Veterans Assistance Commission of Jefferson County

Meeting Summary

Date: July 15, 2026
Time: 1800 hours
Location: Jefferson County
Attendees:

- Michael Hayden
- Gary Reynolds
- Kevin Gatewood
- Ryan Schertz
- Robert White
- Zach Brooks
- Scott Burge (Alternate, VFW 1376)
- Eddie Bond (Guest, VFW Post Commander 1376)

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1. Call to Order and Roll Call

- Meeting called to order at 1800 hours.
- Roll call conducted; all delegates and alternates present.
- Guest introduced: Eddie Bond, VFW 1376 Post Commander.

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2. Approval of Previous Minutes

- Motion made and passed to waive reading of the previous meeting's minutes.

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3. Treasurer’s Report

3.1 Account Balances and Activity

- **Discretionary Account:**
  - Balance: $5,360.55
  - Transaction: Refund of $21.58 for Market Days at Peachtree (July 4th event)
- **Other Account:**
  - Balance: $11,037.11
  - Recent Purchases:
    - Google purchase: $1,980
    - Carrington mortgage: $460 (support for a member)
- **QuickBooks Subscription:**
  - Currently paying $38/month. Discussion on discontinuing; consensus to discontinue and track using Excel for cost efficiency.
  - All agreed that Excel suffices, with annual review and monthly explanations of expenses.

3.2 Motions on Treasurer Operations

- Move to discontinue QuickBooks subscription.
- Motion to accept Treasurer’s Report: Passed (one abstention).

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4. Bills, Future Expenses, and Projects

- **Flagpole Dedication for Kyle Price:**
  - Early-stage planning; need to check with city about permits.
  - Veteran contractor in consideration; insurance confirmed.
  - Estimated cost unknown; further information to be obtained.
  - Project deferred until October, post-grant activities.

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5. Sickness, Distress, and Community Losses

- **Passing of Ernie Collins:**
  - Noted as a significant loss for the veterans’ community.

    - Ernie’s community involvement, leadership in military funerals, and plot management recognized.
    - Discussion on ensuring continuity of Honor Guard and cemetery plot management:
        - **Ron Menks** now handling cemetery plots (Bethel Cemetery, South 10th Street).
        - Coordination and sharing of information on available veterans’ plots emphasized.
- **Honor Guard Age and Membership Crisis:**
    - Majority members retired and/or aging; active recruitment needed.
    - Discussion on partnership between VFW and American Legion for honor guard duties.
    - Inventory and condition of rifles at VFW post to be checked at next meeting.
    - Blanks for ceremonies provided by Armory (likely the Kentucky Armory).
- **Funeral/Plot Costs:**
    - Many details previously handled by Ernie Collins; need for transparency and sharing of knowledge going forward.
    - VA and Social Security benefits discussed for graves and funerals:
        - VA pays $2,000 (service-connected), $999 (non-service-connected).
        - Social Security pays $250 (family must apply, payout delays common).
        - Local cemeteries may have their own charges (e.g., $300 opening/closing fees).

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6. Communications and Community Engagement

- No official correspondence.
- Referral of a local veteran (Russell Gant/Grant) for support—follow-up needed.
- No active or standing committees currently.
- **VFW Activity Increase:**
    - Intent to include veterans of all backgrounds in future events and recruitment.
    - Discussion on eligibility and structure of Auxiliary memberships—clarifying the misnomer "Ladies Auxiliary" and encouraging broader participation.

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7. Unfinished (Old) Business

- **Signage Projects:**
    - Waiting for October grant funds before proceeding.

    - Division of expenses: All costs associated with signage to be paid by the grant, but the sign installation itself remains under organization responsibility.

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8. New Business

8.1 VFW 1376 Delegate Change

- Scott Burge replacing Eddie Bond as delegate due to scheduling and attendance consistency (chapter-approved).

8.2 Secretary Role & Meeting Minutes Technology

- Discussion on using recorded minutes with AI transcription tools to streamline record keeping.
- Recommendation for VAC to cover any costs associated with phone/tech used for official business.

8.3 Reimbursement and Operational Expenses

- Zach Brooks has been paying work-related expenses (phone, tech, possible future Starlink internet) out of pocket.
- **Extensive discussion** on proper separation of personal vs. professional expenses, accounting, and privacy (especially regarding FOIA requests and potential device examination).
- Consensus and final *roll call vote*:
    - **Unanimous approval** to fully reimburse Zach Brooks for all operational expenses (mileage at federal rate, phone bills, supplies, etc.) monthly, upon submission of supporting documentation.
    - Starlink or similar tech purchases to be considered and potentially budgeted for next fiscal year (begins December 1), depending on organizational needs and pending possible legislative changes.

8.4 Legislative/Future Structural Changes

- Potential movement to consolidate county VACs into one Second Judicial Circuit VAC (covering multiple counties).

    - Concerns raised about logistical, budgeting, and leadership challenges, including allocation based on population and property taxes.
    - Risk of loss of local control and more complex travel/coordination needs.
    - Discussion on preparing for possible expansion (fleet/lease vehicles, transportation budgets, etc.) if legislation passes.
- Recommendation to continue minimizing current costs to leverage for future funding/budget applications.

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9. Operational Reporting

Since last meeting:

- 52 in-person visits
- 231 phone calls
- 300 messages handled
- 23 powers of attorney submitted
- 23 claims filed
- 12 community engagement events conducted
- Two cross-accreditations for hunting/fishing completed/submitted
- Assisted with tornado relief through donations (fuel, food, supplies)
- VFW donated $85 for food for tornado relief workers
- $14,000 worth of donated medical supplies received and processed
- Ongoing collection of mobility devices; available for distribution to veterans as needed

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10. Good of the Order

- Acknowledgement of Ernie Collins's humanitarian contributions and legacy.
- Invitation for continued cooperation among VSOs in sharing resources (wheelchairs, scooters, etc.).
- Upcoming 708 grant meeting: If awarded, funds will increase discretionary capabilities for psychiatric/psychological needs.
- Notice: Zach Brooks to join the EMA Board, enhancing VAC presence in emergency and disaster efforts.

11. Action Items

For All:

- Continue to collaborate on Honor Guard staffing and inventories (rifles, blanks).
- Gather and share information regarding available cemetery plots and associated costs.

For Zach Brooks:

- Discontinue QuickBooks subscription; switch fully to Excel for financial tracking.
- Provide monthly operational expenses for reimbursement (mileage logs, phone bills, etc.).
- Create and circulate a simplified monthly spreadsheet of organizational activity stats.
- Consult with the veteran flagpole contractor for cost/project details (bring to next meeting).
- Clarify with Ron Menks regarding who pays for VFW plot opening/closing and report findings.
- Investigate and report on rifle inventory and ammunition procurement at next VFW meeting.
- Research and prepare for eventual purchase of Starlink/service, considering organizational vs. personal ownership for privacy, legal, and reimbursement purposes.
- Pursue full reimbursement for all-out-of-pocket expenses related to VAC business.
- Attend and report on the 708 grant meeting outcomes.

For Delegates & Officers:

- Bring information on available funeral plots to next meeting.
- Raise awareness in their respective organizations about Honor Guard support and recruitment needs.
- Report on auxiliary eligibility/expansion in other organizations for cross-promotion and recruitment.

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12. Follow-up / Future Meetings

- Next regular VFW meeting: Monday (to discuss honor guard rifle inventory and collaborate with American Legion).
- October: Anticipated timeline for progressing with sign and flagpole projects, pending grants.
- December 1, 2026: Start of new fiscal year and potential budget expansion for technology, transportation, and operational needs.
- Additional reporting and coordination with EMA board as Zach Brooks assumes representation for VAC.

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13. Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned after motion and unanimous approval.