



STATE OF WASHINGTON

## VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

PO BOX 41150 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1150 • 360-725-2157

### VAAC PLANNING MEETING

#### MEETING MINUTES

- Attendees:
- Bob Wallace
  - Shellie Willis
  - Cat Nichols
  - Shawn Durnen
  - Jerry Cummins
  - Chuck Whitman
  - Heinz Haskins
  - Heidi Audette
  - Sue LaVoie

Date: February 19, 2025

Time: 2:00-3:00PM

Location: Virtual via Teams [Click here to join the meeting](#)

Minutes: Welcome & Introductions

Potential Collaboration with PNW Vets – PNW Vets is organizing an evening activity on April 22 in Island County and will invite members of the VAAC to attend. These typically go from 6-8pm. The goal is to network with a different segment of the Veteran population

#### Assign Home Liaisons

- Washington Soldiers Home (WSH)
  - Shawn Durnen
- Washington Veterans Home (WVH)
  - Bob Wallace
  - Heinz Haskins
- Spokane Veterans Home (SVH)
  - Cat Nichols
- Walla Walla Veterans Home (WWVH)
  - Jerry Cummins
- Review Guide for VAAC Liaisons to the State Veterans Home
  - Sue will send an email to the Administrators of the homes and their assistants ask that assigned VAAC members be invited to the monthly Resident Council Meetings.
  - Attend the meetings when you are available, but at least 3 times per year.

- Be prepared to share information or news from the VAAC with the residents.
- Ask residents if there is information they would like you to convey to the VAAC Chair or WDVA Director.
- Take notes and share your draft with the Homes Administrator and Sue LaVoie for distribution to VAAC members.
- Ensure notes do not include any personally identifiable information about residents.

#### Upcoming Town Halls (Locations and Leads)

- Island County – April 23, 2025
  - Shawn Durnen – Lead
  - Shawn is working on Community Visits and will get back to Heidi and Sue.
  - Location: Oak Harbor – American Legion, 690 SE Barrington Dr., Oak Harbor, WA
- Omak – July 23, 2025
  - Cat Nichols
  - Jerry Cummins
- Walla Walla – Oct. 22, 2025
  - Chuck Whitman
  - Jerry Cummins
- Commanders Call – date and location TBD
  - Suggested locations
    - North or Eastern Washington
    - Vancouver – potential to hear some best practices from Oregon DVA.
  - Format
    - Similar format as last year
    - Work with VAAC to get feedback on format ideas
  - Travel
    - Budget could affect travel, will have more information once the budget is passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor.

#### Subcommittee for Outstanding Service to Veterans

Will be closing nominations in September rather than October to allow more time for invitations to the Auburn Parade.

- Subcommittee Members
  - Chuck Whitman
  - Jerry Cummins
  - Bob Wallace

- Shawn Durnen
- [List of Individuals and Legislators](#) that have received the award in the past.
  - No requirement to award a representative.
  - Usually awarded to a House and Senate member. One Democrat and one Republican.
  - Subcommittee to request a list of representatives from VAAC members and reason they should receive the award prior to the nominations closing.

#### Agency Legislation on the Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee

Modifies the membership of the VAAC by allowing the Governor to appoint one member from a nationally recognized Native American tribe, and one member who is a current or former Washington National Guard member.

House Bill received a little conversation, and potentially will have additional amendments as follows:

- Allows for the appointment for a formerly incarcerated veteran and a veteran with lived experience.
- Concern from legislators that rather than incarcerated veterans – those that have received purple hearts, etc.
- VAAC Members responses
  - Shawn – Are we talking about individuals that are actively living these experiences or someone who has come out on the other end.
    - VAAC discussion, the preference would be individuals with lived experience who have something to offer and have come out successfully on the other end.
  - Cat – goal is to represent the Veteran population that we represent, flexibility is important. Is there a lot of the population that are currently in the lived experience or on the other end?
  - Shellie – All experiences matter we don't want the legislature to define who is better or more worthy of being appointed, keep flexibility.
- It was mentioned that 1 in 3 veterans has been involved in criminal activity – [Council on Criminal Justice](#)
- Heidi to share back to the representative thoughts and issues posed.

What changes to WDVA and its operations would you recommend to the Governor and Director

- (4) The committee shall have the following powers and duties:
  - (a) To serve in an advisory capacity to the governor and the director on matters pertaining to the department of veterans affairs;
  - (b) To acquaint themselves fully with the operations of the department and recommend such changes to the governor and the director as they deem advisable.

Did not get to this agenda item, please respond with any recommendations.

After Action Reviews (create a list of questions)

- What were some takeaways?
- What are the themes with the community partners?
- Any actions for WDVA?
- What can we share with our partners?

Briefly touched on this agenda item, Sue to set up After Action Review for the Kelso Town Hall.

Good of the Order

Jerry mentioned a local group called **Volunteer Love Serving Veterans**. He asked if we can present this group with a certificate or acknowledgement for what they do for Veterans.

- Heidi indicated that the next time David and/or Solomon are in the area would be a great opportunity to present something to the group.
- Heidi also indicated that Jerry could nominate them for the "Outstanding to Service Award"
  - Sue to send out link to the nomination to Jerry.

Motioned to adjourn @ 3:05PM