VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD
CITY OF LAS CRUCES
June 22, 2021, at 9:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Karen Woods, UMW of Southwest, Chair
Kyle Trout, Special Forces Association, Vice-Chari
John Poland, American Legion Post 10
Victor Eres, Marine Corps League
Rod Gajewski, MOPH
Christine Sautter, MOAA
Mike Cano, Member at Large 3
Hubert L. Gay, Vietnam Veterans
Sam Bothern, DAV Chapter 10

STAFF PRESENT: Eric Enriquez, Assistant City Manager
Larry Nichols, Director Community Development
Audrianna Sambrano, Administrative Assistant

OTHERS PRESENT: Dale Lawrence
Sam Robert Jones
Deborah O’Callaghan
Crystal Davis-Whited
Desiree Javery
Scott del Oso
Rick Pineda
Tony Alvarez
Lester Palmer
Arnold Diaz
Melanie Goodman

I. CALL TO ORDER (9:12 a.m.): Chair Woods called the meeting to order.

II. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

a. The minutes from May 25, 2021, are being reviewed.

III. OLD BUSINESS:

a. Iraq/Afghanistan memorial: Mr. Gajewski stated that as of now, there
is not a designated area for the monument however, it is fully paid
for.

Chair Woods asked if there was an idea of where the monument
should be placed, and Mr. Gajewski stated that they would like to
place it next to the helicopter on the left-hand side where the Korean
monument was before it was moved up.

Mr. Gajewski made a motion to make a recommendation to the City
of Las Cruces’ Parks & Recs department that Iraq/Afghanistan
Operation (inaudible) Freedom Gulf of War Veterans monument be
placed in the southwest corner near the helicopter in Veterans Park.

Board Member Gay seconded the motion.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

a. **Medals for the Display Case:** Chair Woods stated that Mr. Gajewski
presented her with some campaign ribbons from the Korean War that
he received from one of his members. That gave Chair Woods an idea
that instead of cluttering the new display case at Veterans Park, to
get a campaign ribbon from each one of the conflicts, wars, etc., and
place those in the case.

Mr. Cano stated that a lot of the medals in the old display case had
some very old and faded medals, and you could not tell what colors
they were.

Chair Woods stated that her thought on the new display case would
include all major conflicts such as World War I & II, Korean,
Iraq/Afghanistan, etc. By placing the major ones
on top, there will be leeway at the bottom for other items.

(inaudible) stated that there is not a ribbon for the Civil War.

Mr. Cano mentioned that you can get the medals from Medals on
America. Also, that the Purple Heart did not exist as a medal until
1934. Before that, George Washington gave a purple swatch of cloth
as a recognition of honor. Getting a medal or a campaign ribbon from
the Civil War

(inaudible) asked if they are not able to get a medal, can they get a
picture and laminate it to put it in the case to at least show
something.

Chair Woods stated that they will get the ribbons that they can for
now to get started on it. They can always rearrange what is in there.
Chair Woods also stated that she will write something up for Sonya
and Frank from Parks & Rec., on how the display case should be set up with approval.

Motioned by Hubert Gay
Seconded by Rod Gajewski

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

a. VA Clinic: Crystal Davis-Whited gave an update on William Beaumont. She stated that they will be doing an opening ceremony on July 1st. On July 11th, at 7:00 a.m., they are going to start switching the ER over. Everything before 7:00 a.m., will go to the old Beaumont and after 7:00 a.m., will go to the new Beaumont. They will continue to treat those people in the ER, they will not be moved. If you show up at 6:59 a.m., on that date, they will treat you in the old Beaumont. After that, people need to report to the new one.

As far as the VA moving over there, they are meeting with the army corps engineers. The VA and the contractors are working together and are still working on some of those plans. Ms. Davis-Whited also stated that the new Primary Care Provider for Team #5 in place, her name is Satia Mohamad, Nurse Practitioner.

b. Veterans Park Monthly Report: Mr. Hubert stated that the Korean War monument had the two medallions which were stolen but no one knows when. They have been replaced. (inaudible) got more of them. Someone also stole the two plants that Parks & Rec put there. Mr. Hubert also stated that someone also glued two ceramic pictures onto the benches behind the Korean War monument, but they have been removed. Someone also glued a silver cross next to their relative’s name on the wall, but they have been removed. Mr. Hubert is requesting for everyone to talk to their groups and ask them not to do that because it can mess up the park.

Arnold Diaz, Honor Flight of Southern New Mexico, stated that they had a request to use their fire truck to spray off the helicopter. He stated that he took it up to the Chain of Command and explained that they can use it as an actual training. They would not drive the fire truck onto the park, they would use a hose which will benefit them to get some training done. Right now, the decision is at the Chief’s level, so nothing is official. Mr. Enriquez stated that he will be checking with Fire Chief Smith.
Mr. Diaz stated that the Honor Flight of Southern New Mexico is a hub of 147. The network is finally opened up and they are able to do trips again. The board has decided not to do one this year but to hopefully do one next year halfway through the year so they can start doing some fundraising. They did have a successful car show at Allen Theaters which raised some money for them. They are always looking for Veterans and volunteers.

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS:

a. Melanie Goodman, Field Representative, Office of Senator, Ben Ray Lujan, gave an update on what the Senator has been up to. They are working on getting their office up and running at their location at the Bank of the West building downtown. Ms. Goodman stated that all of their congressional offices provide a service called Constituent Services and Case Work. They work one on one with individuals that need help with Federal Agencies. Senator Lujan came from the House of Representatives after 10 years. He built a reputation on being really good at case work. Even if they do not get the outcome they want, they are still going to do everything they can. As a result, they have a lot of cases already.

One area that the staff in the Washington area is addressing is the barriers to VA enrollment. One of the primary barriers they see often for Veterans is proving eligibility for VA benefits. The VA and the DOV work better together to make that happen and to ensure that military branches and the transmitting of the records to the VA give a presumptive eligibility to that Veteran on their discharge from service. Senator Lujan advocated very strongly for better for better outreach and vaccine access for Veterans earlier on when they were short on the vaccine.

Senator Lujan introduced legislation to get a congressional charter for Native American Veteran Organizations. Senator also voted in favor of Commander John Scott Hansen Veterans Mental Health Improvement Act, is groundbreaking legislation specific to Veterans mental health care. It addresses things like access to workforce to give veterans an alternative and local treatment for services.

b. Tony Alvidrez, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope, stated that he is at the Oak Street Apartments, the Veterans Transition Center. He stated that if anyone needs anything he would be willing to help out.
c. Scott del Oso, Healthcare Navigator, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope, stated that his purpose is to provide housing for homeless Veterans. He connects them with medical services that prevent them from getting housing.

d. Rick Pineda, Veteran Liaison for Congresswoman Yvette Herrell. He stated that he is starting to get out to the district such as Hobbs and Truth or Consequences and is still working his way up. He stated that the Congresswoman has been signing bills that has to do with Veterans. The first one was VA (inaudible), Veteran Program Extension Act, Veterans Healthcare Freedom Act, Wingman Act, Pause Act, and Affordable Housing for Veterans Act 2021. Mr. Pineda stated that one of the issues that he has been seeing a lot of is travel in the rural areas. He has spoken to the owners of (inaudible) Ruidoso and they can cover the district if any Veteran needs transportation, just reach out to Mr. Pineda.

e. Dale Lawrence, Vet Center, stated that eligibility has changed over the years to now anyone that can prove that they have been in the service, in uniform, is eligible. Also, from Reserves and National Guard they have been called up, such as if the National Guard has done any of the drug missions and stuff like that on the border, they are not eligible. The Reserves, if they have been called up by the state for floodings, etc., they can receive services now, as long as they can prove they don’t have D214’s anymore. Sometimes Reserves or National Guard don’t get D214’s if they have never been deployed. If they can prove that they wore the uniform whether it is Commanders orders, call up orders, ribbons, etc., they can seek services now. Mr. Lawrence also stated that there is a Veterans Crisis hotline. Deborah O Callaghan, Vet Center, stated that they also see active-duty people.

Chair Woods had a question regarding the Crisis Center. Mr. Enriquez stated that the triage center is not fully open yet. They are working on staffing and pharmacy approval, so they administer the medications. Mr. Enriquez stated that Jaimie Michael is the coordinator and the person to contact for any questions regarding the building. She is located at the Dona Ana County building on Motel Blvd. Mr. Enriquez would like to invite Ms. Michael to a meeting to do a presentation on the triage center.

Crystal Davis-Whited stated that one of the ideas is that if someone is in crisis that needs to be medically cleared and does not want to go through the ER this may allow them to bypass the ER by sending them to one of the mental health facilities.
Mr. Enriquez stated that the goal of the City is to have a mobile crisis team consisting of a mental health provider, a police officer, and a paramedic riding as a team to follow up on those who utilize the system to work in conjunction with the triage center.

f. **Sam Jones, Outreach Specialist, Vet Center**, stated that he goes to a lot of events and if anyone has an event coming up to reach out to him and he will participate if he is available.

Deborah O Callaghan stated that if there is an event in El Paso, they collaborate with the El Paso Vet Center and they can cover and attend if they are available. Ms. O Callaghan also stated that they have not been approved for their back to work plan, but they are reaching out, planning, and scheduling events in the community. Ms. O Callaghan also stated that they are rebranding and re doing their logos.

Christine Sautter, MOAA, stated that despite of the pandemic, they were able to get their awards out the high school and to NMSU. They will be starting their regular meetings hopefully in September. Ms. Sautter asked if anyone would be willing to take on a stand down issue.

g. **John Poland, American Legion Post 10 Commander**, stated that they are starting to open next month. The developing transition planning to the New Mexico Gaming board so they can hopefully have bingo starting on August 4th. They have recently hit a milestone and have 400 members. Over the course of the past few months, they have distributor and delivered over 1,500 USDA food boxes to people in the community. Mr. Poland also stated that they will be having their annual American Legion State Convention on June 24-27th.

h. **Hubert Gay, Vietnam Veterans**, stated that there was a dedication on May 27th for the Hall of Fame and Gold Star. The next monument that they are discussing is for the Afghanistan/Iraq, which will be ordered sometime in the next month or so. Mr. Gay also stated that before it gets placed at the, he will bring it to the board for approval. Mr. Gay also stated that the DVA has a food drive every first of the month. It will be at the Valley Drive Walmart. They receive a lot of donations that get passed along to the community. They also had a car show coming up to raise funds for the Afghanistan/Iraq monument and they raised $4,803.00.
i. Rod Gajewski, Military Order of the Purple Heart, stated that they will be out at the New Mexico State Fair on September 29th through October 3rd.

j. Karen Woods, United Military Women of the Southwest, Board Chair, mentioned a couple of events including, a car show on September 4th at the Sonoma Ranch Golf Course; an event on September 25th at Top Golf and they are looking for sponsors; and the Fourth of July Parade. They are needing two grand marshals and is recommending Jay Lloyd to be one of the Marshalls. Mr. Lloyd is the only WWII vet. Chair Woods would like to encourage all Veterans to get registered for the VA. In November will be the Veteran’s Day Parade.

VII. REMINDERS:

a. Garrison Flag: Hubert Gay, Vietnam Veterans stated that Parks & Rec is working on getting the Garrison Flagpole fixed as well as the two poles next to the Vietnam memorial. It is a contract job to replace the ropes on the poles.

b. Next meeting July 27, 2021: will take place at the East Mesa Public Facility Complex.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT (10:32 a.m.)

Motion to adjourn by Board Member Hubert Gay, seconded by Board Member Rod Gajewski. Motion passes

Chairperson

Date

September 21, 2021