

STATE OF WASHINGTON

VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

*PO BOX 41150*  *Olympia, Washington 98504-1150*  *360-725-2167*

**Meeting Minutes**

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| **Meeting attended by**  **(VAAC Member)** | Chuck Wharton, Rufus Hoefer and Bob Wallace |
| **Date** | November 16, 2017 |
| **Time** | 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. |
| **Location** | Lincoln Center  1316 North Lincoln Street, Spokane, WA |
| **Call to Order** | Meeting called to order by Cat Nichols  Invocation by Lt. Col. Jerry Malone  Pledge of Allegiance led by Rufus Hoefer  Poem Recitation – Charge of Light Brigade by Hannah Nichols |
| **Welcome & Introductions:** | Welcome led by Cat Nichols |
| **Presentations** | **WDVA Update – Alfie Alvarado-Ramos**  WDVA continues to work with our community partners to ensure veterans and their families are connected with their earned benefits. WDVA priorities are:   * Connecting veterans their families with their benefits * Homeless Prevention and Intervention * Veteran employment and Active Duty Transition * Mental Health Care and Suicide Awareness & Prevention * Incarcerated Veteran Service and Prevention * Enhancing internal Agency Capacity   **WDVA Presentation – Cat Nichols**    **US DVA Update – Pritz Navaratnasingam**  US DVA continues to collaborate with local, state, federal entities to assist veterans and their families with earned benefits. US DVA priorities are:   * Greater Choice – Empowering veterans, more transparency, integrated network, telehealth & self-service tools * Modernize System – electronic health record, supply chain, HR smart, vets.gov/digital strategy, call centers, WH hotline & physical infrastructure * Focus Resources – fraud, waste & abuse, DoD collaboration & accountability * Improve Timelines – Same day service, Veteran C.A.R.E., decision ready claims & appeals modernization * Suicide Prevention – OTH mental health care, auto-enrollment, reach Vet, mental health open access & partnerships (DoD, local VSO’s, non-profit)   **Veterans Employment – Kevin Williams/Hannah Schoepp**  WorkSource is available to everyone in Spokane Country [**www.worksourcewa.com**](http://www.worksourcewa.com)  Veterans have priority service by Disabled Veterans Outreach Coordinator or Local Veterans Employment Representatives in the Office. They can help reduce barriers to work by helping with transportation, wardrobe, work-required tools or other gear.  WorkSource also partners with WDVA to provide the Veterans Innovations Program and Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program benefits to veterans who qualify. (more info at [www.dva.wa.gov](http://www.dva.wa.gov))  Other programs include the YesVets hiring initiative – [www.yesvets.org](http://www.yesvets.org) Office is located at 130 S. Arthur St., Spokane, WA Phone: 509-532-3000  **Spokane County Regional Veterans Services Center – Cat Nichols**  The service center provides an array of services: counseling, financial aid to honorably discharge veterans and their families for food and gas if and when critical need is determined. They are ready to assist veterans and their families with emergency financial aid in the event of crisis. Services can be access by:  **https://www.spokanecounty.org/1122/Veteran-Services**  Office is located at 1101 W. College Ave. Ste. 101, Spokane, WA Phone: 509-477-3690  **Spokane Veterans Treatment Court – Fred Aronow**  Veterans Treatment Court are hybrid Drug and Mental Health Courts that use the Drug Court Model to serve veterans struggling with addiction, serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders. They promote sobriety, recovery and stability through a coordinated response that involves cooperation and collaboration with the traditional partners in the community. The court serves former or current members of the Armed Forces, Guards and Reserves. As a former member, the veteran must have been honorably discharged or discharged under honorable conditions. Individuals whose cases are Spokane Country misdemeanor or gross misdemeanor are eligible for acceptance into Veterans Court pending a review by the Veterans Court Team with the exception of sexual and serious violent offenses. Felony reductions plead in District Court may be referred to the Veterans Court for probation monitoring subject to a staffing review by the Team. Website: **https://www.spokanecounty.org/485/Veterans-Enhanced-Treatment-Court** and volunteer opportunities at: **www.spokaneveteransforum.org**  **WA Veterans State Cemetery – Rudy Lopez**  Eligibility for interment in the Washington State Veterans Cemetery mirrors National Veterans Cemetery  eligibility requirements. In general:  • All U.S. Veterans discharged under conditions other than dishonorable;  • Spouses; and  • Dependent Children.  The Washington State Veterans Cemetery serves veterans and other eligible individuals from  Washington and other States.  More information on the National Veterans Cemetery Eligibility Requirements is available at:  **http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/bbene/eligible.asp** or by contacting a WDVA Benefits Specialist directly at 1-800-562-2308.  The State Veterans Cemetery provides for in-ground casket burial sites and cremation interments.  For cremation interments the following options are available:  A columbarium niche that includes an inscribed, granite marker;  An in-ground cremation inurnment that includes an upright inscribed, granite marker;  A scattering garden with a flush-to-ground inscribed granite memorial marker  **Veterans Center Update – Joe Dumlao**  The Vet Center Program was established by Congress in 1979 out of the recognition that a significant number of Vietnam era vets were still experiencing readjustment problems.  Vet Centers are community based and part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.  In April 1991, in response to the Persian Gulf War, Congress extended the eligibility to veterans who served during other periods of armed hostilities after the Vietnam era.  Those other periods are identified as Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, and Kosovo/Bosnia.  In October 1996, Congress extended the eligibility to include WWII and Korean Combat Veterans. The goal of the Vet Center program is to provide a broad range of counseling, outreach, and referral services to eligible veterans in order to help them make a satisfying post-war readjustment to civilian life.  On April 1, 2003 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs extended eligibility for Vet Center services to veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and on June 25, 2003 Vet Center eligibility was extended to veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and subsequent operations within the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).  The family members of all veterans listed above are eligible for Vet Center services as well. On August 5, 2003 VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi authorized Vet Centers to furnish bereavement counseling services to surviving parents, spouses, children and siblings of service members who die of any cause while on active duty, to include federally activated Reserve and National Guard personnel. For assistance after hours, weekends and holidays call: 1-877-927-8387.  **Community Update – Mayor David Condon**  The Mayo and City Council members of Spokane put their focus squarely on their customers as the city prioritize and approach their work in five critical areas:   * Public Safety – Restoring public trust in law enforcement and enhancing community safety * Jobs and Economic Growth – Creating an atmosphere to attract and retain jobs * Budget – Promoting long-term fiscal health without undue burden on citizens * Infrastructure –Maintaining critical public infrastructure at an affordable price * Quality of Life – Engaging citizens and improving the quality and character of our community   Though, their singular focus is making Spokane the “City of Choice” for the Northwest and they are working hard toward that goal. They are a leaner, more efficient operation today as they bring services closer to citizens, drive greater accountability, and save tax dollars.  There is much work still to be done, and they want to hear from you. You are an important voice as they deliver services they can afford and develop a safe, livable community full of the opportunities that makes you call Spokane your home. |