

West Suburban Veterans District – October 2, 2014

Location: Natick Community/Senior Center

Present: Chris Coleman, Kate Fitzpatrick, Hans Larsen, John Senchyshyn

Also present: Matt Ching, Dale L. Kurtz, Sally Rose, and Stanley Spear

Call to order: Meeting called to order at 1:20 pm.

Business:

1. Citizen Speak

None

2. Minutes

The Board voted (3-0) to approve the minutes of the June 5, 2014 meeting.

3. Director's Update

Mr. Larsen introduced Ms. Rose who has replaced Ms. Thompson as the administrative assistant for the WSVD District. Mr. Larsen reviewed the FY15 budget status and asked Mr. Senchyshyn when he thought Wayland would pay their remaining Chapter 115 balance. Mr. Senchyshyn said he would put it on the Town Meeting warrant. Mr. Senchyshyn asked to be notified if additional veterans are added that will impact Wayland's budget. Finance agreed to contact them. A question was raised about why the Medicare Tax and OPEB budget line items were both 100% expended. Ms. Rose explained that those expenditures are accounted for at the beginning of each fiscal year. WSVD's OPEB assets are being tracked separately.

Mr. Coleman requested that Needham be billed for Chapter 115 benefits prior to the end of the year. Mr. Larson said invoices could be emailed out in November.

Mr. Ching reviewed a recent slide show and video regarding pension requirements and aid in attendance that had been shown in Needham and Wayland. Handouts concerning pension qualifications had also been distributed at the sessions. He commented that attorneys and financial planners are not allowed to charge a fee for filing a claim on behalf of a veteran. Mr. Ching attended an event at Avery Crossing and found out that they charge, while he and Stan don't, for providing the same service. People will file a claim even though their income is too high thereby making them ineligible. The veterans then become frustrated and contact their senators and representatives who contact Stan and Matt. Matt said those that file claims knowing an individual's income is too high are doing so regardless of the situation. These professionals can also be referred to as pension poachers, as their principal interest is their fees.

500 postcards were sent out to Wayland veterans to advertise a program on Veterans' Benefits. 70 people attended this event. In Needham 1,200 postcards were mailed out and 150 people attended a presentation. Mr. Spear will share slides on the Valor Act with Mr. Senchyshyn. The Valor Act, a tax work-off program for veterans, will come before Wayland's Town Meeting in April. In contrast with the senior work-off program, the Veterans' program has no age or income restrictions. A veteran can participate in both a Senior program and the Valor Act.

Mr. Ching reported on “A day in the life of a VSO”. The phone system is being replaced in Wellesley. With the new phones, reports will be available showing where phone calls are originating and where they are going. This will make tracking phone calls easier. Mr. Ching also spoke about the program that brings WW II veterans to Washington, DC for a day to honor their service to our country. He recently was an escort to a veteran and he shared how moving it was to have a police escort and honor guards, and being met at National Airport by Boy Scouts. They visited the war memorials in our nation’s capital. The program is run about 8 times each year. They are talking about allowing Korean War Veterans to participate.

Mr. Ching was congratulated on his help obtaining 100% disability status for a veteran with PTSD. He said this veteran had not been treated very well and he was happy his work had resulted in this new determination.

For his Eagle Project a Needham Boy Scout is building portable, handicap accessible planters at the Chelsea Soldiers Home. These planters can be rolled in and out. Many people at the home like to garden and will enjoy the accessible planters.

4. District Budget

Mr. Spear talked about increasing Mr. Ching’s phone reimbursement, which is currently \$50/month. Mr. Larsen committed to look into this matter, in order to avoid Mr. Ching bearing additional charges for business use of his personal cell phone. For FY16 we are tentatively planning a 3% budget increase. Sally will prepare a proposed budget reflecting this change. The travel budget will be increased. The training budget will be affected by the Valor Act, as VSOs must be certified and trained.

5. Other

The annual Veterans Agent Training on October 27-30, 2014 is in Leominster again this year. Mr. Spear will attend and stay at the Doubletree Hilton Hotel and Mr. Ching will commute daily. Ms. Rose will go for the day on October 28th when the focus will be on MGL Ch. 115.

Mr. Kurtz said that an individual named Joe is evidence of the success of the “Veterans’ Court” system and related training. On November 12th Joe will graduate, having been in the program for 18 months.

Mr. Spear said that Mr. Ching is working on his Master’s degree in Human Services at UMass Boston and is currently taking evening courses on Monday and Wednesday evenings.

6. Old/New Business

Mr. Spear said that at the June 5th quarterly meeting Mr. Senchyshyn had requested occasional evening hours in Wayland be available for veterans who work or are otherwise unable to make daytime hours. Mr. Spear said that due to his back surgery and Mr. Ching’s covering the three satellite offices, evening hours had not yet been implemented. Both Wayland and Weston are

interested in implementing occasional evening hours. It was decided that a trial pilot program would be started in Wayland, perhaps on one Monday each month.

The Board agreed the next meeting will be on Thursday, January 8th, 2015 at 4:00 p.m. in the Great Hall at Wellesley Town Hall.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 pm.