
**COUNTY OF EL PASO
VETERAN'S ADVISORY BOARD
ANNUAL REPORT**



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INTRODUCTION

The Veterans Advisory Board was approved by the El Paso County Commissioners Court on September 28, 2015, to serve as a link between the Veteran community and El Paso County government. The initiative was a culmination of collaborative efforts between Commissioners Leon and Stout and local Veterans advocates.

During the January 2018 El Paso County Commissioners Court strategic planning session, an action was presented to clearly define the current purpose of the Veterans Advisory Board. This was completed through developing a Veterans Advisory Board Directive, with updated and specified responsibilities and guidelines.

VISION

El Paso County Veterans and their families' needs met through access to available food, housing, employment, education, mental health, medical, and financial resources.

MISSION

Identify Veterans services gaps throughout El Paso County and propose recommendations to the Commissioners Court to improve quality of life for Veterans and their families.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the El Paso County Veterans Advisory Board is to inform the Commissioners Court of Veterans' affairs, identify services shortfalls and propose recommendations for approval and action.



BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Mark Dunham

- Commissioner Pct. 1 appointment

Vacant

- Commissioner Pct. 3 appointment

Burrel C. McCollum Jr. (Chair)

- Commissioner Pct. 2 appointment

Juan Rocha

- Commissioner Pct. 4 appointment

Benjamin Miranda, Jr. (Vice-Chair)

- County Judge's appointment

QUALIFICATIONS

- Received honorable discharge or spouse of honorably discharged Veteran.
- Demonstrate proficiency in Veterans' matters throughout El Paso County.
- Coordinate Veteran community support.
- Dedicate requisite time and effort.

TERM

- Board members are appointed for a two-year term – with no term limit.
- Participants can be dismissed by the Commissioners Court without justification.
- Removal of a board member is permitted with a majority vote from fellow participants for conduct not in harmony with the Commissioners Court or El Paso County representative.
- Board members can resign their position at any time.
- In the event of a vacancy, the corresponding Commissioners Court will appoint a new board member to either serve the remainder of the unexpired term or commence a new term.

RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Collaborate with Veterans and Veterans' advocates throughout El Paso County to identify gaps accessing assistance and resources for Veterans and their families.
2. Attend Veterans Advisory Board Meetings and introduce, discuss then examine problems.
3. Develop a plan to resolve identified issues using collective board member experience, community stakeholders, and already established resolutions.
4. Seek solutions utilizing accessible, existing community resources first and account for all projected County obligations prior to finalizing plans and proposals.
5. As required, coordinate with the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office to add discussion and approval items to the Commissioners Court Regular/Special Meeting Agenda.
6. Communicate regularly with appointing Commissioner/County Judge to discuss Veteran concerns, topics, and updates.
7. Assist coordinating Veterans community support and obtaining assistance.
8. Develop a Veterans Affairs policy for the County of El Paso.
9. Complete an annual report of the board's activities to be presented to the Commissioners Court, no later than June 30 of every year.

MEETING SUMMARIES

Veterans Advisory Board meetings are conducted on the second Tuesday of every month at 1 pm in the Judge's County Courthouse conference room.

June 12, 2018

Opening: The Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:00 pm; all Board members – sans Mr. Mark Dunham – were present. El Paso County staff present; Mrs. Diana Shearer from the County Attorney's Office; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efred Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office; Mr. Alberto Halpern from Commissioner's Stout Office; Members of the public present were Juan C. Mendoza, MVPN coordinator from the El Paso One-Stop Shop and Stephen Mills from the Veterans Non-Profit Veteran's Food Pantry.

Discussion: Mr. Mills introduced himself as the VNP Director and hope to assist the Veteran Advisory in any way possible. Mr. Mills also requested for veterans to register at the VA to receive benefits. Mr. Sparks moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Rocha seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. The Advisory Board presented 4 main topic to make recommendation and provide solutions for veterans in the community. (Homelessness, Employment, Housing, Transportation, and Communication). Mr. Heassler announced the veterans Assistance Office was approved a \$200,000 grant to assist veterans, surviving spouses, and active duty personnel going through a hardship. He also informed the Veterans Advisory Board the yearly report is due by June 30, 2018 to the Commissioner's Court. Mr. McCollum announced the Veterans Treatment Court Graduation taking place June 27, 2018 at 3:30 pm on the 7th floor of the Court house. Meeting adjourned at 2:40 pm.

July 10, 2018

Opening: The Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:01 pm; all Board members were present. El Paso County staff present; Mrs. Diana Shearer from the County Attorney's Office; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efred Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office; Mr. Alberto Halpern from Commissioner's Stout Office; Members of the public present were from Senator Rodriguez office Carla Owens.

Discussion: Mr. McCollum approved the motion. Mr. Dunham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Heassler announced the veterans Assistance Office has a Facebook account. The account was create to post any updates for event that occur out in county. Mr. Sparks announced he has a financial assistance grant where he can assist with emergency dollars within 48 hours or less. Meeting adjourned at 2:05 pm.

August 14, 2018

Opening: The Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:02 pm; all Board members were present. El Paso County staff present; Mrs. Diana Shearer from the County Attorney's Office; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efred Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office; Mr. Alberto Halpern from Commissioner's Stout Office; Judge Angie Juarez Barill and Silvia Serna from El Paso Veterans Treatment Court; Mrs. Melissa Carrillo, Mrs. Valeria Fernandez, and Mrs. Christine Sanchez from El Paso County Human

Resources; Members of the public present were from Senator Rodriguez office Carla Owens; Mr. Jeremy Binder, Mrs. Karen Rooks and Mrs. Dorcas Crawford from Texas Veterans Commission; Mr. Stephen S. Ellsesser from EHN;

Discussion: Mrs. Christine Sanchez and Mrs. Valeria Fernandez from Human Resources announced a hiring fair that would be taking place in Ft. Bliss and invited the board to participate. Mr. Dunham moved to approve the minutes. Mr. McCollum seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mrs. Carrillo presented a program that will launch on the website on October 2018 for the job descriptions being translated into military occupational specialty codes. Mr. Ellsesser stated that EHN has a 2.7 million dollars project invested on the eastside for clinic to provided services for the community. EHN clinic are like a safety net for El Paso when it comes to providing mental health services. Mr. McCollum motioned to submit to Commissioner's Court for approval. Mr. Dunham seconded the motion. Motion carries unanimously. Mr. Heassler announces that the TVC grant that the veterans assistance office received on July 2018, have spent about \$40,000 dollars in 1 month. He also stated that the Facebook website for the veteran's assistance office has received 600 likes, from being created. The resource director is being updated within a month if anyone need to provide updates. Mr. Sparks announce the Stand Down event which will be taking place on September 14, 2018 from 8:00 am to 1:00pm at the armory reserve unit. He also announce the Symposium that will also take place at the armory reserve unit on August 18, 2018 from 9:00am to 2:00pm. Meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.

September 11, 2018

Opening: The Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:04 pm; all Board members were present. El Paso County staff present; Mrs. Diana Shearer from the County Attorney's Office; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efren Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office; Members of the public present were from Juan Carlos Mendoza the MVPN Coordinator; Jose G. Gutierrez and Cesar Cardona from Green Bliss Gardens; Mrs. Arvis C. Jones and Tanya Rico from El Paso Community College; and Michelle Knerl and Jennifer Paniagua from the El Paso VA.

Discussion: Mr. Dunham moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Sparks seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mrs. Rico offers veterans a lending program where laptops and books can be used throughout a semester. The Office is also going to provide academic advisor or crisis intervention if veterans need it. They also provide a veteran lounge to use with a coffee and a microwave to use. Mr. Gutierrez offers free meditation for veterans struggling with mental health problems instead of taking medication. They provide free soil, and free labor as a therapeutic treatment. The organization is a nonprofit who is asking Ft. Bliss for land by giving therapeutic treatment to the veterans in the community. Mrs. Knerl and Mrs. Paniagua presented to the veteran advisory board that they have 10 vouchers to use out in the county. When a homeless veteran applies, they go through an intake and housed within 90 days of the initial start. Program is growing and will be asking for more future vouchers. Mr. Heassler announce the Veterans Treatment Court graduation taking place on 26 of September 2018 at 4:00 in the court house on the 7th floor. Mr. Sparks announced the financial grant that he has is down to \$1,500. The only requirement is that a veterans has to be going through a 24-hour emergency. Meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.

October 9, 2018

Opening: The Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:04 pm; Board member Dunham was absent. El Paso County staff present; Mrs. Silvia Porter from the County Attorney's Office; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efren Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office; Members of the public present were Roberto Candelaria and Melissa Cordero from the Child Crisis Center; Mrs. Carla Owens from Senator Rodriguez Office.

Discussion: Mr. Sparks moved to approve the minutes. Mr. McCollum seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Candelaria provided a brief on the Military Family and Veteran Prevention Program (MFVPP) offered by the Child Crisis Center, focused on reducing/preventing child abuse and neglect. The Child Crisis Center also has food items, hygiene products, shopping vouchers and emergency shelter services. The MFVPP lasts 6-12 month. Mr. Candelaria can be reached at 915-562-7955. Mr. Heassler updated that the TVC General Assistance Grant was expended, but Salvation Army and Project Amistad continue to have funding available. The Veterans Legal Clinic will be held on October 23 at the Transmountain EPCC campus. Senator Rodriguez is scheduled to be the guest speaker. There will be a TVC Job fair on November 8, from 9 am-1 pm. Mr. Montelongo announced the Veterans Assistance Office is occupying a new office in East El Paso and will be open Monday and Friday, 8 am-5 pm. Mr. Sparks announced the Veterans Business Association breakfast meeting for October 13, 2018 from 9-10 am. JC Mendoza announced there will be a Pre-Thanksgiving Luncheon at the Veterans One Stop on November 16, from 11 am-2 pm. Meeting adjourned at 1:45 pm.

November 13, 2018

Veterans Advisory Board postponed due to quorum not being met.

December 12, 2017

Opening: The Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:00 pm; Board member McCollum was absent. El Paso County staff present; Mrs. Silvia Porter from the County Attorney's Office; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efren Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office Mrs. Valeria Fernandez from El Paso County Human Resources; Members of the public present were Mr. Bruce Biegel from the Texas Veterans Commission; Mr. George Whitmire from El Paso Del Norte Veterans Coalition; Mrs. Tanya Rico from EPCC; Mr. Dwayne Williams from the City of El Paso; Mrs. Kellie Franco director of the One-Stop Center; Mrs. Laura Butler director of the Onward to Opportunity (O2O).

Discussion: Mr. Sparks moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Rocha seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mrs. Franco is the new director for the one-stop center and has a grant to provide mental health service to veterans in the community. There will be yoga therapy offered at the site and case management will be offered as a secondary to veterans who receive counseling at the site. Mrs. Butler is the director and is offering educational benefits to veterans and family members out in the community. Mr. Heassler announce the Veterans Treatment Court graduation on December 12, 2018 at 3:30 pm on the 7th floor of the courthouse. Meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.

January 8, 2019

Opening: The Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:00 pm; All Board members present. El Paso County staff present; Mrs. Silvia Porter from the County Attorney's Office; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efren Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office Mrs. Valeria Fernandez from El Paso County Human Resources; Members of the public present were Mr. Bruce Biegel and Mr. Don Parrott from the Texas Veterans Commission; Mr. Dwayne Williams from the City of El Paso; Mr. Jerod Palmer and Mr. Chris McMillan from Walgreens, and Mr. Jourdan Norman from Peak Behavior Services.

Discussion: Mr. Dunham moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Sparks seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Jourdan presented all the services that are provided at Peak Behavior for veterans needs help. He also offered his assistance to anyone who needs health care benefits or questions on how Peak Behavior services will be provided. Mr. Palmer has 2 full-time position for employment available for veterans in the community. The program will expand to 7 more positions if there is a need in the community. They offer all paid training and a guarantee job position upon completion of training to any veterans looking for employment. Mr. Sparks motion to have the Chairman create a structure or a format on the policies and procedures for the veteran advisory board. Mr. Dunham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Dwayne William announced the Point in Time Survey would be taking place on January 24, 2019 at the homeless coalition. He also announced the Veterans Advisory Board Meeting for the City of El Paso would take place on 28 of January 2019 at city hall at 11:00am. Meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.

February 12, 2019

Opening: The Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:00 pm; Mr. Mark Dunham was absent. El Paso County staff present; Mrs. Silvia Porter from the County Attorney's Office; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efren Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office; Members of the public present were Mr. Don Parrott from the Texas Veterans Commission; Mrs. Tanya Rico from El Paso Community College and Mr. Jourdan Norman from Peak Behavior Services.

Discussion: Mr. John Vandevede presented information on veteran disability placards offered from the vehicle registration. Mr. Sparks moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Rocha seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Chairman is still working on the policy and will provide an update next meeting. No updated provided by the VSO's. Mr. Sparks announced that on March 30, 2019 VA is offering a creative writing class at the VA for all veterans whom are interested. The guest speaker for that day is Mrs. Donna Snyder. Meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.

March 12, 2019

Opening: The Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:04 pm; All Board members present. El Paso County staff present; Mr. Ricard A. Samaniego the County Judge; Judge Angie Juarez Barill and Silvia Serna from the Veterans Treatment Court; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efren Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office;

Members of the public present were Mr. Josh Norman from Peak Behavior Services; Mr. Don Parrot from Texas Veterans Commission; Mrs. Tanya Rico from El Paso Community College. **Discussion:** County Judge Samaniego introduced himself and offered any assistance needed by the Veteran Advisory board. Mr. Dunham moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Miranda seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Miranda Motioned to conduct a new election. Mr. Dunham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Miranda motioned to reappoint Mr. McCollum Jr and the chairman. Mr. Rocha Seconded the motion. The Motion carried unanimously. Mr. Miranda motioned to become the Vice-Chairman. Mr. McCollum Jr. seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Miranda was going to have more information on how to proceed and return with an update for the board. Mr. Chairman is still working on the policy and will provide an update next meeting. No updated provided by the VSO's. Mr. Rocha announced Senator Rodriguez is having their Veteran Advisory Board meeting on March 14, 2019 at 4:30 at his office. Mr. Miranda announced the Mental Health Summit taking place on May 10th 2019 at the community college administration building. Meeting adjourned at 2:15 pm.

April 9, 2019

Opening: The Veterans Advisor Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:04 pm; Board member Benjamin Miranda JR was absent. El Paso County staff present; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efren Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office; Mrs. Nicole Ruiz from El Paso County Judge Samaniego's office; Members of the public present were Mr. Benito Torres from Congresswoman Veronica Escobar; Mr. Josh Norman from Peak Behavior Services; Mr. Bruce Biegel from Texas Veterans Commission; Mr. Derrick Iozzio from Peer Support; Mr. Joe Carrillo and Mr. Rodriguez from University of Park.

Discussion: Mr. Rocha moved to approve the minutes. Mr. McCollum seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Carrillo provided all the programs and classes offered to veterans by Park University who are looking to return to school or pursue a higher education. Mr. Chairman is still working on the policy and will provide an update next meeting due to now having all members present. Mr. Heassler advised that the Veterans Assistance Office was awarded \$300,000 for of financial assistance for veterans in the community. The funds will be available by the end of July 2019. Mr. McCollum announced the Mental Health Summit taking place on May 10th 2019 at the community college administration building. Meeting adjourned at 1:54 pm.

May 14, 2019

Opening: The Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) was called to order at 1:08 pm; All Board members present. El Paso County staff present; Mrs. Betsy Keller from the El Paso County Chief Administrator; Mr. Rollin Heassler and Mr. Efren Montelongo from the El Paso County Veterans Assistance Office; Mrs. Nicole Ruiz from El Paso County Judge Samaniego's office; Members of the public present were Mr. Benito Torres from Congresswoman Veronica Escobar; Mr. Josh Norman from Peak Behavior Services; Mr. Bruce Biegel and Mr. Don Parrott from Texas Veterans Commission; Mrs. Lilia Herrera-Estrada from Texas Health & Human Service Commission; Mrs. Carl Dwyer from Hiring our Heroes; Clarence Rael from the Disabled American Vets; Mr. Manuel G. Vega from the Tigua Post 8782; Mr. Tom Moran

from Emergence Health Network; Mr. Paul Albright from El Paso Veteran and Military Affairs; Mrs. Nathalia Rodriguez from National University; George Whitmire from Paso Del Norte Borderplex Veterans Coalition; Mrs. Arvis C. Jones and Mrs. Tanya Rico from EL Paso Community College.

Discussion: Mrs. Nicole Ruiz invited the Advisory Board to the wall of honor presentation that County Judge Samaniego was hosting after. Mr. Dunham moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Rocha seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Carrillo provided all the programs and classes offered to veterans by Park University who are looking to return to school or pursue a higher education. Provide outreach services for veterans in the community and conducts wheel walks events. Mr. Miranda moved to approve the veteran needs assessment. Mr. Dunham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Chairman is waiting to see the outcome of the needs assessment before implementing policies. Mr. Heassler advised that the resource directory will be updated soon for anyone to go ahead and submit changes or corrections before posting on the website.

Mr. McCollum announced the Veteran's Treatment Court graduation taking place on June 26, 2019 on the 7th floor of the 346 District Court. Meeting adjourned at 1:54 pm.