

MINUTES**ARKANSAS VETERANS' HOME TASK FORCE****Thursday, June 6, 2013****10:00 a.m.****Room 149, State Capitol****Little Rock, Arkansas**

The Arkansas Veterans' Home Task Force met Thursday, June 6, 2013 in Room 149 of the State Capitol in Little Rock, Arkansas. The following members attended: Senator Jane English, Chair; Representatives Charles Edwards, Kim Hammer, and George McGill.

Non-legislative members: Paulino Acosta, Jr., Amy Schlesing (proxy for Ronnie Anderson), AnnaMarie Atwood, Jane Benton, Miles Brown, Terry Callahan, Joseph Didden, Mary V. Erdman, Steve Gray, Mike Hampton, Patricia Herring, Anne Laidlaw, Bob Moody, Alicia "Cissy" Rucker, David Beranek (proxy for Bob Schoenborn), and Tom W. Thomas.

Other legislators attending: Senator Jonathan Dismang and Representatives Douglas House, Stephen Magie, Mark Perry, and Jeffrey Wardlaw.

Senator English called the meeting to order and recognized the Task Force members for introductions.

Consideration to approve Minutes of May 7, 2013 [EXHIBIT B]

Representative John Edwards made the motion to approve the minutes. Without objection, the motion was approved by the Committee.

Goals and Timelines [EXHIBIT C]

Senator English stated that the goals and timelines are a framework for the Task Force to accomplish its goals by October 31st, noting that some changes may be made.

Mr. Charles Johnson, Deputy Director, Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA), was recognized. He discussed projections submitted by the ADVA. Based on the projections, Arkansas will need approximately 653 beds for veterans by 2020; the state currently has 108 beds in Fayetteville with a census of approximately 78 beds, however, this number is predicted to increase. Neighboring states projections were described as follows: Louisiana currently has 786 beds—projected to need 638 beds by 2020, Mississippi currently has 600 beds—projected to need 480 by 2020. This information is based on the future declining veterans' population. According to Mr. Johnson, there are 79 accredited, private nursing homes that have contracts with the Veterans Association in Arkansas; 33 were contacted and noted that 115 veterans residing in these homes receive per diem. He noted that other veterans in the nursing homes are on a private pay system of Medicaid or Medicare. Mr. Johnson reported that some of the proposed services for the new veterans home will include: day care, assisted living, nursing home, dementia care, and hospice care.

Mr. Johnson gave a brief update on the application process for matching funds. He stated that two documents were submitted this month to complete the application process. Mr. Johnson reported that with the help of the Arkansas Building Authority (ABA), ADVA put together a schematic placeholder to help ADVA get matching funds [HANDOUT #7]. Mr. Johnson stated that the placeholder has a basic layout of the cottage format with a basic floor plan, noting that the estimated total cost is under \$21 million.

Senator English stated that although the schematic placeholder facility is not the final plan for the Task Force, it gives them an idea and something to look at.

Ms. Iris Pickett, Licensed Social Worker, Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System, Community Nursing Home Program Coordinator (CNHP), was recognized. Ms. Pickett stated that she is responsible for overseeing basic order agreements that CNHP has with nursing homes in the community. Annual surveys are required. CNHP only caters to a certain category of veterans; such as 60% service connected—including un-employability, and permanent and total ratings completed by the Veterans Administration Regional (VA) Office

that would make the veteran eligible for services for a service connected disability. A non-service connected veteran can be placed in the community nursing home for 32 days but the amount of time is limited.

Senator English asked has there been an increase in the number of veterans applying for nursing home placement. Ms. Pickett replied, "yes". Since 2010, the number has increased from 52 to approximately 80 veterans. Senator English asked is the percent of veterans' disabilities above 70%. Ms. Pickett replied, the percentage of service connected disability varies noting, that if the rating of service connection is 70% or greater veterans are eligible for the program and VA will cover the cost of long-term care. However, if veterans are rated 60% service connected and unemployable; or 60% service connected and permanent and totally disabled they are eligible for placement as well. Ms. Pickett noted that some veterans that are not service connected at the 70% or greater rating may be considered for placement pending the need for placement is related to their service connected disability.

Senator Edwards expressed his concerns with the oversight of staffing and cost of maintenance for the new facility. He stressed the importance of the Task Force creating a dialogue with experienced individuals that have operated and maintained veterans homes.

Representative Hammer asked what is the federal matching rate for the grant. Mr. Johnson replied, that the matching rate is 65% and approximately \$15 million in state matching funds. He noted that ABA established the estimated prices for the project.

Representative Hammer asked that the following questions be addressed at future meetings:

- comparison between the traditional facility concept and the cottage concept
- maintenance costs
- existing facilities and types of care provided
- long-term care issues within facilities, e.g., citations, etc.

Senator English expressed that she would like to invite individuals to attend the next Task Force meeting to discuss information on facilities they have built. Representative House stated that based on his experience with dementia wards, the placeholder facility is not compatible for a dementia ward or daycare, noting that the facility has to follow the function.

Representative House asked where is the greatest need among Arkansas' veteran population. Ms. Pickett replied, that the greatest need for veterans is dementia care because it is hard to place these individuals. She noted that there is an increased number of veterans with Alzheimer's and dementia however; the local community nursing homes have secured units that are not certified, operating as Alzheimer's units.

Ms. Erdman expressed her concerns with the schematic placeholder facility (cottage style). She reported that nationally as of August 2012, there are approximately 253,330 veterans suffering from traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and 131,341 veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. She noted that a cottage concept facility is nice but it would not be suitable for taking care of patients with these disorders.

Senator English reiterated that the schematic design presented is only a placeholder and is not the final design for the new veterans home. She is interested in the Task Force looking at all types of facility designs to ensure the best decision is made for the veterans in Arkansas and to ensure that the facility is manageable.

Mr. Hampton expressed his concerns with the September timeline for the facility type and design, noting that the design of the building will impact the facility selection. He suggested that the September timeline be moved up to address this issue. Mr. Acosta encouraged the Task Force members to determine the type of veterans that the facility will serve before deciding upon the type of facility.

Representative Hammer asked whether or not the schematic placeholder, that includes 10 cottages are designed to take care of the dementia need.

Mr. Floyd Farmer, State Engineer, ABA, was recognized. He replied that ABA assisted ADVA with creating the estimate for the facility. The estimate is a high-level broad scope estimate, and many of the items that will be encountered in the construction project are not known at this time. Allowances are also included in the estimates.

Mr. Farmer stated that until a specific design concept is created the estimate is still in fluxed. The concept includes a couple cottages that will be a little more costly than the others to accommodate the dementia needs. Representative Hammer suggested that the site location should be a high priority, to determine the design of the facility and the true cost of the project, if the land cannot be acquired at no cost to the state. Senator English expressed that the facility location will need plenty of green space, noting that atmosphere is very important. She stated that this is an economic development project, noting that the schematic placeholder is a basic site requirement and the proposed services are areas that could be implemented within the facility. Senator English stressed the importance of the facility being in a location where people live and where families can visit, near shopping centers, medical facilities, etc. A minimum of 20 acres was discussed for the new facility with room for expansion.

Senator English reported that the proposed services [Handout #5] has been sent to the Arkansas Economic Development Commission as well as every economic development representative in every city in the state. She stated that anyone that has an interest or may want to submit a proposal, should feel free to do so by July 3, 2013. All proposals should be mailed or hand delivered to the director of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs. After the proposal deadline, a three-member Task Force committee will review all proposals and narrow them down to 3 to present to the Task Force. The Task Force will visit the 3 communities to understand what their proposals are, investigate their property and amenities, and make a decision. Senator English asked for 3 volunteers of the Task Force to serve on the three member committee. **Ms. Mary Erdman, Mr. Terry Callahan, and Mr. Tom W. Thomas volunteered.**

Representative Edwards reported that HB1598 (appropriation bill for new veterans home) included a provision for a \$7 million cash funds—i.e., private donations, gifts, and bequests to help with the cost of the project. He noted that Mr. Dustin McDaniel, Attorney General has committed \$200,000. Representative Edwards stated that special language allows tax deductible donations from private citizens to go into the account to help fund the new veterans' home. He pointed out that this is a good opportunity for the public to help by contributing funds. Mr. Johnson reported that a family has donated \$293,000.

Mr. Bill Harris with the Arkansas Veterans Alliance was recognized. He asked, is there a mechanism in place for non-Task Force members to offer or make suggestions. Senator English replied, that the Task Force will make available to the public, email addresses for her, the Task Force members (with their approval) and the following agencies: Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs and the Bureau of Legislative Research. Comments and concerns may be directed to any of these parties, to be brought before the taskforce. She noted that individuals can also forward questions or concerns to Ms. Erdman to be submitted to the Task Force.

Mr. Farmer gave a brief overview of the preliminary project development timeline for creating a new veterans home [HANDOUT #4]. He reported that the timeline begins when the agency is ready to start the selection process for their design professional. According to Mr. Farmer, the entire process will take approximately 30 to 41 months to complete.

Mr. Mike Hampton asked when will the Task Force agree upon the services for the new veterans' home. Senator English replied, the Task Force can possibly discuss this issue at the next meeting, noting that the cost of providing the services will need to be discussed as well. Referencing [Handout #5], Mr. Hampton stated that the Task Force should approve the 5 proposed services. Ms. Rucker pointed out that the Task Force has to continue to explore how the proposals can be funded before deciding levels of care, noting that dementia services will be a #1 priority. Ms. Erdman stated that Medicare is a revenue source for a limited time, if the facility provides rehabilitation services to veterans. She noted that funding for Hospice care is also available for a limited time, if the patient has a life limit of 6 months or less.

Senator English concluded by stating that Varnaria Vickers-Smith will send out draft minutes to Task Force members for their review.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:15 a.m.