

# Montana Board of Veteran Affairs

## Meeting Minutes

September 2020 Board Meeting	
<b>Date</b>	September 24, 2020
<b>Time</b>	2:00 p.m.
<b>Location</b>	94 <sup>th</sup> Troop Command, Fort Harrison, MT 59636 Zoom Tele-Conference

Attendance	
Members	Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vice-Chairman Clancy Sivertsen</li> <li>Ronald Milam</li> <li>Gary Swartz</li> <li>Mitch Godfrey</li> <li>Mike Stone</li> <li>Ryan Beston</li> <li>Paul Little Light</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kelly Ackerman, Administrator</li> <li>Taryn Phillips, Administrative Support</li> <li>Casey McInerney, Budget Analyst</li> </ul>
	Guest
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gary White, Adjutant, American Legion</li> <li>Col. Lee Hyslop, Special Forces Association</li> <li>Eric Powers</li> </ul>
Non-Voting Members	Absent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jason Smith</li> <li>Thomas Finch</li> <li>Duane Cunningham</li> <li>Joren Underdahl</li> <li>Mike Waters</li> <li>Denny Lenoir</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voting Member Brenda York</li> <li>Non-Voting Member MG Matthew Quinn</li> <li>Non-Voting Member Marvin Weatherwax Jr.</li> <li>Chairman Peter Olson</li> </ul>

Meeting Minutes		
Discussion Topic	Speaker	Time
<b>Pledge of Allegiance, roll call, introductions, and welcome</b>	<b>Vice-Chairman Sivertsen</b>	<b>14:01</b>
<b>Chairman Nominations and Election</b>	<b>Administrator Ackerman</b>	<b>14:10</b>
<p>Previous chairman, Peter Olson, termed out August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. One application was submitted by Vice-Chairman Clancy Sivertsen for the Chairman position. Vice-Chairman Clancy was excused from the conference room. There were no nominations for Chairman. The following is the voting results:</p> <p>Peter Olson (Ron Milam by Proxy) - Yea                      Ronald Milam – Yea                      Gary Swartz – Yea                      Mitch Godfrey – Yea                      Mike Stone – Yea                      Ryan Beston – Nay                      Paul Little Light – Nay</p>		

Vice-Chairman Clancy Sivertsen was elected as Chairman for the Montana Board of Veteran Affairs.

<b>Vice-Chairman Nominations and Election</b>	<b>Administrator Ackerman</b>	<b>14:13</b>
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One application was submitted by Voting Member Mike Stone for the Vice-Chairman position. Mike was excused from the conference room. There were no nominations for Vice-Chairman. The following is the voting results:

Peter Olson (Ron Milam by Proxy) - Yea

Clancy Sivertsen - Yea

Ronald Milam - Yea

Gary Swartz - Yea

Mitch Godfrey - Yea

Ryan Beston - Yea

Paul Little Light - Yea

Voting Member Mike Stone was elected as Vice-Chairman for the Montana Board of Veteran Affairs.

<b>VHA Updates</b>	<b>Duane Cunningham</b>	<b>14:15</b>
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Duane Cunningham gave a brief update on the VHA regarding COVID-19, Flu Clinics, billing, shipping of medications, and the Mission Act.

<b>Staffing Changes</b>	<b>Administrator Ackerman</b>	<b>14:29</b>
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The Veteran Service Program Manager, Cheryl Heald, retired in July 2020 after thirty years in the agency. The Western Regional Veteran Service Officer, Ryan Keeler, replaced her in July 2020. Ryan works in the Kalispell office and is a retired US Marine. MVAD has not replaced the full time Veteran Service Officer in Billings.

The Cemetery Program is currently fully staffed but will have a position open starting September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The Cemetery Program Manager, Curt Aasved, is retiring after fourteen years in the division. The Cemetery Program Manager position has been advertised and interviews will be held early October. The position can be filled at any three of the cemeteries.

Vacancies in the division include a Veteran Service Office in Helena and Billings. The Governor's office has advised all state agencies to hold off recruiting. MVAD will not be filling positions until Legislature comes down with next biennial budget.

<b>Grievance Status</b>	<b>Administrator Ackerman</b>	<b>14:33</b>
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In 2019, there was a grievance filed against MVAD leadership and that grievance has been resolved with no cause.

<b>2021 Legislative Update</b>	<b>Administrator Ackerman</b>	<b>14:34</b>
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MVAD submitted two proposals for the next legislative session. One proposal which was accepted is to increase the percent of license plate revenue to the cemetery program by reducing the revenue going to VA services. The second proposal was submitted and denied by the Governor's office. The proposal was for the Patriotic License Plate fee to increase from \$15 to \$20. The Governor's office denied the proposal not wanting to burden the taxpayers with an increased fee during a pandemic. MVAD is hoping for a legislator to review the proposal and carry it.

Gary Swartz asked what the Patriotic License Plate looked like and who can purchase them. Kelly explained that the Patriotic License Plate is for civilians, and Taryn Phillips presented a picture of the license plate.

Gary Swartz asked if Montana has proposed to have military retirement exempt from taxes. Gary White explained for the past nine legislative sessions, the American Legion has fought to pass military retirement being exempt from state taxes. The 2019 session proposed for a 50% tax exemption, it moved through the committee, but was short two votes to pass. The American Legion plans on proposing it again this session.

<b>Biennial Report</b>	<b>Casey McInerney</b>	<b>14:45</b>
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Casey McInerney reviewed the Biennial Report provided in the board meeting packet. Casey asked if there were any questions. Administrator Ackerman mentioned Casey and Taryn built a new format for the Biennial Report and this format will be used from now on. Administrator

Ackerman reviewed the financial impact in fiscal year 2020. Administrator Ackerman then reviewed the statistics of burials and gave an update to the COVID-19 procedures of burials. The VA expansion grant for the Eastern Montana State Veterans Cemetery will be finished October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

**2020 Annual Training**

**Administrator Ackerman**

**14:57**

Administrator Ackerman explained annual training was cancelled for 2020. The training was cancelled due to COVID and wanting to keep everyone safe. In lieu of annual training, Ryan Keeler, Veteran Service Bureau Chief, will travel to each region to conduct safety, PII, IT and benefits training.

**Budget Overview**

**Casey McInerney**

**14:59**

Budget Analyst, Casey McInerney, reviewed MVAD budget for fiscal year 2020 (July 2019-June 2020) and 2021 (July 2020-June 2021). MVAD is on track this FY with a healthy budget. There was a large payout to Cheryl Heald when she retired at the beginning of fiscal year 2021. Looking at fiscal year 2020, the Honor and Remember Medallion Fund was not utilized. It was decided to produce advertising materials. After research, it will be cheaper for MVAD to design, print and distribute advertising materials rather than using a third-party. Taryn Phillips presented the advertising materials developed on the projector.

**Board Member Vacancies / Ending Terms**

**Chairman**

**15:06**

Chairman Peter Olson's term ended August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. The Region 5 Representative position is vacant.

Dr. Dan Edelman resigned from his voting member position on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020. His position as Region 4 Representative is vacant.

Veterans at Large position is vacant.

**Issues / Comments / Questions**

Joren Underdahl gave an update on the Southwest Montana Veterans Home located in Butte, MT. The veterans home is about 45 days behind but is scheduled for completion Fall 2020. More information can be found at [www.swmvh.mt.gov](http://www.swmvh.mt.gov).

**Public Comment**

No public comments.

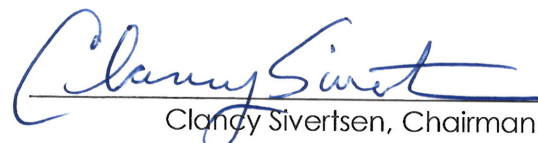
**Next Meeting**

January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 14:00 via Zoom and telephone.

**Adjournment**

Chairman Sivertsen adjourned the meeting at 15:15.

  
Taryn Phillips, Recorder

  
Clancy Sivertsen, Chairman