they are trying to resurrect some bills. They need to prioritize. There is a meeting Thursday on legislation. This is Representative Graham's bill.

Warren Perry commented that Rep. Graham is sponsoring legislation to waive the fee for the Gold Star families.

### **LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS:**

**Chris Scott (Senator Shaheen):**

The Senator is working on the next stimulus package.

They are carefully considering withdrawing troops from Afghanistan/Iraq.

Nov 20th: In response to the NHVH, Senator Shaheen sent an urgent medical staffing request to FEMA to contain the outbreak.

Nov 20th: Senators Shaheen and Hassan welcomed VA Secretary Wilke at the Manchester Airport for the PPE order.

Today (Dec 1st): Senator Shaheen supported a new proposal to help students and providers; support for small business; and housing assistance.

**Jane Graham (Governor's Office):**

Hope all are doing well.

Nov 17th: The Governor wrote to the President for extension of Title 32 for the Guard.

Nov 17th: The Governor sent a letter to FEMA for the NHVH.

Nov 20th: The Governor met the flight with the PPE (gloves) for the VA and the State of NH.

**Justin Troiano (Senator Hassan):**

He discussed legislative activity.

Nov 19th: Sen. Hassan sponsored bipartisan legislation to improve the Caregiver program; transparency to strengthen communication; maintain care for 150 days.

Nov 23rd: Sen. Hassan sponsored a bipartisan bill on the K2 Veterans Advocacy Act of 2020 (K2 toxic exposure and cancer).

Nov. 17th: In state for Global War on Terrorism Memorial.

Nov 20th: Sen. Hassan welcomed the shipment of PPE.

Al Balsasaro asked a question on the bills introduced. Justin responded that they will need to be re-introduced.

**Tom Giancola (Rep. Annie Kuster):**

He reiterated the efforts of the NHVH.

Rep. Kuster sent a letter to FEMA.

Tom mentioned that it was a quiet month on legislation.

There is a new process for NPRC requests.

**Patrick Carroll (Rep. Chris Pappas):**

Rep. Pappas sent a letter to FEMA as well.

He is addressing the backlog of record requests at the NPRC.

Rep. Pappas spoke at the NHVSC on Veteran's Day.

There is a hearing in DC on VHA eligibility issues.

**Good of the Order:**

Paul Lloyd mentioned that the Mid-Winter Conferences for all VSO's are cancelled.

Andy Patterson asked if something can be done locally with the Congressional team.

**Calendar of Events:**

1st Wednesday- Monthly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Veterans Park, Manchester, NH.

4th Tuesday - Monthly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Langdon Park, Portsmouth, NH.

Every Thursday - Weekly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Hesky Park, Meredith, NH.

**Next meeting date:** 05 January 2021

**Adjourn Meeting:** 1838

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise M DeBlois  
Secretary

