

Jefferson County Veterans Assistance Commission Meeting Summary – February 4, 2026

Start: 6:14 PM

End (Open Session): 7:22 PM (Executive session followed)

Location: 816 Main St Mt Vernon, IL

Attendees: (Quorum Confirmed)

- Delegates and Alternates from American Legion, DAV, VFW, and Dan Vets
 - Absent: Michael Hayden (arrived later), Joe Norris (arrived during meeting)
 - Guests: Rachel Chapman, Dave Keene
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1. Call to Order & Opening Administrative Matters

- The meeting was called to order at 6:14 PM.
- Pledge of Allegiance and other decorum protocols were suspended for the evening.
- Roll call was performed; a quorum was confirmed.
- Minutes from the previous meeting were passed around rather than read aloud. A motion was approved to skip the reading.
- Wave AI summary system is being used to assist with minutes, with minutes being posted on the new website and shared via email.
- The new website is live: Published the last two months of meeting minutes.

2. Treasurer's Report

- **Treasurer Absent:** Michael Hayden.
- Account balances as of 5:00 PM:
 - **Fundraiser/Donation Account:** \$445
 - **County Deposit Account:** \$100 (plus a pending \$15,000 ACH county transfer, initiated last week, expected soon)
- **Banking logistics:**
 - Debit card received for the first account, not yet for the second (operating) account; checks for both accounts pending.
 - Issues with checks ordered through local banks (address requirements).
 - Intention to order checks online for efficiency/cost.
- **Expense Reimbursements:**
 - \$76.69: Pending reimbursement to Kevin for Illinois nonprofit signup.
 - \$137.20: Approved reimbursement to Zach Brooks for hotel (two nights) for outreach purposes.
- **Process improvements discussed:** Recommendation to obtain debit cards for all operational accounts to streamline expense handling.

3. Sickness & Distress

- Noted passing of Kerry Janney (US Army veteran, Elizabethtown). Funeral in Harrisburg; efforts to gather honor guard attendance. Coordination ongoing with the family.
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4. Communications

- County informed of a \$15,000 transfer (pending in account).
 - Update from recent VFW district meeting:
 - Ongoing lawsuits regarding certification requirements for VAC superintendents statewide.
 - Legislation likely to mandate hiring only certified benefits managers to manage VACs in the near future.
 - Having a certified Service Officer as superintendent would position Jefferson County ahead of compliance.
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5. Committee Reports

- No standing committees yet; functions handled by active members.
 - Office rental arrangement discussed – intention to pay 2 months' rent (\$1,000) upon receiving county money, as previously voted.
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6. Unfinished Business

a. Donations & Fundraising

- Updates on potential donation from Kenny Hayes/ET Simons Construction (regarding a found backhoe).
 - No funds/confirmation received yet. Follow-up assigned.
- Check from American Legion donation (action pending based on motion last meeting).

b. Account Designations & Procedures

- **Official naming:** Accounts formalized as “Operating” (county funds) and “Discretionary/Fundraising” (donations/private funds).
 - **Check protocol:** Discussion on two signatories for checks, alignment with bylaws, and updating procedures upon hiring a superintendent.
 - **Bylaw update needed** for clear check-signing policy and signatory authority.
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7. Applications for Superintendent

- Application period closed as of February 3, 2026. Six resumes received (two late submissions).
 - Two applicants not veterans – ineligible. Of remaining, no one but Zach Brooks is already a certified Service Officer.
 - Concerns discussed about job hopping and residency; consensus that Zach Brooks is the standout, with veteran status, certification, and local residency.
 - Recommendation to formalize a bylaw: if hired candidate does not live in Jefferson County, they must move within six months of hire.
 - **Hiring process:**
 - Motion made and carried to hire Zach Brooks as superintendent.
 - VFW delegate/alternate abstained appropriately.
 - **Effective date:** Targeted March 1, 2026, with possible earlier or partial start if scheduling allows.
 - **Transition policy:** Zach to assist VFW office in current role until replacement found; may assist in both offices if required temporarily.
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8. New Superintendent Compensation Package

- **Salary:** \$60,400 per year (as discussed and previously budgeted; motion approved).
 - **Compensation structure:** Salaried, not hourly, due to variable and on-call nature of work.
 - **Holidays:** All federal holidays off.
 - **PTO:** 30 days per year (“use it or lose it”) – to be finalized (proposal to allow some carryover under consideration for exceptional circumstances).
 - **Benefits:** No insurance or health benefits requested/needed by candidate at present.
 - **Retirement:** Motion approved to establish a Simple 401k with 3% employer match (local Edward Jones representative or similar suggested).
 - **Payroll services:** Proposals from local and regional payroll services being solicited; cost and features to be compared before selection (Priority Staffing, Kemper, ADP under consideration).
 - **Position Requirements/Budget:** Will be further detailed at next meeting (reporting requirements, time accounting, office setup, etc.)
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9. Office & Operations Planning

- **Office Setup:**
 - Internet, phone (cost-effective VOIP suggested, with recording capability), equipment, etc. to be coordinated by Zach in conjunction with existing resources/knowledge from the VFW office.
- **Signage:**
 - Design and placement to be coordinated with the property manager and local government contacts; will be timed to coincide with opening/employment start.
- **Website Upgrades:**
 - New site live at vacjc.org.
 - Request for content: bios, photos, event/news updates, contact info for delegates/alternates, etc.
 - Motion to post minutes and reports (excluding sensitive treasurer data for public).

10. Assistance Requests

- **Guest: Rachel Chapman presented requests for aid**, notably roof repairs due to leaks and age (partial repair already funded/facilitated through local contacts).
 - No action taken pending establishment of formal aid criteria, legal vetting, and compliance with state code.
 - Zach Brooks to handle intake and vetting in official superintendent capacity; further information and coordination pending.
 - Discussion on future need for a process to identify and prioritize similar assistance cases.

11. Insurance

- Motion approved to obtain at least three liability insurance quotes (focus on employee dishonesty and directors & officers coverage).
- Agents/contacts suggested; will standardize coverage requirements for all quotes.

12. Organizational Discussion

- Brief clarification and affirmation of officer roles – secretary, vice president, backups, etc.
- Delegates and staff support each other as needed to cover absences and ensure continuity.

13. Policy Discussions

- **Paid Time Off & Carryover:**
 - 30 days/year approved, with initial “use it or lose it” policy.
 - Subject to further review at March meeting; rationale to allow some carryover for illness or exceptional circumstances.
 - **Reporting:** Superintendent will provide monthly reports on service delivery, expenditures, and absences.
 - **Bylaw updates:** Required to codify new procedures for finances, PTO, and superintendent role.
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14. Additional Donations

- Waltonville VFW provided a \$250 donation check.
 - Legion donation check also pending (confirmation to follow).
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15. Outreach/PR

- Planning for formal office opening/ribbon cutting.
 - Press releases and public awareness to coincide with full operational status.
 - Ensure coordinated signage with property owner/manager and local government.
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16. Executive Session

- Entered at end of open session (motion, roll call vote).
 - **Purpose:** To discuss sensitive aspects of guest requests for aid (notably, concerns about background and conduct of individuals requesting assistance).
 - Decision: Caution urged for housing/roof-related financial commitments and for vetting of any beneficiary's circumstances and history.
 - Consensus: Need strong, transparent vetting and benefits coordination processes before large grants are given.
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17. Action Items

- **Follow-up with Kenny Hayes/Simons Construction** on potential donation/reward.
- **American Legion** to issue previously approved donation check.
- **Finalize and order checks** and debit cards for both accounts.
- **Submit and process pending reimbursements** (Kevin \$76.69, Zach \$137.20).
- **Zach Brooks** to prepare for March 1 superintendent start; work on office setup and vetting of assistance requests.
- **Begin process for opening payroll and benefits accounts/services;** compare proposals.
- **Obtain three insurance quotes** for required coverages (liability, employee dishonesty, D&O).
- **Draft clear bylaws** distinguishing operating/discretionary account policies and superintendent duties.
- **Website improvements:** Solicit and add member bios, contact info, event photos (with proper consent), and approved public documents.
- **Prepare office signage and press release** for official opening.
- **Formulate and finalize PTO/carryover policy** before March 1.

- **Continue working group/committee coordination** for insurance, payroll, website, and office operations as needed.
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18. Next Meeting / Follow-up

- **Next meeting:** No date set; implied to target before March 1, 2026.
 - Open items to address:
 - PTO policy review and possible amendment.
 - Finalization of insurance, payroll, and benefits provider selections.
 - Detailed reporting/accounting standards and bylaw adoption.
 - Members asked to review website and submit content suggestions/photos.
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19. Adjournment

- Returned from executive session at 7:22 PM; adjournment motion approved thereafter.
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20. Additional Extended Discussions

a. Superintendent Selection Process

- Discussion thorough regarding rationale for Zach Brooks' selection:
 - Only certified applicant; meets anticipated legal requirements.
 - Local residency.
 - Strong work history and transparency.

- Emphasis on transparent recording of decision factors in minutes to avoid perceptions of impropriety.

b. Financial Controls

- Emphasis on proper signatories for all accounts.
- Clear differentiation of funds for donation/discretionary versus county operating.
- Need for robust checks-and-balances on financial disbursement, especially regarding assistance grants.

c. Veteran Assistance Philosophy and Precedent

- Debate on setting precedents for large-scale aid (e.g., roof replacements).
 - Need for documented, state code-compliant criteria for major expenditures and clear communication among members on such matters.
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Summary prepared by:

Robert White

February 4, 2026

Sent from my iPad