Veterans Assistance Commission of Jefferson County

Date: August 19, 2026

Time called to order: 1808 hours

Meeting: Veterans Assistance Commission of Jefferson County

Adjourned: 7:37 PM

Kevin Gatewood chaired the meeting and noted that the Pledge of Allegiance was skipped for this meeting.

Attendance and Roll Call

Present / participating: Robert White, Kevin Gatewood, Zach Brooks, David Nesbitt, Ryan Shurtz Not present: Michael Hayden, Eric Kennedy, Gary Reynolds, Joan Norris

Scott Burge: not present; Robert White stated he was acting as Scott's Alternate

Robert White identified himself as alternate for VFW Mount Vernon

Zach Brooks was present and actively led much of the operational and budget discussion

Main Topics Discussed

1. Minutes and Website Posting

Kevin Gatewood asked about the April sign-in sheet and noted he did not have that copy.

The group agreed to waive the reading of the previous minutes since they had been posted and were available online.

Kevin Gatewood said he had been posting the minutes on the website.

Robert White moved to waive reading and approve the minutes; David Nesbitt seconded.

2. Treasurer's Report and Account Activity

Kevin Gatewood presented the treasurer information as of August 17, 2026.

Two VAC accounts were referenced:

- Discretionary account: $5,360.55
- Primary account: $11,071

Recorded charges included:

- Miscellaneous fees/activity: $10
- Google purchase: $26.40

Kevin Gatewood speculated the Google charge and other card activity may be related

to debit card inactivity rules, noting the card may need to be used every 60–90 days to avoid fees.

Zach Brooks said he believed the wrong card may have been handed over and said it needed to be rectified, especially since budgets were being worked on.

Kevin Gatewood said he thought he had the discretionary card at home and that Michael Hayden may have the other login/card if needed.

The Treasurer's Report was approved by roll call vote after David Nesbitt reminded the group that money related motions require roll call under Robert's Rules.

3. Web Domain / Hosting and Transparency

Kevin Gatewood explained that he had already paid for the web domain / web-related expense for the first year and was considering it a donation.

Robert White said that if Kevin Gatewood wanted to donate it, he should send a written donation letter with the receipt so the commission could document it properly.

The group emphasized the importance of transparency and avoiding any appearance of impropriety, even on small expenses.

This conversation connected to the broader effort to keep the VAC's administrative and website spending documented correctly.

4. QuickBooks and Accounting Software

Zach Brooks reported that QuickBooks was still being charged at

about $28 per month. The group discussed how difficult it can be to

stop subscriptions like this.

This tied into the larger budget discussion and the effort to reduce unnecessary recurring costs.

5. Community Losses and Veteran Recognition

Robert White raised the recent death of Ernie Collins, calling it a major loss to the veteran community in Jefferson County.

He described Collins' service and impact, including his work with veterans, the Illinois State Troopers, the Jefferson County Volunteer Fire Department, and the American Legion Honor Guard chaplain role.

The group discussed possible ways to recognize Collins, including:

- A street or building naming
- A bridge designation
- A county/state recognition effort
- Naming or incorporating his name into a resource center or memorial feature

Kevin Gatewood suggested contacting post commanders from every veterans organization in the county to build support before approaching the county council.

Zach Brooks said he and Nat had already been discussing a Kyle Price memorial flag and garden, and he floated the idea of an Ernie Collins Resource Center.

The group also discussed the possibility of using a bridge over the interstate or another public structure, with David noting that state designation might be easier than county-only action.

Robert White suggested the airport as another possible place for recognition.

Robert said Chris had expressed interest in helping continue his father's legacy and possibly getting involved with the Honor Guard; Robert said he thought Chris might eventually join the Sons of the Legion.

6. VAC Communications and Grant Partnerships

Zach Brooks reported that there was not much new from the county specifically affecting the VAC, but he had been discussing grant partnerships with Nat and other VACs.

He said he and Candy Rogers had been working on a grant proposal for homeless veterans and trying to get her positioned to help through the VA system.

Zach said the biggest issue was lack of funding locally and that he had been talking to National and VISN in hopes of getting things moving.

He also said that Severin and Bryant appeared to not understand what a VAC was, and that he had been asked what makes the VAC different from a normal VSO.

David Nesbitt used this as an opportunity to explain the VAC's role in helping veterans file claims, access benefits, and bring resources into the county.

Zach cited a recent example of $95,000 in back pay for a widow as evidence of the VAC's impact.

7. Veterans Picnic and Event Support

Kevin Gatewood said Dave Keene had called to confirm the veterans picnic would be on September 13th, from noon to 2 PM.

Robert White said the VFW picnic was being moved to September 19th because key players would be absent on the 12th.

Zach Brooks had asked whether veterans organizations could help pay for some items for the picnic, specifically mentioning bumper stickers.

Kevin Gatewood said he would call and see what could be done and asked whether the group would be in favor of donating from the discretionary fund.

After discussion, the general feeling was that if the request was only for bumper stickers, that would not be as compelling as something like food or a more meaningful direct event expense.

Zach said if the money were going toward food or something directly useful, he

would support it more readily.

8. Budget Work and 2026–2027 Planning

A large portion of the meeting was devoted to the VAC budget and line-item planning.

Zach Brooks said he had pulled budget examples from multiple counties to build the new budget, including counties such as Marion, Franklin, Clinton, Livingston, Effingham, Woodford, Fulton, and Lee, plus others.

He explained that he had not yet received all examples and was still comparing line structures and amounts.

The group discussed how the property-tax levy should be budgeted and how much should be set aside for veterans aid versus overhead and administrative costs.

Key budget points included:

The direct aid to veterans line should absorb any money left after fixed expenses

The budget should stay under the levy amount and remain flexible

within the line items Some line items can be estimated or padded

conservatively to avoid under-budgeting

The group repeatedly emphasized that the whole purpose of the budget is to support veterans aid, and money not needed for overhead should be pushed there.

There was substantial discussion about how the VAC handles the levy, what happens if money remains at year-end, and whether that money can be carried forward or held.

Kevin Gatewood and Robert White encouraged Zach to find out exactly how leftover funds are treated administratively.

9. Facility / Building Concept for Veteran Resources

Zach Brooks shared a larger concept he had been considering: acquiring or using a building that could serve as a resource center for indigent or homeless veterans and possibly attract VA-region support.

He described an abandoned hotel building near the highway behind one of the hotels as a possible candidate, with delinquent taxes and the possibility of turning it into a county-owned facility.

The concept included:

Housing or temporary rooms for veterans

Office and conference space for VSOs

Accessibility by foot for veterans who need services

Potential use for job placement and transitional support

A multi-use facility, not necessarily a shelter, though it could support temporary housing if needed

Robert White was enthusiastic and said it could be used for many functions, including office space and meetings.

The group talked through the idea of a grant, county ownership, tax write-off / donation possibilities, and how the county could ultimately buy or accept the property before tax sale.

Kevin Gatewood suggested checking with the assessor's office, treasurer's office, and finding the PIN number to determine the tax status and delinquency details.

The consensus was that it would need to be a county building, not privately owned by the commission.

10. Superintendent Compensation, Retirement, and Benefit Structure A major budget subtopic involved Zach Brooks' compensation structure and how to handle benefits.

Robert White walked through several compensation-related items and asked what Zach wanted to do regarding retirement and benefits.

Zach said he did not want the county retirement plan and was not interested in a SIMPLE IRA right now.

The group discussed that if retirement or insurance benefits are declined, those funds may need to be reallocated or at least accounted for properly.

David suggested the board might consider a 3% match for a SIMPLE IRA if one were used, but Zach declined the retirement option during this discussion.

The group also discussed a possible stipend structure, with Zach suggesting $250/month to cover internet, phone, and gas reimbursement needs.

David and others focused on continuity and accountability, saying the board should control the phone and internet resources rather than having them in Zach's personal name.

Robert White suggested the commission buy a phone that stays in the office so the number and access remain under VAC control.

The group debated whether a landline or cell phone would be better. Zach strongly preferred a cell phone and did not want a landline.

There was discussion of forwarding a VAC-owned number to Zach's phone, or using a low-cost plan with enough data and texts to support his work.

The key issue was continuity: if Zach were unavailable, the VAC must still be able to access the number, records, and ongoing veteran work immediately.

11. Office Technology, Equipment, and Record Access

The group discussed the need for a VAC-owned phone and possible future internet access or Starlink Mini as a portable option.

Robert emphasized that the organization needs control of its communications tools for continuity and legal reasons.

Zach explained the difference between his VA remote desktop / Citrix setup and his local VAC files.

He said his veteran-side work goes through a secure VA system, while VAC budget files and flyers are stored on a local hard drive that stays plugged in and could be accessed by simply plugging it in.

Kevin Gatewood asked about securing continuity for the computer files, and Zach said there was no sensitive PII/PHI on the local drive.

The group clarified that if something happened to Zach, another person would still need to be able to access the work-in-progress and complete veteran-related tasks.

Robert White also noted that the current laptop belonged to him, which reinforced the discussion about ownership and continuity.

12. Public Access, Hours, and Veteran Service Model

Zach explained that he operates as a walk-in only office, not by appointment.

He said veterans can come in and will be seen if they arrive before 3 PM, and he will stay later if needed.

He said he rarely takes lunch and is generally present during his posted hours, which he identified as 7:00 AM to 3:00 PM Monday through Thursday, and 7:00 AM to 12:00 PM on Friday for administrative work.

Robert White raised concerns about continuity and what happens if someone comes looking for Zach and he is unavailable.

Zach said front desk staff are told when he is out and that veterans can wait or come back later, but if they arrive before 3 PM, he will ensure they are seen.

The exchange centered on balancing access, flexibility, and accountability.

13. Budget Line Items and Specific Estimates

The group reviewed budget categories one by one and discussed estimated amounts.

Key points included:

Website hosting/domain: suggested budget around $1,200 annually

Office equipment: likely $1,000 or more for a future computer and related access needs

Professional services: not clearly needed yet, though an annual audit/external review may require accounting support

Training: likely the most expensive item next year, with Zach expecting Miami for NAC training and possibly separate VFW training

David estimated the training budget might be in the range of $4,000 to $10,000, depending on travel and classes

Veterans memberships: discussed as a possible budget item, though the group ultimately leaned toward using existing organization support and limiting this item

The group also talked about:

Postage: likely minimal, possibly just a small amount to keep on hand

Phone: likely should be budgeted at around $1,200 if a VAC-owned

line or plan is used Utilities: set to zero in the working budget

because the county covers them

Liability insurance: possibly zeroed out if the commission falls under the county's umbrella

14. Memberships and Organization Relationships

Zach said membership-related expenses had been confusing because he did not want to mix benefit work with membership talk.

David said the VAC should not budget for Zach to pay his own membership fees and suggested that the post should help him with life membership or other membership support where appropriate.

The discussion clarified that any membership support for veterans coming through the VAC should likely be handled by the individual organizations, not through a separate VAC budget line.

The group ultimately agreed that the budget item for memberships should be reduced or removed as a direct VAC expense, and that life memberships or sponsor support should be handled separately.

15. Evaluation, Surveys, and Governance Follow-Through

Robert noted that, per the bylaws, Zach needs a formal evaluation as

superintendent. The evaluation is needed both for performance

oversight and to justify any future raise.

The group also discussed sending out questionnaires to gauge whether the VAC is doing a good job and where service can improve.

Kevin Gatewood suggested paper options such as a postcard, while others leaned toward using the website and email/QR code tools instead.

Zach said a QR code solution was possible but might require a small monthly expense.

The meeting also touched on the necessity of open meetings training and statements of economic interest for those involved in public service functions.

Kevin Gatewood reminded the group about the open meetings training requirement, and Robert said he had already completed his long ago.

Action Items

Kevin Gatewood to check whether he has the correct VAC card and verify the status/location of the other card with Michael Hayden if needed.

Kevin Gatewood to confirm the donation process for the web domain expense if he intends to treat it as a donation and to document it with a letter and receipt.

Zach Brooks to continue building the VAC budget using comparable county examples and bring the refined version back after discussion with Brittany and Cliff.

Zach Brooks to determine how leftover levy funds are handled at year-end.

Zach Brooks to confirm whether the county provides a stipend for staff who decline health insurance and how that should be recorded.

Zach Brooks / Kevin Gatewood / others to determine the proper budget treatment for website hosting, phone, and any recurring communication tools.

Zach Brooks to provide details on training costs for Miami/NAC and VFW-related training so they can be budgeted accurately.

David Nesbitt / Kevin Gatewood / Robert White / Zach Brooks to continue discussions on the Ernie Collins recognition effort and possibly contact other veterans organizations and post commanders in the county.

Zach Brooks to work with Nat and others on the abandoned building / resource center concept, including tax status, ownership, and possible grant opportunities.

Kevin Gatewood to call Dave Keene regarding the veterans picnic and the question of whether discretionary funds might support an event-related purchase.

VAC leadership to complete Zach Brooks' annual evaluation, as referenced in the bylaws.

VAC leadership to consider a questionnaire or survey method, likely via the website and/or QR code, to gather feedback from veterans.

Zach Brooks and leadership to confirm any open meetings / ethics / statement of economic interest compliance items required for the upcoming budget year.

Follow-Up / Next Meeting Notes

The budget discussion was not fully finalized and will continue at a future meeting next month.

Robert White specifically noted that the group had gone too deep into budget details and would need to pick it up next month.

Next meeting agenda items should include:

Zach Brooks' salary review/evaluation

Any final budget adjustments

Clarification on recurring communication and tech expenses

Any decisions on surveys/questionnaires and website publication

Closing

With no further new business, Kevin Gatewood called for a motion to adjourn.

Motion and second were made, the motion carried, and the meeting adjourned at 7:37 PM.

Action Items

☐ Check which People's debit card belongs to the discretionary account and which belongs to the primary account — @Robert White

☐ Verify the commission’s account cards and logins so the Treasurer’s Report can be managed correctly — @David Nesbitt

☐ Obtain a letter and receipt for the web domain expense if it is being donated or reimbursed — @Robert White

☐ Contact post commanders across the county to gather ideas and support for recognizing Ernie Collins — @David Nesbitt

☐ Call Dave about the Ernie Collins overpass recognition and bring him up to speed — @David Nesbitt

☐ Call Dave Keene to confirm details and support for the veterans picnic donation request — @David Nesbitt ☐ Add salary, retirement, health insurance, and stipend figures to the draft budget — @David Nesbitt ☐ Find out whether the county gives a stipend for declining health insurance — @David Nesbitt

☐ Verify whether liability insurance must be renewed under the county umbrella — @David Nesbitt ☐ Check the cost of website hosting and domain so the budget can be updated — @David Nesbitt ☐ Confirm whether an annual audit or external accountant is required and what it will cost — @David Nesbitt ☐ Budget for the Miami training trip using estimated hotel, flight, class, and meal costs — @David Nesbitt ☐ Find out the cost of VFW training and add it to the training budget — @David Nesbitt

☐ Check the rules for statements of economic interest and distribute them if required — @David Nesbitt

☐ Check the state open meetings training requirement and complete the course — @David Nesbitt