VAC of Jefferson County Meeting 9/16/26

Summary

- The Jefferson County Veterans Assistance Commission (VAC) approved adding Zach Brooks as an authorized signer on both accounts, approved the Treasurer's Report, reinstated the phone stipend, and authorized purchasing Starlink equipment in the VAC's name using operating/county funds.
- The board reviewed account-number confusion, transfers between county and discretionary funds, bank fees, and the need to reconcile records for an audit before considering a bank change after the fiscal year turns on December 1.
- Members discussed the Superintendent's walk-in service model, budget oversight, separate VAC communications accounts, and possible future transportation services. No transportation-vehicle purchase was approved.
- Follow-up includes bank access and reconciliation, written support for Kevin Gatewood's website-domain/hosting donation, and clarifying phone/internet ownership and continuity arrangements.

Strategic Overview

- Strengthen financial controls and continuity: reconcile the crossed account records, clarify which funds are county versus board/discretionary funds, and prepare for a possible bank transition after fiscal-year close.
- Maintain accessible veteran services while formalizing operations: continue the walk-in model with advance calls encouraged, while addressing the board's expectations for field availability, professional communications, and budget oversight.
- Build service capacity responsibly: acquire approved mobile internet equipment and investigate the legal, staffing, insurance, and funding requirements for future veteran transportation.

Key Decisions

- Add Zach Brooks as an authorized signer on both accounts.
    - Business Impact: Enables access needed to reconcile the accounts and correct transfers; the motion carried by roll-call vote.
    - Timeline: Minutes and required signatures are to be taken to the bank; no firm completion date was established.
- Approve the Treasurer's Report.

    - Business Impact: Reported balances were $5,130.57 in the discretionary account and $10,990.71 in the operating account. One member abstained; the report was approved by the recorded vote.
    - Timeline: Approved at this meeting; account reconciliation remains outstanding.
- Reinstate the phone stipend for the Superintendent's second phone number.
    - Business Impact: Continues reimbursement for the VAC phone expense while the number remains configured as a second SIM on the Superintendent's phone. The motion was approved; the transcript gives no stipend amount.
    - Timeline: Reinstated at this meeting; longer-term number ownership and continuity still need clarification.
- Purchase Starlink equipment under the VAC's name, using operating/county funds.
    - Business Impact: Provides mobile internet capacity for service away from the office. The board favored a clean organizational purchase rather than relying on a personal-account discount.
    - Timeline: Approved at this meeting; no purchase deadline was stated.
- Minutes: The previous meeting's minutes, posted online and circulated by text, were approved without a recorded objection.
- Bank selection: No bank change was approved. Members discussed potential alternatives, including Community First, but favored reconciling the records first and considering any change around the fiscal-year transition.

Financial Implications

- Budget Allocation
    - Reported balances: discretionary account $5,130.57; operating account $10,990.71.
    - Starlink was authorized as a VAC purchase from operating/county funds. The Superintendent stated the budget included $2,500 for Starlink; estimated service was $2,100 per year, plus approximately $350 for the Starlink Mini. A possible discount would reduce annual service to approximately $1,050, but the board chose the organizational purchase approach rather than making the personal-account discount the basis of the decision.
    - Phone stipend was reinstated, but no amount was specified.
    - Members discussed a possible future vehicle and transportation program, but made no purchase or funding decision. The Superintendent said vehicle planning might proceed next year, potentially by spring; insurance and driver arrangements remain unresolved.
- Revenue Projections
    - No new revenue or fundraising projections were approved. The Superintendent reported that approximately $100,000 in funds could roll over, subject to the board's discussion and accounting records.

        - The Superintendent said approximately $10,000 was being directly deposited, while the account records and account designations required correction; the exact status and amount need reconciliation.
- Cost Savings
    - The Superintendent described a Starlink discount of about half price, reducing the stated annual service estimate from $2,100 to $1,050 if attached to an existing personal account. The board instead approved VAC-name procurement.
    - Members objected to a bank's $10 monthly debit-card fee and discussed a $5 charge for obtaining a statement. A separate member cited another bank's $1.88 per-check charge. A bank change remains only under consideration.
    - The Treasurer questioned recurring charges, including $227.98 on August 21, after being told the vendor supplied ink and that only two cartridges had been purchased. The charge pattern was not resolved during the meeting.

Risk Analysis

- Potential Obstacles
    - Account numbers and account purposes have been crossed or inconsistently recorded. Transfers may have moved county funds into a private/501 account, creating audit, accounting, and county-reporting concerns.
    - The Treasurer needs statements and supporting documentation to reconcile the records. Obtaining a statement for the difficult-to-access account may incur a $5 fee.
    - The Superintendent's VAC phone number is a second SIM associated with a personal line. Verizon reportedly said it cannot be separated or transferred without canceling the arrangement; continuity, ownership, and possible fees remain concerns.
    - Board members disagreed about whether prior minutes settled the separate-phone and internet issue, and the discussion became contentious. Accurate minutes and clear motions are important to prevent repeated disputes.
    - A future transportation program would require dependable drivers, background checks, insurance/liability confirmation, and clarity on whether drivers may be paid. Members raised risks of accidents and claims; no vehicle decision was made.
    - The Superintendent's walk-in-only office policy drew questions from board members about access for veterans constrained by work schedules. The Superintendent said he accommodates after-hours requests and house calls and asks veterans to call ahead to check availability and records access.
- Mitigation Strategies

- Add Zach Brooks as a signer, obtain statements for both accounts, document transfers, and reconcile the books before an audit or bank transition.
- Use consistent internal account labels such as “county” and “board” funds; the chair said the labels and checks could be straightened out when changing banks.
- Maintain minutes documenting approved motions and votes; ensure all required signers complete the bank’s updated signature-card process.
- Preserve phone-number continuity through a documented contingency plan and clarify whether a new VAC number, forwarding, or transfer arrangements are needed.
- Before any transportation commitment, determine county insurance coverage, driver qualifications and screening, procurement options, and whether volunteer or paid drivers are viable.
- Communicate the office process clearly: veterans can call ahead, walk in during posted hours, and contact the Superintendent about after-hours arrangements.

Main Topics Discussed

- Accounts, banking, and audit readiness
    - The Treasurer presented balances of $5,130.57 for discretionary funds and $10,990.71 for operating funds. Members discussed temporarily referring to the accounts as “account 1” and “account 2” because account purposes and numbers had become confused.
    - The Treasurer traced the issue to the original $15,000 deposit, subsequent transfers, and checks/account details that had been switched. The county’s records and the accounting agency reportedly identified one account as operating, while the actual funds and transfers did not align cleanly.
    - The Treasurer said the books must be balanced for an audit and that transfers between county funds and a private/501 account need to be documented and, where appropriate, returned. He requested statements for the other account to complete reconciliation.
    - Members discussed changing banks due to fees and online banking difficulties. One member suggested Community First and described a contact there, but no institution was selected. The fiscal year was identified as starting December 1; the discussion favored avoiding account closure before fiscal-year transition and proper reconciliation.
    - Zach Brooks was approved as a signer on both accounts. Members noted that the bank may require all existing signers to complete signature cards, not only the newly added signer. Kevin Gatewood said he would prepare/post the minutes and work on the required documentation; the Treasurer and another member anticipated going to the bank together.

- Treasurer's Report, vendor charges, and administration costs
    - The board approved the Treasurer's Report following the account discussion.
    - A member raised recurring monthly charges, including $227.98 dated August 21, and asked whether the VAC was being charged for furniture or other recurring purchases. Zach said it was for ink and that only two cartridges had been purchased. A member offered to contact the vendor, but another participant said they would handle it; responsibility and resolution were left unclear.
    - Kevin Gatewood's Google Workspace charge was discussed. He explained it offered email and shared Drive storage, but the Treasurer requested receipts and questioned its necessity for the commission. Kevin said he would cancel it.
- Superintendent's service model and availability
    - A board member requested clarification of office hours and raised feedback that veterans could not book appointments. The Superintendent clarified the schedule as 7:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m., with 7:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. Fridays; the discussion also referred to a 37-hour work week and Friday administrative time.
    - The Superintendent explained that appointments had previously caused delays and dissatisfaction when veterans arrived late or one case ran long. He described the office as walk-in based and said veterans who arrive before closing will be seen, even if service continues beyond closing. He also accommodates after-hours requests and house calls when needed.
    - He explained that initial claims work depends on records access and signed forms, including a 21-22 and 966 (as referred to in the recording), and that a 72-hour waiting period applies to the intent-to-file process. Veterans are asked to call or text to confirm records access and availability; he said they generally need identification and lists of diagnosed conditions and non-military treatment providers.
    - Board members discussed the needs of veterans who must fit a visit around work and the possibility of appointments or reserved windows. The discussion concluded with a shared practical message to call ahead, check availability, and arrange after-hours service when necessary; no formal change to the walk-in policy was adopted.
- Budget oversight, phone, and internet arrangements
    - A board member said the board should review and approve the budget before it is sent to the county. The Superintendent disagreed that the board could sign off under the governing law and said the Superintendent was the official responsible for submission. The board member said they would check the statute; the issue remained unresolved.
    - Members revisited whether the VAC should have a separate phone and internet account rather than relying on personal accounts. The

Superintendent cited a previous vote for reimbursement and said he had begun implementing it; other members recalled a separate organizational phone and internet requirement. The disagreement was not conclusively resolved for internet service.

    - The board voted to reinstate the phone stipend. Members discussed the second-SIM arrangement, succession, number retention, possible cancellation charges, a new number with forwarding, and how the VAC could retain access if the Superintendent left or became unavailable. The Superintendent said he had a contingency arrangement, but the board's ability to exercise it should be documented and verified.
    - Starlink was approved as equipment purchased under the VAC name and paid from operating/county funds. The stated budget allocation was $2,500; the Superintendent estimated annual service at $2,100 plus approximately $350 for the Mini, or $1,050 annual service with the proposed discount. No discount-dependent personal-account arrangement was approved.
- Potential transportation program
    - The Superintendent described transportation as a possible required VAC service and raised the possibility of buying or obtaining a vehicle, using volunteers or a hired driver, and serving veterans traveling to compensation-and-pension appointments. He said the catchment area can involve long distances and that DAV transportation may not cover these appointments under current rules because of potential duplicate government payment.
    - Members discussed county vehicle leasing, possible vehicle donation support, Uber as an alternative, and whether the county's insurance or an umbrella policy could cover a VAC vehicle. They raised liability, screening, driver availability, and whether paid drivers would need additional licensing.
    - Kevin Gatewood noted that DAV has difficulty recruiting van drivers and that State DAV was exploring grants for volunteer stipends or gas cards. These were discussion points only; no transportation expenditure or program authorization was adopted.
- Website, facilities, and other updates
    - Kevin said he had registered vac4jc.org through Namecheap and purchased a low-cost hosting account, with the intention of donating the expense. The Superintendent requested a receipt and donation letter to document the required website costs. Kevin agreed to provide them; the record does not confirm that the requested letter had already been sent.
    - The Superintendent reported that IAC accreditation had opened and that his DAV accreditation had been approved, allowing him to process DAV claims locally rather than sending them to Chicago. Kevin encouraged him to join DAV and offered chapter support for the initial membership cost; no formal motion was recorded.

- Members discussed a building improvement project being pursued by another party, expected to begin around October. The Superintendent said grant work would cover most improvements, including security and cameras, but the VAC might be responsible for its door and installation, potentially from the discretionary account because the building is owned by United Way. No estimate or expenditure was approved.
- The Superintendent reported a newly arrived veteran who was effectively homeless after moving from Alabama. He said the VAC could not yet provide direct assistance under residency rules and was coordinating with the VA and Lori Porter to seek help. A member's death was also noted: Robert Tinsley had died the prior week.
- One appreciation letter to the board/VAC was reported. No committee reports or additional formal business were presented.

Next Steps

- Action Items
    - Prepare and provide the approved minutes and required bank documents so Zach Brooks can be added as a signer on both accounts; coordinate required signatures and bank visit.
        - Owner: Kevin Gatewood for minutes/documentation; Treasurer and relevant account signers for bank paperwork.
        - Deadline: As soon as practicable; no specific date set.
    - Obtain statements for both accounts, trace transfers, gather receipts, and reconcile county and discretionary/board funds for audit readiness.
        - Owner: Treasurer, with supporting records from account signers and Kevin Gatewood as needed.
        - Deadline: The Treasurer hoped to proceed once access and statements were available; a member suggested completion within about one week, but no formal deadline was adopted.
    - Confirm the bank's requirements and document all current signers; defer any bank change until records are reconciled and the fiscal-year transition is considered.
        - Owner: Treasurer and account signers; board to evaluate bank options.
        - Deadline: Before any bank transition; fiscal year begins December 1.
    - Investigate the recurring charges and confirm whether the monthly charges are valid ink purchases or require cancellation.
        - Owner: Treasurer/member who offered to contact the vendor; ownership was not clearly settled.
        - Deadline: A member proposed calling the vendor the next day; no calendar date was specified.

- Check the Google Workspace charge and receipts and cancel the subscription if it is no longer needed.
    - Owner: Kevin Gatewood to cancel; Treasurer to verify supporting receipts and accounting treatment.
    - Deadline: No specific date set.
- Purchase Starlink equipment under the VAC name using approved operating/county funds and confirm the final equipment and service costs.
    - Owner: Superintendent, with board/finance coordination.
    - Deadline: No formal deadline; the Superintendent said he was considering the purchase that weekend, but the board decision did not set a date.
- Provide the Namecheap receipt and a written donation letter for vac4jc.org and hosting expenses.
    - Owner: Kevin Gatewood.
    - Deadline: No specific date set.
- Document and verify the VAC phone-number continuity plan, including access, succession, any cancellation or transfer charges, and whether a separate VAC number is needed.
    - Owner: Superintendent and board; no single owner assigned.
    - Deadline: Before future officer/superintendent transition; no date set.
- Clarify the board's statutory role in budget review and approval before the next budget submission.
    - Owner: Board member who offered to review the statute, with the Superintendent providing cited provisions as needed.
    - Deadline: No specific date set.
- Continue coordination with the VA regarding assistance for the newly arrived homeless veteran.
    - Owner: Superintendent, working with Lori Porter/VA.
    - Deadline: Ongoing; no date set.

- Follow-up
    - Revisit bank selection, account naming, and any account transfer after reconciliation and around the fiscal-year boundary of December 1.
    - Confirm that the Starlink purchase is recorded as a VAC asset and its costs fit within the approved budget allocation.
    - Return to transportation feasibility only after insurance, procurement, driver screening, funding, and legal requirements are established; no purchase was authorized.
    - Clarify written guidance for veterans on walk-in hours, calling ahead, and after-hours arrangements; no new appointment policy was adopted.
    - Track the October-start building project and determine the VAC's actual door/installation obligation once quotes and grant scope are available.

- The meeting adjourned after a motion and second; the vote was recorded as in favor, with no opposition noted.