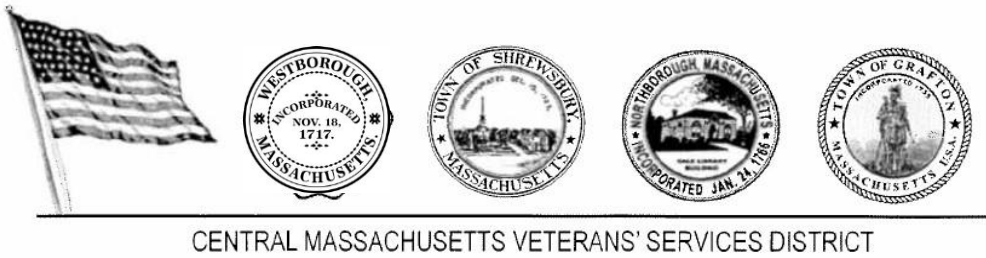


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By KWilber/Assistant Town Clerk at 1:55 pm, Jul 01, 2024



3/19/2024 9:00am Meeting Minutes

**CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS VETERANS SERVICE
DISTRICT BOARD MEETING**

Remote Meeting

Roll Call: Diane Wackell (Northborough), Kimberly Foster (Westborough), Jeff Farrell (CMVSD), Justin Dobson (Shrewsbury), William Blake (Grafton) & Ashley Gerstel (CMVSD)

Meeting called to Order at 9:07am by Diane Wackell. Kimberly Foster read the Governors order allowing remote meetings and Zoom link was included on Posted agenda allowing the public to attend the meeting in real time.

Meeting minutes from 12/12/2023 meeting were approved, Diane Wackell (Aye), Kimberly Foster (Aye), Justin Dobson (Aye) William Blake (Aye).

Discussion: District performance review. Jeff gave an update on the performance of the district to include,

1. Demographics
2. Unemployment
3. District budget
4. VA Claims
5. EOVS updates
6. Website
7. Outreach
8. Workflow
9. Highlights

The presentation will be attached to the minutes for viewing. Kimberly Foster asked for a review of how the state has been reimbursing the towns for CH15 benefits paid and Jeff will report at next meeting.

Discussion: Communication Procedures. VSO's have been responding to phone calls within twenty-four hours and have seen an increase of calls. When discussing benefit options we request the Veteran or family member to schedule an appointment in the office rather than answering

questions over the phone. This allow us to meet more Veterans in person and check their character of discharge to help better determine what their eligibility is.

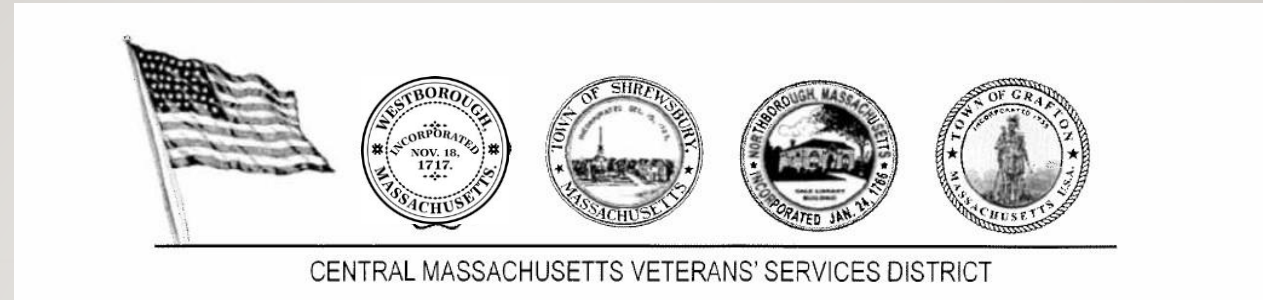
Discussion: Memorial Day. VSO's will be attending the Westborough & Shrewsbury Memorial Day Parades. Planning has been underway in each community and VSO's have been involved with each town to coordinate the events.

Next Meeting Scheduled for June 11 2024 by zoom.

Motion to Adjourn, Diane (Aye) Kimberly (Aye), Justin (Aye) & William (Aye).

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 am

Approved 6/11/2024



DISTRICT UPDATE

OVERVIEW

- Demographics
- Unemployment
- Spending by town
- Operational budget
- 2023 VA Payments by community
- EOVS Updates
- Website
- Priority of Work
- Outreach
- Highlights

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 25 Total CHI 15 Claims
- Grafton – 5
- Northborough -4
- Shrewsbury - 12
- Westborough – 4
- 3 New claims since 2023.
- Since Feb 2023 there have been 2 deaths of Clients, one moved into nursing home and removed from benefits, and one returned to work.
- 3 Veterans are not retirement age but looking for work.

UNEMPLOYMENT

- Three Veterans are on employment plans and have been complying with program. One is close to having a job offer and eager to get back working.
- Masshire Worcester is a phenomenal asset for any new clients that need to update resumes or search for open positions. EOVS also partnered with Off Base Transition Training and will be expanding its Employment referrals through Virtual Gateway.

SPENDING BY TOWN

- CH 115
- Grafton - \$19,112.04
- Northborough – \$29,237.35
- Shrewsbury - \$54,417.80
- Westborough – \$14,236.76
- Flags (Ordered, invoice not paid yet)
- Grafton - \$2,700.00
- Northborough – \$2,025.00
- Shrewsbury - \$2,025
- Westborough - \$2,430.00
- Price per flag increased from \$1.25 to \$1.35 per flag this year.

DISTRICT EXPENDITURES

- Group Allocated Expended Remaining

Prof & Tech	\$2,400	\$2,628.43	-\$228.43	\$898.00 Vetraspec \$900.00 Cummulus Global. Verizon \$942.32 Since July '23
Employee Training	\$1,000	\$0	\$1000	
Office Supplies	\$1,200	\$339.94	\$868.06	
Other Supplies	\$1,000	\$243.57	\$756.43	
Dues & Memberships	\$500.00	\$50.00	\$450.00	

VA CLAIMS

Disability Compensation – Most common claim for Veteran. We are averaging around 4-5 per week. C&P exams are being scheduled quickly but average time for a decision is 159.8 days as stated on VA.gov. If Veteran passes away before claim is settled, family would receive a payment from date claim was filed to date it was approved.

Benefit, no income & asset check, Tax free monthly payment. Able to increase if conditions worsen. Eligible for Property tax exemption if rated 10% or higher under clause 22E.

VA CONTINUED

- Non-service connected Pension claims. These are time consuming claims that require financial statements and sometimes medical records. To be eligible the Veteran must have served during an approved Wartime Period and have under roughly \$150,000 in assets, not including a primary house. Spouse are eligible to apply for this under a deceased Veterans Eligibility, as long as they have not remarried.
- Aid and Attendance can also be applied for under NSC Pension if medical expenses are being paid for in home attendant or assisted living.
- Benefits – Tax free payment.

VA CONTINUED

- DIC (Dependant Indemnity Compensation)
- This is reserved for Spouses of Veterans with 100% disability for +10 years or death was determined to be service connected from a condition linked to claim. Death Certificate must include a condition linked to VA disability.
- No Income or Asset limit.
- Pays 50% of Veterans payment.
- Eligible for full property tax exemption under clause 22D
- Eligible for State Veteran Annuity - \$2,000 annually.

VA PAYMENT BY TOWN FOR 2023

- Grafton - \$3,968,603.00
- Northborough - \$2,213,049.00
- Shrewsbury - \$6,849,861.36
- Westborough - \$2,823,988.20

This include service connected disability, non-service connected pension, survivors pension & DIC.

EOVS UPDATE

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF VETERANS SERVICES

- Hero Act is a bill to increase Veterans Benefits in the state.
- Aligns Veteran definition with federal definition
- Allows National Guard with deployment eligibility for CHII5
- Fertility benefits for same sex female couples. Currently VA will not cover.
- RMV updates. Removing vanity plate fee and adding Women Veteran sticker for plates.
- Holyoke Veterans Home will break ground soon on new facility

WEBSITE

- Website continues to be updated and refreshed.
- Feedback received that navigating was difficult for some veterans. Graphic link buttons were adjusted to be more direct. Other changes will require more assistance from Civic Engage. One issue was Veterans were confused that different towns were showing on the banner. Adding text to the district schedule should help clear this up.
- Community spotlight has been updated and we can increase the use of this feature.

PRIORITY OF WORK

CHI 15 remains the top priority of work. Receiving monthly expenses from Veterans and processing payments are ongoing task's. Monthly closeouts have been taking place in a timely manner and communicated if there is a delay. VA claims are next on the list as walk ins have been increasing in the community. We have been actively answering and returning phone calls in 24 hour windows.

OUTREACH

- This is where we have an opportunity to increase our presence in the community.
- It has been regularly reported that Spouses of deceased Veterans may not be aware of CH115 eligibility. Local Media could be a good way to get the message out.
- Worlds Best Coffee Hour is a new outreach opportunity that Jeff will attend monthly.
- Plan summer event to spotlight the CMVSD. Goal would be to attract younger veterans but also give isolated elderly veterans social interactions with people who have shared similar experiences.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Unmarked Civil War Veteran grave was identified in Shrewsbury by Kevin Espisito. We were able to submit a request for a VA Grave Marker.
- Second Civil War Veteran was submitted for Grave Marker in Grafton.
- Grafton Trustees of Soldiers and Sailors was awarded \$8,000 grant from State to create a second Vietnam Veterans Honor Roll. It was identified that many names were missing and has been close to decade long project.
- Worlds Best Coffee hour will be co-hosted with Northborough American Legion and CMVSD.