



# TOWN OF WAKEFIELD

## VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD

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Meeting Minutes – January 19, 2021

Meeting Attendees – Dan Benjamin, Paul Cancelliere, Melinda Cook, Marion Dennehy, Rob Ettinger, Brian McCoubrey, Sean McGrath Jackie Millinor, Michael Owen, Jay Pinette, Kristi Yentile, VSO Dave Mangan

Absent: Rick Pearson

**Item 1: Call to order:** Chairman Pinette called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM

**Item 2: Pledge of Allegiance:** conducted by all attendees

**Item 3: Review/Approval of December 2020 VAB Meeting Minutes:** Motion by Jay, and second by Paul to approve the December meeting minutes. Vote was unanimous.

**Item 4: VSO Report:** from VSO Dave Mangan - Food bank for Wakefield is Wednesday, January 20<sup>th</sup>. Wakefield food pantry has donated dry goods to go along with the Boston Food Bank donations. We currently have 20 recipients.

We currently have 14 recipients on the Chapter 115 program in Wakefield. Re-certifications for 2021 Chapter 115 clients are processing.

Kristi Yentile and I have been continuing surveying the community for Veteran Discounts in the businesses in town. We have gotten up to 40 commitments and will be reaching out next week for more. Will be going down Salem St. As well as Water St. The door decals have been ordered and we will distribute them going forward.

We lost another veteran, Joseph Racamato, to COVID. He was a Korean war veteran. And we lost Salvatore Orifice a WW2 veteran, 93 yrs old, he was the proprietor of the Wakefield Bowladrome on Water St.

A Senior Veteran who lived at 12 Chestnut St. and was displaced as a result of a fire on the upstairs apartment sought out help from the Veterans Service Office in getting placed. He was given advice and contact information for public housing. He has financial stability, so he will be seeking out an apartment for both himself and his son.

Veterans over 65 years old (or under 65 with a 30% or higher disability rating) can contact the VA in Bedford for an appointment for the COVID Vaccine 781-687-4000. Line will be busy, keep trying. You must be enrolled in the VA care program to be eligible.

**Item 5: Recap of 2020 Wreaths Across America Event:** The VAB served as the local coordinator for the 2020 Wreaths Across America (WAA) event held on Saturday, December 19<sup>th</sup> at Forest Glade Cemetery. All agreed it was a very successful event. The goal of 440 wreaths was exceeded by a few dozen, which go in the “bucket” towards next year’s event. An article in today’s Item announced the date and theme (“We’re standing on the shoulders of those that came before us”) of the 2021 event. The Board must decide if it will continue in the role of local



coordinator for the 2021 WAA event. Action Item: Jay to reach out to Mr. Fazio of the DPW to discuss his preference on this question before the Board takes a vote.

**Item 6: Wakefield Veterans Discount Program Update:** VSO Mangan and Kristi provided an update. They have contacted businesses in the downtown area and there has been tremendous enthusiasm among local businesses for this program. Decals to be displayed on the front door/window of participating businesses are expected in tomorrow. It will be helpful to have those in hand when continuing to approach businesses for the first time. They plan to approach businesses on Salem and Water streets next. Dan Benjamin suggested creating flyers, describing the program and participating businesses, to have available in the VSO's office to hand out. It was also suggested that the list of participating businesses should be shared in the proposed "Veterans' Corner" section of the Item. Action Item: VSO Mangan to provide to the Board the excel document with the detail of the businesses contacted and signed up. Action Item: Jay to share image of final decal with Board.

**Item 7: Wakefield "Veterans' Corner" Program Review/Planning:** This new section in the Item will likely run once per month, on Tuesday, but space is available on an ad hoc basis as required. Banner designs have been reviewed by the Board, but work will continue on those designs and be run by the Board at a future date. Discussion was held on whether VSO Mangan or the Board should be the "host" of the Veterans' Corner. It was decided that a byline for each month's article could reference both the VSO and the VAB. The Board felt it was important that the public knows the Board exists and the composition of its members. Contact details for VSO Mangan and the Veteran Service Office could be included at the end of each month's article. Logistically, at each month's VAB Board meeting, we will discuss the next month's article. Action Item: Jay to draft high level "Introductory Article" for review by Board.

**Item 8: Memorial Day 2021:** Discussion on planning for Memorial Day was had. A limited/virtual ceremony is most likely due to the ongoing Covid pandemic, similar to what the Board conducted for Veteran's Day. We need to work with the Item and WCAT again to provide coverage and programming that day. VSO Mangan and Jay are gathering quotes for flags. Kristi is looking at getting 13 wreaths for the various town memorials (Greenwood School, Veterans Memorial Common, Paddy Heights, etc). We need to identify a guest speaker, a member of clergy, and contact high school music department and the Wakefield Choral Society. Melinda suggested we could have segments individually recorded virtually, and WCAT could splice the program together. This will provide flexibility on who we can ask to participate. Action Item: Before any planning can begin, Jay to reach out to Mr. Maio on guidance from the town on the form of the ceremony.

**Item 9: Proposed Project to Erect Veterans' Field Flagpole and Memorial:** There is currently no sign or memorial identifying Veterans Field. It doesn't appear that there has ever been one. Dan provided some suggestions and images of signage and memorials at various Veteran-themed sites around the surrounding area. Dan has spoken with both Sardella Sign and Quinlan Memorial who have agreed to be involved in the project. The cost of the project is able to be funded by a couple of families in town. A small inscription at the bottom of the memorial ("A gift to the Town of Wakefield from the \_\_\_\_ Family, etc") would be required to secure the gift from the families. Due to the nature of this project, it should be presented to the Town Council. It was noted by Jay that excise tax bills in town have a checkbox to contribute to a "Memorial Maintenance Fund". He was not aware of ever using any such funds, but perhaps we should inquire. It was noted this checkbox is only available when you use submit the paper form, not on electronic submissions. When we introduce the project to the public, we should do so with a Veterans' Corner article an

include a little bit of the history of the site in the article as well. We will continue the discussion at the February Board meeting. Action Item: Dan to send designs/pictures to the Board.

**Item 10: Proposed “Veteran of the Month Program”:** Paul described his idea for this program. Sort of like a “Soldier of the Quarter” program we were familiar with in the service. The idea would be to award this on a periodic basis and confer some benefit to the winner. A free dinner at a local restaurant (especially a restaurant participating in the Veterans’ Discount program), gift certificate, preferred seating at ceremonies, etc. Maybe invite them to lead the Pledge of Allegiance at a Town Council meeting. We could also highlight in the Veterans’ Corner important news about local active duty members. Returning home, major awards, deployments, promotions, etc. The old “Hometown News Services” within the military used to provide this type of information on local service members. Can recruiting centers help us? We may need ask family members to submit. Something like *“Do you have a friend or family member that is an active duty service member who you would like to see recognized? Let us know!”* Discussion to be continued at February Board meeting.

**Item 11: Other Business:** Board very briefly discussed “Coats for Vets” program at Gillette stadium in December that Chief Skory of the WPD participated in. Board to convey our willingness to help/participate in the program next year. Briefly discussed who has access to the self-reporting check box as a U.S. Veteran on the annual town census form. That information could be very helpful with the Board’s outreach. Action Item: Jay to talk about that data with someone from Town Hall.

**Item 12: Adjournment:** The chair adjourned the meeting at 7:50 PM

Submitted by: Rob Ettinger, Wakefield VAB Clerk