

Commission members hear concerns from veterans office staff

Concerns to advisory group echoed those raised to committee

BY BRIAN WILSON
NEWS EDITOR

Members of the Taylor County Veterans Service Commission weighed in on operations of the county's veterans service office on Friday after hearing concerns from staff.

The Veterans Service Commission, which is made up of local veterans Donald Schindler, Rev. Warren Behling and Barry Anderson has limited power to take any action. Its primary role is to review requests for assistance for veterans with unmet needs and determine what help can be given. However limited the group may be in taking action on the of-

fice operations, members noted they still had the ability to voice concerns like any other resident.

Commission members show of support came after veterans service office Shellie Shaw and Benefit Specialist Nikki Sherman shared their concerns about the need for privacy in the office to deal with veterans needs.

Shaw explained her goal of going to an appointment-based system in the office. Both positions are currently on the 35-hour per week schedule. Shaw said that they are "losing ground" under that schedule with the amount of work the office has.

"We keep falling behind," she said, noting that they are adding compensatory (comp) time frequently. "We are adding an hour of comp time every day," she said.

According to Shaw she would like veterans to call and make an appointment ahead of time. "The committee is

not a fan of that," she said, referring to the county's veterans service committee which is the county board oversight committee.

At the last meeting of the Veterans Service Committee on March 4, committee members and office staff had discussed creating a hybrid model with days the office would be for appointment-only and set times for walk-in clients. A plan was supposed to be developed and it was slated for further discussion at a future committee meeting planned for early May. The committee had also discussed converting an office space across the hall from the current VSO into a waiting room so that veterans would not have to wait in the hallway.

Sherman said Shaw needed the ability to alter things as needed to operate the office. She said it was hard when they are bombarded with walk-ins. She also raised concerns with HIPPA privacy law compliance.

"If they don't have privacy they won't come in," Anderson said stating that is needed to serve the needs of veterans. "If you have stopped one veteran from killing themselves you have done your job," he said.

"I know I have saved lives," Shaw said.

"I don't think they understand the importance of privacy," Shaw said of the veterans service committee.

Commission members reviewed the annual report for the office and praised Shaw for her work in getting veterans the services they need. Anderson noted there are veterans who have physical wounds and others that are mentally wounded. "It is our job as commissioners to get them to come in," he said, noting that he was happy to see the number going up as veterans get the help they need.

★ County looks to increase size of some committees, shuffle members

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It will take county board action to make the change, but committee members said they would proceed with tentatively setting a committee list with the assumption increasing the committee sizes would pass in order to reduce the amount of time needed during the reorganization meeting next week.

Committee member Lester Lewis also reminded those at the meeting that the county board chairman has the authority to set the appointments to committees and while the county board as a whole provides input that is to advise the board chairman. "The chairman is the final appointing authority," Lewis said.

In addition to the committee structure change to increase committees to at least five people, Lewis said he planned to bring a proposal forward to merge finance and personnel committees into one seven-member committee. Traditionally, there has been significant overlap between the two committees.

Some of the parameters for assigning committees was to review surveys given to all the current and incoming county board members for their interests. Even with no other changes, with the change

of four county board members, there was going to be a shuffle as they are placed into board seats. Goals were to make the number of board appointments roughly equal among county board members.

Newly elected board member Lorie Floyd called on committee members to take into account the expertise and backgrounds of new board members in deciding committees. For example, she noted that she had a 34-year career as a state trooper and could bring that knowledge to a committee like law enforcement.

Lewis said there is a learning curve with service on the board and there are some committees that face issues requiring more experienced board members than others.

Committee members went through the list of committees one by one discussing potential appointments. Major changes proposed in the tentative recommendation were as follows:

Law enforcement — Board member Scott Mildbrand offered to step down from that committee with Floyd and Chuck Zenner looking to be added to it.

Board of health - Mildbrand would be chairman with new board member Lynn Rosemeyer to be added along with Rollie

Thums.

Human Services - Thums will continue as chairman with Rosemeyer as a new appointment.

Forestry — Mildbrand was tentatively named as chairman replacing Chuck Zenner. Zenner said he would like to stay on the committee to keep some continuity. "I don't think you want to change the committee too much," he said. Committee members discussed placing Jim Gebauer on the committee while keeping Myron Books and Gary Beadles. There was also discussion with Greg Knight, Thums and Ray Soper being named.

Zoning — This is one of the three-person committees that would be increased to give more board members input. Lewis would continue as chairman and in addition to the current members would add Mike Bub and Lynn Rosemeyer.

Land Information — Lewis would stay as chairman with Catherine Lemke, Rod Adams, Mike Bub and Ray Soper as tentative appointments. "This needs thoughtful people who will do their homework and study," Lewis said, noting that this is the committee that decided to take property back for nonpayment of taxes. "You deal with heartbreaking situations in this committee," he said.

Buildings and grounds — Diane Albrecht will stay as committee chair with Gebauer and Adams being joined by Lisa Carbaugh and Floyd.

Broadband — There were minimal

changes proposed with Sue Swiantek to replace Gene Knoll and the request for Knoll to stay on as a lay member in place of Mike Schaefer.

Information technology — Bub as chairman with Floyd and Greg Knight joining the committee.

Airport Committee - Zenner as chairman with Albrecht and Swiantek as well as Russ Gowey and Mark Hoffman.

Housing — Sue Swiantek to replace Knoll.

Tourism — Albrecht to become the committee chair with Carbaugh and Floyd joining the current members.

Rail Trail — Sue Swiantek to replace Knoll.

Traffic Safety — Floyd added to the existing committee.

Veterans Service - There was discussion about this with the desire to include one to two lay members who are veterans in addition to the county board members. Mildbrand felt there should be five county board members on that committee. Lewis objected saying that he felt it would be unwieldy with that number and suggested having four county board representatives on it and a veteran lay member. He suggested Larry Peterson would be a good veteran member. Metz said he planned to appoint Steve Voss as the veteran member. After discussion the tentative plan is to have Lewis as chair with Thums, Swiantek, Floyd and Voss serving on it.

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