



**Government Office Building  
9830 Patuxent Woods Dr.  
Columbia, MD 21046**

**MINUTES  
Thursday, 01 April 2021**

Meeting Opened        1900 hours  
 Meeting Closed        2003 hours  
 Meeting Location      Virtual (WebEx); due to COVID-19 pandemic

**MEETING SUMMARY:**

J. Greg Jolissaint, Chair, presiding, opened the meeting at 1900 hrs.

**1. Roll Call of Commission Members to Establish a Quorum**

- a. Roll Call: The roll was taken; ten commission members present, two excused, and one vacant. The Chair declared the Commission was in a quorum and brought the meeting to order.

Commissioner	Present	Excused	Absent
J. Greg Jolissaint (Chair)	✓		
Jonathan Branch (Co-Chair)	✓		
Reginald Avery	✓		
Cherron Blakely		✓	
Michael Blum	✓		
Steven M. Bolen	✓		
Nafrettifi Griffin	✓		
Michael Griggs	✓		
Kelly Kesler	✓		
Robert Lowell		✓	
Keith McGuire	✓		
Paul Rivers	✓		
(Vacant)			

- b. Acknowledgement of Howard County Government Officials in Attendance: Lisa Terry (Manager, Howard County Office of Veterans and Military Families) and Jennifer Jones (Deputy Chief of Staff, Howard County Executive).



- c. Special Guest(s): Mary-Lena Kikta (United Through Reading) and Alexis Johnson, LMSW (VA Health Care for Homeless Veterans).
- d. Others in Attendance: John Spain (A.L. Post 156), Bob Pelletier (A.L. Post 156/VFW Post 7472), Yale Stenzler, Linda Bergofsky (Coordinator, Veterans Advisory Council, Frederick County), and Vikki Garcia (Community Outreach for U.S. Representative John Sarbanes).

## **2. Meeting Opened by the Chair/Pledge of Allegiance**

- The Chair led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **3. Reminders of Virtual Meeting Etiquette**

- The Chair stated the meeting rules of etiquette.

## **4. Consideration of the March 2021 Meeting Minutes**

- The March minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

## **5. Guest Speaker(s)**

### Alexis Johnson:

- Alexis is a new VA Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) social worker.
- She will help veterans navigate the VA healthcare system, including enrollment.
- Veterans can contact Alexis at 443.488.4875 or Aimee Olivera-Sanchez at 443.401.8645.
- The VA's Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC) will be opening back up on 05 April at 0830 hours. Homeless veterans can get a meal, take a shower, and get other help. Alexis will send flyer about the opening to Lisa.

### Mary-Lena Kikta

- United Through Reading (UTR) is a 32-year old non-profit that connects veterans who are separated from their families - due to deployment or military assignment. UTR helps servicemembers read stories to their children through videos that the veteran creates and sends to their families.
- UTR has an application available on iOS and Android that servicemembers can use to read a book, record it, and send it via email to their family. UTR also works with libraries to allow servicemembers to check out books for free to read and record.
- Mary-Lena is a USAF veteran, and her husband is active duty USMC.
- The Chair asked Mary-Lena to send the Commission flyers and brochures on the UTR program.
- Mary-Lena can be reached at [mary-lenakikta@utr.org](mailto:mary-lenakikta@utr.org). More information about UTR can be found at [www.unitedthroughreading.org](http://www.unitedthroughreading.org).

## **6. Old Business**

- a. Update on Survey Proposed by the Commission's Subcommittee on Equity and Racial Justice:



- The Commission received a copy of the survey electronically.
  - The Chair noted that a question was added to the survey: (Question #5) “Please indicate the degree to which you feel welcome and seen (i.e., valued, included, and respected) in the following areas in Howard County ...”
  - The Chair asked Lisa Terry how the survey will be distributed. Lisa plans to distribute the survey through our networks and the County’s. Jennifer Jones will also help with the distribution.
  - Commissioner Blum suggested changing the last response in Question #5 to be more positive. He suggested changing “Health Disparities” to “Health Care Access” or another more positive statement. The Commission agreed.
  - The County has approved the release of the survey.
- b. Update on Veterans Support Group:
- The next meeting is Monday, 05 April. There are currently six veterans signed up for the meeting. Commissioner Rivers expects ten veterans will participate.
  - The Support Group meets the first Monday of the month from 1800 - 1930 hours.
  - Register for the Support Group here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nami-howard-county-connection-veterans-support-group-tickets-130261512691>.
- c. Feedback on the VAMHCS March Meeting:
- The last meeting was held on 17 March via a virtual connection. Dr. Sandra Marshall presided.
  - Almost 89% of veterans in VAMHCS nursing homes have been vaccinated.
  - Any veteran that needs a vaccine can make an appointment by calling the COVID-19 Vaccine Hotline at 410.605.7740 (M-F; 0800 - 1600 hrs.)
  - The National Cemetery COVID-19 visitation rules remain in effect.
  - 29 March is Vietnam War Veterans Day commemorating the end of direct U.S. military action in Vietnam in 1973.
  - The Airborne Hazards and Burn Pits Center of Excellence (AHBPCE) has established a network of experts in respiratory health to conduct clinical evaluations to study post-9/11 veterans with reparatory problems.
  - The Chair stated that all veterans, spouses, and caregivers are now eligible to get a COVID-19 vaccination. The Chair urged veterans to pursue all resources to get a vaccine.
- d. Update on Veterans Day Presentations in Howard County Schools:
- Commissioner Avery said that the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) will hold a 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Simulated Congressional Hearing at Hanover Hills Elementary School on 26 May. The Chair urged Commissioners to participate. Commissioners Avery, Blakely, Blum, Bolen, Jolissaint, and Kesler and Manger/HCOVMF, Lisa Terry volunteered.
  - HCPSS is still determining if schools will be back to in-person learning this Fall. Veterans Day activities are TBD.
- e. MHFA Proposal to the FMA Foundation Board:



- The Chair noted that Fort Meade is incorporating mental health into its basic training for employees.

f. Update on Regional Veteran Symposium in Lieu of Annual Veteran Resource Fair:

- Lisa is working with the Department of Labor on three virtual events: two hiring fairs and veterans' benefits. The VA Benefit event will be held on 20 April at 1100 hours.
- Lisa is working on a Memorial Day tribute to include social media videos. She is also working a monthly tribute to veterans.

g. Update on Howard County Web-Based Veterans Tribute:

- The County is launching a new web-based platform. So, the Commissions Tribute Site is on hold until after the County has transitioned to the new platform.

h. Veterans Home Exploratory Committee:

- Linda Bergofsky said that the state is going ahead with plans to open a home in Sykesville (Carroll County). She suggested asking to have beds set aside for Howard County veterans. Linda will connect the Commission with the Carroll County Commissioner that is working on the Sykesville home project. She also suggested looking for a property that can be converted to a home instead of building a new structure.

i. Potential Collaboration with Rotary Club:

- No update.

j. Commission Letter of Appreciation and Thanks for Milton Matthews, Columbia Association President. Departing his CA role in April 2021:

- The Chair will write a letter of appreciation on behalf of the Commission.

**7. Business “On Hold” Due to the Pandemic**

- Columbia Lake Monument Completion. (Donations can still be made via mail.)

**8. New Business**

a. Update on the Veterans Day Parade:

- The next meeting will be held on 13 April.
- John Spain said that the fundraising committee is working to define requirements and activities to generate funds for the parade.
- Memorial Day coordination with different organizations in the county is ongoing.
- The Chair would like the Commission to help with fundraising.

b. Reminder of Flag Retirement Ceremony on 17 April:

- A.L. Post 156 will hold a Flag Retirement Ceremony on 17 April. A flag etiquette class will start at 0830 hours and the retirement ceremony will start at 1100 hours.

c. New Business from Commission Members:



- No new business.

**9. Other Announcements or Dates of Importance**

- The Chair urges everyone to get vaccinated, continue physical distancing, wear a mask, and wash your hands.

**10. Next Commission Meeting Date(s)**

- The next Commission meeting will be held on 06 May starting at 1900 hours.

**11. ADJOURNMENT:**

- The Chair adjourned the meeting at 2003 hours.

The Commission stands in adjournment until  
**06 May 2021.**

Minutes were taken by Steven M. Bolen.

J. Greg Jolissaint  
Presiding  
Chair, HCCVMF