

**EASTERN ESSEX DISTRICT
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES
Board of Directors Meeting
Meeting of February 17, 2021**

The Eastern Essex Veteran's Board of Directors participated in a remote meeting utilizing Zoom in accordance with the governor's March 12, 2020 order suspending provisions of Open Meeting Laws and to promote public health and social distancing.

With a quorum present, Mr. Snow called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

Board Members present: Robert Snow, Chair, Rowley; Linda Alexson, Ipswich; Douglas Dawes, Georgetown; Michael Doyle, Newbury; Michael Flynn, Essex; William Wilson, Wenham

Staff present: Karen Tyler, Veterans Services Officer

Also present: Eileen Page, Recording Secretary; Karen Summit, Treasurer

Not present: Robert Janes, West Newbury

Guest Speaker: William D. Davidson

Bill Davidson gave a presentation to the Board on Home Base, a program that runs through the psychiatric department of Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), and funded by the Red Sox Foundation. Home Base was founded in 2010, and provides a holistic approach to treating invisible wounds such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) sustained as a result of military service at no cost to veterans. Care is provided regardless of discharge status, and services are provided through MGH and Spaulding Rehabilitation. Mr. Davidson reported that every day, 20 veterans die by suicide, and veterans are one and a half times more likely to die by suicide than a person with no military service. Veteran suicides have risen by 20% during the COVID-19 pandemic, and active duty suicides have risen by 30%. 1 in 3 veterans live with an invisible wound, but less than 50% receive treatment to address it. Home Base provides a variety of services, including outpatient mental health care, a two-week Families of the Fallen intensive clinical program; Comprehensive Brain Health and Treatment Program for Special Operators (designed for Navy SEALs, Rangers, and Green Berets); adventure activities for families, in partnership with the YMCA, Boston Harbor, Duck Tours, Mount Wachusett, and the Boston museums. Other programs including Warrior Health & Fitness, Resilient Warrior & Resilient Family, and the 20 to 0 Suicide Prevention Campaign. Veterans and their families can contact Home Base at (617) 724-5202 or online at HomeBase.org.

Mr. Flynn asked what "evidence-based treatment" is. Mr. Davidson responded that treatment utilized by Home Base involves cognitive processing therapy backed by extensive research with proven success.

Mr. Wilson asked where treatment is based. Mr. Davidson explained that there are offices in the Charlestown Navy Yard in Boston, and another office in Florida. Home Base hopes to eventually have offices nationwide. Mr. Wilson asked how the program is funded; Mr. Davidson responded that it is about 90% philanthropy funded, as insurance does not cover the holistic care needed for treatment.

Mr. Snow asked if there has been an increase in TBIs through the current conflicts versus previous wars. Mr. Davidson reported that while less troops are deploying overseas, the ones who do are typically in special operations, which is where an influx in TBIs are being seen due to the nature of their missions.

Meeting Minutes

I. December 16, 2020

The Board discussed *Retained Earnings* as a software term against the optics of using a term like "earnings."

The Board discussed whether the department was due for an audit. It was reported that the last audit was conducted five years ago by Powers & Sullivan at no cost. Although annual audits are not technically required, Ms. Alexson supported an audit for transparency purposes.

- *Vote: Ms. Alexson moved to approve the December 16, 2020 minutes. Mr. Doyle seconded. The motion carried unanimously via roll call.*

Financials

Ms. Summit reported that all expenses are running according to budget, although postage is running low. Ms. Tyler noted that this is due to an increase in mailing Chapter 115 checks, as veterans are not comfortable coming into the office to pick them up. Ms. Summit stated that funds could be appropriated from Legal allocations if necessary.

Chair Report

Mr. Snow reported that he recently received his COVID-19 vaccine at the VA in Bedford, and it was a respectful, efficient experience.

The VA clinic in Haverhill has moved. The clinic is now located at 209 Summer Street in Haverhill, and has expanded its services to allow veterans to visit at that location instead of driving to Bedford.

Director Report

Ms. Tyler and Ms. Collins continue to participate in weekly calls with the Department of Veterans Services, the North Shore Veterans Collaborative, and the North Shore Veterans Coalition. They recently attended a VA Regional Director Briefing, in which they and other VSOs expressed concern over the outsourcing of VA compensation exams. The exams continuously require extensive out-of-state travel to contracted sites. Congressman Seth Moulton also participated in the call as an advocate for the VSOs. Ms. Tyler and Ms. Collins also attended a virtual Military Discharge Upgrade Training, which provided training on managing cases of veterans who were dishonorably discharged due to mental illnesses such as PTSD. A Triton Regional High School senior recently approached the department about collecting supplies for homeless veterans; Ms. Tyler will be working with him to collect and distribute necessities.

Mr. Dawes reported that he has received several calls from veterans believing the office has closed, as the phone number changed. Ms. Tyler responded that she is working to spread the word about the change, and is disappointed that the phone company required the change when the department switched providers. The Veterans office can be reached at (978) 356-6699 Monday 8 AM to 7 PM, Tuesday through Thursday 8 AM to 4 PM, and Friday 8 AM to 12 PM.

Discuss/Vote Budget

The total budget increase for FY22 is \$3,538, and includes a 7% increase in health insurance costs dictated by the market, a 2% scheduled Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to the Assistant VSO salary, a scheduled increase to the VSO salary based on her contract.

Ms. Tyler broke down the financial contributions made by each community, as dictated by their veteran population:

Essex	\$17,911.31	7.5% of budget
West Newbury	\$21,694.97	9.0% of budget
Wenham	\$26,896.29	11.2% of budget
Rowley	\$30,929.27	12.9% of budget
Newbury	\$33,305.06	13.9% of budget
Georgetown	\$40,979.84	17.1% of budget
Ipswich	\$68,017.99	28.4% of budget

Mr. Wilson asked that any veterans at Gordon College be excluded from the budgetary costs, as they are not permanent residents of Wenham. Ms. Tyler explained that any veteran who registers to vote in the district is included in the population, as they are entitled to veteran services.

- *Vote: Mr. Dawes moved to approve the FY22 budget as presented. Mr. Doyle seconded. The motion carried unanimously via roll call.*

Miscellaneous/Other

VSO ANNUAL REVIEW

Mr. Flynn and Ms. Alexson will manage the administration of Ms. Tyler's annual review. A meeting will be scheduled for early May to discuss the logistics of the review.

- *Vote: Mr. Doyle moved to adjourn. Mr. Flynn seconded. The motion carried unanimously via roll call.*

The Board of Directors adjourned at 8:37 PM.