

Veteran Assistance Commission of Jefferson County

Meeting Summary Date: March 11, 2026 Location: 716 Main St Mt Vernon, IL

Attendees and Roll Call

- **Present:**
 - Gary Reynolds
 - Kevin Gatewood
 - David Nesbitt
 - Robert White
 - Scott Burge
 - Ryan Shurtz
 - Zach Brooks (Superintendent)
 - **Absent:**
 - Michael Hayden
 - Eric Kennedy
 - Ben Newborn
 - **Guests:**
 - Carolyn King (DAV Member)
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Main Topics Discussed

1. Meeting Administration and Previous Minutes

- The meeting was called to order.
 - The pledge was omitted due to lack of a flag.
 - Officer roll call recorded absences as noted above.
 - Minutes of the previous meeting were printed and passed around.
 - Suggestion to distribute meeting summaries and transcripts via email using an AI-generated summary, with member approval for this process.
 - **Motion:** Minutes from the previous meeting approved (moved by Gary Reynolds, seconded by Ryan Shurtz).
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2. Treasurer's Report

- **Treasurer absent.** A casual report was provided:
 - Operations (county) account: \$13,412.80
 - Discretionary account: \$2,518.06
 - \$100 transferred back to discretionary account to balance prior setup costs.
 - \$587.20 reimbursement to Zach for certification/membership and a veteran's emergency lodging.
 - \$1000 donation from ET Simons Construction (recognized as a reward redirected by Kenny Hayes to the VAC rather than accepted personally).

- Checks are on order; currently securing appropriate check processing (including two signatures if required).

Discussion:

- The process for payroll and benefits for the Superintendent (Zach) remains unresolved—see section on Staffing & Payroll.
 - Regular claims submission to the county will be required for payroll and veteran assistance, with supervision for transparency.
 - Reminder to include claims for direct veterans' assistance in the county reporting.
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3. Committee and Organizational Updates

- Coordination with VFW, DAV, and other veteran groups for emergency assistance. Each organization has its own discretionary assistance process (typically max \$500 per request).
 - Superintendent responsible for networking with all local VSOs for referrals and support.
 - Announcement:
 - "Enlistment Day Dinner" to be organized (date TBA).
 - National Guard appreciation dinner: April 18, 2026, at the Elks at 5:30 PM. The VAC approved payment for 20 veterans' dinners (\$300). Invitation extended to significant others may be limited due to drill schedules.
 - Expected attendance: Approximately 30 National Guard members plus possible guests. Planning for up to 50 attendees.
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4. Unfinished Business

A. Staffing/Payroll Arrangements

- Dilemma on whether to use:
 - IMRF (county retirement system) recommended by members familiar with its stability and benefits.
 - County's role debated: County Board and Treasurer have differing opinions; precedent with Washington County referenced.
 - Transparency and accountability to taxpayers emphasized. **Motion Passed:**
 1. A private payroll/staffing company (Staffing Plus, Woodridge, IL, charges 12.13% fee covering payroll, withholdings, comp, etc.)
 2. County-run payroll and benefits, as per the legislation requiring comparable benefits to county employees.
- **Primary:** Approach the county board/treasurer to run payroll and benefits for the Superintendent.
- **Secondary:** If county-run payroll is not possible, proceed with Staffing Plus as backup.
- Motion by Robert White, second by Gary Reynolds. Unanimous approval.
- **Practicalities:**
 - Back pay for Superintendent's training week needs to be reconciled with county payroll.
 - County payroll is bi-weekly.
 - Authorization for the Superintendent to initiate process once approved.

B. Liability Insurance for Commission & Superintendent

- Proposal received from Robert White (who abstained from voting due to a conflict of interest; his agency insures the VFW).
 - **Coverage includes:** office rental liability, director & officer liability (\$1M), employee dishonesty (\$150k), contents (\$10k), special event options.

- Cost: \$1,377/year if paid in full.
 - Can be canceled later if a better quote is found.
 - **Motion:** Proceed to purchase this insurance policy, with option to replace if better terms become available.
 - Moved by Ryan Shurtz, seconded by Gary Reynolds.
 - Approved; Robert White abstained.
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5. New Business and Planning

A. Grand Opening / Ribbon Cutting

- Consensus on the need for a formal event to publicize VAC opening and Zach's role.
 - To be scheduled for **May 2026** (tentative), allowing time for all veterans organizations and key partners to be notified.
 - Suggestion to invite: DAV, VFW, American Legion, AMVETS, National Guard, county officials, VA clinic, unemployment office, area colleges, chamber of commerce (for possible ribbon cutting), and other relevant community organizations.
 - Aim to coordinate with coverage in local media, Facebook, local radio PSAs, and possible Facebook promotional spending (~\$20–100 suggested).
 - Committee to be formed (several volunteers) to organize invitations, signage/logistics, etc.
 - Signage for office exterior/interior to be discussed with Todd Hamer for possible donation or cost reduction.
 - Discussion on specific needs: flags for the building, business cards, and promotional items (pens, bags, etc.).

B. Phone and Communications System

- **Phone System Options:**
 - UMA VOIP system proposed (\$24.99/month; includes app for cell/computer, call logs, voicemail-to-email, fax, business texting).
 - Need to check for HIPAA/VA compliance (issues with call recording).
 - Option for a second SIM (Verizon) as an alternative.
 - Emphasis on transferable "official" business number system for continuity and compliance.
- **Motion:** Approve use of UMA, contingent on Superintendent's review for compliance and suitability; fallback to alternative system if not suitable.
 - Moved by Dave Nesbitt, seconded by Gary Reynolds. Approved.

C. Office Equipment & Supplies

- Existing equipment: Donated color laser printer by Michael Hayden; 12" touch tablet for e-signatures/documents.
- Need to procure: Business cards (discussion of suppliers), generic and personalized, and basic office supplies.
- Adobe software for electronic document management pending approval (\$157+/year).
- Content insurance to be reviewed as office assets increase.

D. Adoption of Policies & County Compliance

- **Statutory Requirement:** All county policies that are relevant (employee rights, ethics, procurement, records retention, budget, compensation, etc.) must be adopted/amended by VAC within 60 days of opening.
- Discussion: Uncertainty regarding nature/extent of central county policies—all agreed Zach will consult with Cliff Linneman (County Board), the Treasurer, County Clerk, etc. to identify applicable handbooks, codes, and ordinances.

- Plan for policy review, adoption, and amendments to be a focus at next meeting; Google Doc or other shared tracks to be used for collaborating.

E. Check Writing & Financial Controls

- Need to clarify and formalize spending authority for the Superintendent.
 - **Motion Passed:** Superintendent may write checks up to \$500 for routine expenses; for emergency housing-related expenses, the cap is \$2,000. Higher amounts require approval by two delegates/alternates.
 - Moved by Robert White, seconded by David Nesbitt. Approved.
 - All emergency or discretionary aid is paid directly to organizations/service providers (e.g., Ameren, Tri County, food banks), not to individuals.
 - Monthly reporting requirement of all county-funded aid to all participating organizations (to prevent duplication/scamming and comply with statutes).
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Action Items

1. Payroll:

- Approach county officials ASAP to initiate payroll/benefits through the county. If declined, implement Staffing Plus as alternative.
- Ensure back pay for Superintendent's training/orientation week is addressed.
- Gather/start necessary documentation for IMRF if selected.

2. Insurance:

- Secure liability insurance per approved quote; collect any alternative bids if possible for future review.

3. Grand Opening:

- Form ad hoc committee for planning; include signage/logistics, media outreach, and invitations.
- Target May 2026 for execution; coordinate date once more input from organizations is received.

4. Communications/Phone:

- Superintendent to evaluate UMA phone system for suitability/compliance and, if approved, implement service and select local number.
- Acquire business cards and related communications materials as soon as contact info is final.

5. Office Setup:

- Inventory current equipment; increase content insurance coverage if necessary.
- Continue procurement of basic supplies (printer paper/ink, pens, bags, etc.).

6. Policies:

- Superintendent to contact county officials/Cliff Linneman for copies of all relevant ordinances, employee handbooks, and financial/purchasing policies.
- Begin compiling a living document of required VAC policies for adoption/amendment at next meeting.

7. Records and Reporting:

- Prepare monthly aid reports for distribution to all relevant veterans organizations.
- Ensure mechanisms for tracking and preventing duplicate assistance (in compliance with statute).

8. Bank Authorization:

- Add Superintendent as an authorized check signer on VAC bank accounts (operations and discretionary).
- Arrange with bank staff for signature cards/Docusign as required.

9. Memberships & Affiliations:

- Research/conclude membership with Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions (ICVAC), including payment of associated fee (~\$250).
 - Consider joining Chamber of Commerce for PR and ribbon cutting support.
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Follow-Up & Next Meetings

- **Next meeting:** Date TBA in April 2026.
 - Agenda topics:
 - Finalize grand opening arrangements
 - Review policies for formal adoption/amendment
 - Confirm payroll/benefit setup and first pay period
 - Office setup progress and supplies
 - Report distribution systems for monthly aid
 - MAINTAIN weekly/monthly communication as needed for expedited action items.
 - Items for discussion at next meeting:
 - Vendor(s) selected for signage, promotional objects.
 - Any issues from the first weeks of operation/addressing ad hoc resource needs.
 - Progress on integrating VAC into community network (other vet groups, colleges, job offices, etc.)
 - County policy adoption and required amendments.
 - Membership status with relevant professional associations.
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Adjournment

- No further new or old business was raised.
 - Meeting adjourned following a motion and second.
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Prepared by: Robert White, Secretary 11 March 2026

(End of summary. For detailed records, please refer to distributed minutes and transcript.)