

**MINUTES****ARKANSAS VETERANS' HOME TASK FORCE****Thursday, September 12, 2013****10:00 a.m.****Room 149, State Capitol****Little Rock, Arkansas**

The Arkansas Veterans' Home Task Force met Thursday, September 12, 2013 in Room 149 of the State Capitol in Little Rock, Arkansas. The following members attended: Senator Jane English, Chair; Bobby Pierce, Jim Hendren and Representatives Charles Edwards, Kim Hammer and George McGill.

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

Other legislators attending Senators Jonathan Dismang and Gary Stubblefield. Representatives Ann Clemmer, Charlie Collins, Douglas House, Sheilla Lampkin, Stephen Magie, Mark McElroy, Mark Perry and Sue Scott.

Senator English called the meeting to order.

**Consideration to approve Minutes of August 5, 2013 [EXHIBIT B]**

**Representative McGill made the motion to approve the minutes. Without objection, the motion was approved.**

**Discussion of Site Visits**

Senator English thanked every community in Arkansas for submitting their proposal for a potential veteran's home site. She reported that the Task Force visited four sites in August: Fort Smith, Russellville, Haskell, and Jacksonville.

Ms. Rucker stated that the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) received 35 proposals by the Task Force deadline of July 3, 2013 however; several more proposals were received after that deadline. Ms. Rucker reported that she and Mr. Charles Johnson have visited over 20 sites within the past several months. They are looking at where the greatest population of veterans is located and what the various communities have to offer. Ms. Rucker reported that the site criteria is very clear and specifies, that the new veterans home cannot be located near an industrial area, railroads, airports or any facilities with loud noises. Ms. Rucker explained that the July 3, 2013 request for proposal deadline was set by the Task Force; it was not an ADVA deadline. She noted that there are several proposals that have potential in addition to the proposed four sites that the Task Force decided to visit.

Representative Hammer suggested that the Task Force and the House Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs Committee and the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee visit the Fayetteville nursing home. At the request of the Task Force, Ms. Rucker agreed to schedule the site visit.

Ms. Rucker expressed that ADVA will be responsible by putting many safeguards in place for building the new veterans home, noting that it is an economic development project. She added that ADVA has partnered with many state agencies to gather their expertise and knowledge to get the job done right.

**Ms. Rucker stated that ADVA will post the criteria for a strengthened proposal that is based on a point system.** Interested communities can submit their proposals by November 15, 2013. Communities that submitted proposals by the Task Force deadline can request a copy of the new proposal criteria and submit proposals or additional information that is required. According to Ms. Rucker, the new proposal will provide ADVA with pertinent information, that will remove the emotion out of the decision making process. Ms. Rucker stated that the new proposal will assist ADVA with deciding where the best location should be for veterans. She noted that ADVA will make the final decision for the new veterans home location based on advice from the Task Force and the Arkansas Veterans Commission (AVC). **She added that a copy of the new proposal criteria will be sent to every site location that ADVA has visited and a copy will be sent to Varnaria Vickers-Smith for dissemination to the Task Force members.**

Senator Dismang stated that more clarification may be provided to the Task Force outlining its purpose, duties and responsibilities. He added that the Task Force is considered as an advisory committee to ADVA. He suggested that ADVA establish firmer timelines, standards, and clearer expectations of what the other entities roles are with regards to the final decision.

Mr. Kurt Neumann with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC), gave a brief overview of the AEDC's dialogue with ADVA. He informed the members that Nebraska had recently gone through the same process using a quantifiable point system for evaluating proposals. Mr. Neumann suggested that ADVA review the criteria to determine what is relevant to their situation and tailor their evaluation tool using these criteria. He concluded by stating that AEDC will assist ADVA with developing the new criteria.

With regards to the new veterans home, Representative Hammer asked who will make the final decision. Ms. Rucker replied, according to the legislation, the final decision will be made by the director of ADVA, however, the decision will be made through the advice provided by the Task Force and AVC. Ms. Rucker reported that as of now there is no consensus among either group.

Mr. Hampton stated that he represents the Arkansas Veterans Coalition (AVC) and that their discussions have included various topics: such as the greatest needs for veterans and what they would like best. He reported that he is also a member of the Combat Veterans and Motorcycle Association, noting that they have identified every long-term care nursing home facility in Arkansas that is serving veterans. According to Mr. Hampton, AVC concluded that the majority of veterans that are in need, are located in Central Arkansas and ADVA should concentrate on building a facility in this area. He further suggested that the Task Force support the idea of giving priority to Central Arkansas proposals.

Ms. Erdman stated that she provided the Task Force with the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) statistics at a previous meeting and offered to provide it again if it was requested and/or needed. **Senator English requested that Mr. Acosta present the numbers on where veterans are located in the state, along with the number of veterans that are returning with TBI at the next Task Force meeting.**

Ms. Rucker gave a brief update on the application process. She stated that ADVA has amended their application to reflect or include a replacement veterans home as opposed to a new home due to closing the former Little Rock Veterans Homes for safety reasons, noting that Arkansas qualifies for a replacement home. The Veterans Administration's regulation specifies that a replacement home must be within a two hour drive of the former home which encompasses Central Arkansas. Ms. Rucker reported that this information will be a part of the new proposal criteria. Representative Hammer asked would the new facility be run by the State, the veterans or by a private company. Ms. Rucker replied, that the legislation specifies that ADVA would be the administrative head over the new facility.

Representative Hammer asked does the Task Force have to stop its work after the sunset date or could it continue on in its advisory role. Senator English replied, the legislation specifies that the Task Force would be dissolved after the report is made to the Arkansas Legislative Council (ALC) on October 31, 2013. She will check with ALC to determine whether or not the Task Force can become a subcommittee of the House Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs Committee.

**Representative Hammer made the motion that all ADVA , future considerations for the Veterans Home, moving forward be in accordance with limitations established by federal guidelines. Without objection, the motion was approved by the Committee.**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:42 a.m.