

The Minutes of the Meeting

STATE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

January 19, 2017
10:00 A.M.

An official meeting of the State Veterans Affairs Commission convened on Thursday, January 19, 2017 at the Kinston State Veterans Home, Kinston, North Carolina. The following were present:

Commission Members

Jimmy G. (Tony) Braswell, Chairman
Elree T. Smith, Vice-Chairman
Etteinne (E.T.) Mitchell
William Shillito
Leonard (Mike) Scruggs
Carol Phelps
Terry T. Hales (Absent)
Joseph (Joe) W. Adamczyk (Absent)
Gregory R. Woodard (Absent)
Rev. Lenwood V. Long, Sr. (Absent)

Advisory Committee Members

Jeffrey D. Jones
Marine Corps League
Jacob Roth, Commander (Absent)
American Ex-Prisoners of War
David Shore, Commander (Absent)
The American Legion
Buddy Waller (Absent)
AMVETS
Algernon B. Hill, Commander (Absent)
Disabled American Veterans
Doug Blevins, Commander (Absent)
Veterans of Foreign Wars
James Hicks (Absent)
Military Order of the Purple Heart
Rossie M. Nance, Jr. (Absent)
Vietnam Veterans of America
Douglas Ehrhardt, President (Absent)
North Carolina Council

Assistant Secretary for Veteran Affairs
Deputy Director, NC Division of Veteran Affairs
Facilities Manager
Contractor/Scholarship
Administrative Assistant
Administrative Assistant
Administrative Secretary

James (Jim) Prosser
Martin Falls
James (Jimmy) Woodard
E. Wayne Peedin
Diane Norris
Ken Castille
Angela Heilig

Guests

Mel Davis, Special Consultant, State Veterans Homes
Elizabeth Cannon, NC State Council, Vietnam Veterans of America

Chairman Tony Braswell called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for attending. Wayne Peedin gave the invocation and Vice-Chairman Elree Smith led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. Chairman Tony Braswell welcomed everyone to the Commission meeting.

Secretary Jim Prosser called the roll and announced appointment of new Commission Members for District 2, Michael Worley and District 8, John Boesch. Mr. Worley was unable to attend due to death in the family and Mr. Boesch was unable to be contacted. Commission member for District 9 is still vacant. All attendees introduced themselves. Chairman Braswell confirmed that a quorum was present and again welcomed all attendees expressing appreciation for the service of all.

Chairman Tony Braswell called for a motion to approved the Minutes of the Commission meeting on October 21, 2016. Commissioner William Shillito brought attention to the Minutes and difficulty transcribing discussions accurately. Commissioner Shillitio made a motion to approve the October 21, 2016 minutes striking the conversations and leaving only the attendance, action items and important Items. Vice-Chairman Elree Smith seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Chairman Braswell brought attention to the Agenda for today's Commission meeting and recommended moving items of Other Business and Board Comments later after Ethics Training/SEI Compliance discussions. A motion was made to move the Agenda items by E.T. Mitchell and seconded by Bill Shillito. A voice vote was taken with no discussion and members in attendance approved the motion.

The Agenda item for Guest Comments from Mr. Joseph Kelly, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs was scratched and has been rescheduled for the April 2017 meeting.

An item of Old Business was presented by an Ad-Hoc committee of the State Veterans Nursing Home chaired by Mr. Shillito to review Assisted Living Cost and Charge Structure for NCDVA Homes. First understanding current and financial operations, the purpose of the committee was to determine if a "Private Pay" rate increase is necessary and sufficient to sustain operations then make recommendations to the Chairman and Members of the Veteran Affairs Commission. The recommendation out of committee to the Commission was to authorize a "Private Pay" increase of \$10.00 and recommend the Commission authorize the Deputy Director of NCDVA (with review by the Assistant Secretary for Veteran Affairs) to adjust rates for services at State Homes by 5% in any one six-month period with less than 5% not needing Commission authorization. Further, when rates are adjusted, the Commission shall be notified not later than the next scheduled Commission meeting. Chairman Braswell inquired if this recommendation was a motion and answered affirmative by Mr. Shillito. Clarification was asked by Secretary Prosser if the Deputy Director of Facilities or Deputy Director of Veteran Affairs was authorized to adjust rates. Mr. Shillito stated that the authorization should be made from outside the normal State Homes day-to-day operations.

Vice-Chairman Smith expressed need to ensure that this adjustment was not in conflict with other financial guidelines that were established by this Commission in the operation of State nursing homes. Discussion was heard about use of general counsel from the Governor's office in the absence of counsel within Department of Military and Veteran Affairs and Department of Administration. Mr. Shillito pointed out that when he accepted the position to sub-chair this committee, he expressed request for legal counsel to prevent issues. Mr. Shillito requests to modify the recommendations based on concerns expressed to increase the "Private Pay" by \$10.00 and get legal counsel to weigh in on the increase and then giving the operating office of the NCDVA Homes the authority to make decision on operations rather than bring to the Veteran Affairs Commission for approval.

Mr. James Woodard reminded the Commission about purchasing and money management of the State Homes and their authority plus other items for Veteran Affairs Commission actions.

Vice-Chairman Smith brought up the need to have general counsel on the Board who would be familiar with laws and footnotes to provide legal advice to the Board.

Chairman Braswell asked to proceed with the motion on the floor and note that legal counsel was sought on numerous occasions for advice. A vote was taken with no opposition.

Chairman Braswell called on Assistant Secretary James Prosser for a report.

The first item in Secretary Prosser's report was the budget for this year with a major caveat that all the money put into the budget last year now goes into the new Governor's budget that is now being looked at.

The Department is asking that all cemetery workers be placed under appropriations and use receipts budget items for maintenance. Also, the Department asked for eight cemetery positions last year but was only given two so we will ask for the other six positions this year.

The DMVA asked for \$1.5M to restore full scholarship funding and is looking to expand the Department. When the Department was created it was at no-expense to the State so in order to staff the Department, the Veteran side gave up some positions to Military side but the Department is not asking for a budget increase request but restored as to what we had before.

The Fayetteville and Garner offices are both open after some delays getting a hard-wire telephone line installed so 911 calls could be made.

Secretary Prosser stated we are looking at VA facilities. The plan to expand the agency resulted in more places for service and much press to announce our expansion but over time, we've found that having four 1-person offices in a town really doesn't help because when someone is sick, on training, family sick or on vacation, that office would have to close and if two people are out, two offices are closed. So, we're in the process of reevaluating our VA outposts.

Secretary Prosser stated he has visited almost all of the Service Offices and in his opinion, things are settling down after the last three years of constant change

We're working with NCServes and you may have seen that in your areas. The one started in Charlotte was first then we have the Raleigh-Fayetteville, one in Jacksonville then next week we're doing the kick-off in Asheville. These community action groups are making a difference for people.

We have also been working with Greg Richardson from Indian Affairs. They've opened an office in Cherokee in the Tribal Office this year. He has also met with Chairman Godwin of the Lumbee tribe to more formalize our agreement with them and went to the last Indian commission meeting and we have encouraged them to open a tribal service officer for every tribe in North Carolina.

Secretary Prosser stated that Jimmy Woodard will talk about FEMA. We've put in claims for some of the water damage in our nursing homes.

Upon conclusion of Secretary Prosser's report, Chairman Braswell asked if there were any questions.

Commissioner Shillito commented to Secretary Prosser that the NC4Vet Resource Guides are very helpful and asked if they would continue or if funds were available to continue as well updates if needed. Secretary Prosser stated they would continue and we should be fine. Last year we found a champion at the last minute to rescue us and give us an extra 100,000 copies; that was Sen. Meredith. We don't have the money in our budget but DHHS has given us money over the last few years and we will continue to have the Resource Guides because it is so valuable. He further stated that the guide will be expanded this year adding another tab on Veteran Entrepreneurship.

Vice Chairman Elree Smith stated that the Resource Guide is one of the best things that came out in years and he passed out about 2,000 himself. Referring to the update, he asked about adding a subtitle is some information on end of life; what do you do on a veteran's end of life. He said he gets telephone calls from people asking what to do, wanting a flag, how to get a flag. Vice Chairman Elree Smith was very happy to see the Garner office reopened because it put a strain on another local office.

Chairman Tony Braswell thanked Secretary Prosser for his report and the work of his staff.

Deputy Director Martin Falls gave a report on personnel issues, training issues, and regional issues/items where a lot is going on there. Since the last meeting in October, we have hired eight positions: a PA4 in Wilmington, a VST in Greenville and Canton, Administrative Assistants to the Assistant Secretary for

Military Affairs and Assistant Secretary for Veteran Affairs, three Grounds Workers in Spring Lake, Goldsboro and Sandhills. We have posted and interviewed for two positions: Maintenance Mechanic for Black Mountain and Grounds Worker in Jacksonville. Mr. Jimmy Woodard stated the Grounds Worker is working in Jacksonville and expecting the Maintenance Mechanic to start shortly.

Deputy Director Falls further stated that NCDVA posted and screened positions for PA4 in Cemeteries, Grounds Worker in Black Mountain, Administrative Assistant in Spring Lake, VST in Call Center, Installation Coordinator and Interagency Coordinator in Military Affairs. Current postings in the Department are for an Accountant and Director of Business Operations so hopefully we'll have these personnel onboard to work. He further stated we have six current vacancies since the last meeting: Service Member/Family Coordinator, Attorney and Communications Director. These two positions are transferred from DHHS and the Attorney will also serve as Legislative Liaison. Also current vacancies for VSO in Raleigh, Region IV VSO Training Officer and Region I Regional Manager. There are Temps hired against those positions but can't fill because money is needed and when hires are made elsewhere, Temps go away which is a double-edged sword.

Deputy Director Falls stated we need to get salaries increased because the Counties pay more and we lose folks that get trained after 2-3 years to a County operation. Example is when Secretary Prosser left his position (as County Veteran Service Officer), we lost one of our NCDVA resources to his old job and his salary was doubled. We can't match that. Our budget asks for \$470,000 increase in our salaries.

Regarding issues, Deputy Director Falls restated what Secretary Prosser mentioned regarding people and the field is we have VSOs and VSTs in the VHA facilities. To go along with that, some of the "nug" work is the VA system will not allow our computers to be plugged into their network on the campus of the hospital. VSOs have to use a hotspot or wireless internet to do their work and file the claim. We can't use their network computer because we aren't on their system.

Deputy Director Falls further stated that we have 22 people currently in training since October; 15 County and 7 State. We have accredited 28 service officers since our last report. We're testing at the Spring County Conference and again at the Fall Conference. Teaching how to develop the claim is one of the most important things we do.

Deputy Director Falls moved on to the Regional report. A VBAC event was held in Sampson County and over 400 veterans came through. NCDVA was there providing support and resource guides, assisting veterans. It was an excellent event.

Secretary Prosser asked Deputy Director Falls to explain what a VBAC is. Mr. Falls stated a VBAC is a Veterans Benefits Action Center where the VA will come in with Raters that can make a decision on the spot if the claim is in and developed. They've gone through the process waiting for someone to look at it and award it. Sec. Prosser injected that the important thing about this is that he has lobbied with National VA and the Regional office in Winston Salem to continue those VBAC events. Sec. Prosser further stated we do tend to get higher ratings in person and the Raters say they love it because they're tired of just looking at computer screens and they don't get paper files anymore; it's all on computers. So, they enjoy the fact they can sit with the veteran and get more of the story; get the "Paul Harvey" so they're very beneficial.

Commissioner Mitchell asked how we get the word out in communities to veterans who may be less than perfectly connected to the system that "hey, on the 23rd of February at the convention center, big VA raters are going to be here at this conference". Sec. Prosser said they do and said the word gets out. There were people from Virginia, people from South Carolina, people from Georgia, people from Tennessee plus from all over the state that drove all the way out there because they know that's the one chance they're going to sit and talk to a Rater. The notice is put out in the local papers, VFW, American Legion posts, DAV, Marine Corps League, news media and through the local vet councils. The VA does

a pretty good job of getting that information out there. Sec. Prosser stated the State and County offices help screen veteran claims to assist their time with the Rater. Some coaching is done and since the event covers three days, the veteran can return with any documents to aid their claim rather than hurt their claim.

Commissioner Shillito inquired if an appointment is needed for a VBAC. Sec. Prosser said no but shared that the first day is not very busy but when a veteran who attended that day goes back to the VFW that night and announces to his buddies he received an award, the second day is the busiest because they heard from their friends.

Commissioner Mitchell mentioned that many municipalities have city TV where announcements can be put up and are watched by many people if they don't get paper so that can be a way to get the information out. She stated she is pretty sure the information doesn't get to her municipality and asked if that information could be put out. Chairman Braswell stated that the local veteran service officer is responsible for putting that out.

Deputy Director Falls announced the next VBAC will be held February 10-11 at the Randy Parton auditorium in Roanoke Rapids.

Deputy Director Falls reported that the State Service Office was concentrating on appeals. With a change a couple years ago that all compensation claims are faxed to Georgia, the State office's receipt of claims has been reduced. In the last quarter, they received a little over 300 compensation claims and 20 pension claims. Of the 119 claim appeals that were scheduled, 80 were conducted either in the Regional Office or by travel/video. The VA knows they are behind on appeals but they are concentrating on getting the backlog cleared out.

Deputy Director Falls addressed the State scholarship system. Over the last few years, NCDVA has undertaken getting a computerized scholarship system that will work. We're waiting on the best and final offer. Bad thing is the software will be delivered during the scholarship season so under current operations, we'll use the old system where future operations will be able to take advantage of the computer software. Thanks were given to Mr. Wayne Peedin for his time and knowledge helping NCDVA.

Across the state, NCDVA is going under a common IT operating picture where all offices are on one printer, one scanner, one fax for each location that computers are tied into.

NCDVA has submitted a budget for 2017-2019 and added into the budget a request for funds for the NC4Vets Resource Guide and asked for an increase in salaries and money for scholarships.

Chairman Braswell thanked Assistant Director Falls for his NCDVA report.

Commissioner Shillito commented about the number of Veteran Service Officers at the State and County level and how many are accredited further stating that it would be important to keep track of that and give an update of each of those. Knowing this will give us a good measurement tool that we're in a good position or moving in the good position because things change and turnovers occur. Commissioner Shillito asked Assistant Director Falls if those numbers were available. Mr. Falls stated he had the numbers in the office and will send them when he returns. Commissioner Shillito then asked that we get an update at each Commission meeting.

Commissioner Mitchell asked a question about the linkage issues between "Big VA" computer systems and North Carolina VA systems. She stated that she believes the issues could be resolved at the senior level with one conversation because it could be nasty on the front page of the N&O (News & Observer) and "Big VA" does not need any more hits. She asked if that could be put on the agenda for the new

NCDMVA Secretary. Secretary Prosser addressed the question in that the issue has been addressed with Dan Hoffman at VISN6 (Veterans Integrated Service Network #6) to get the office spaces and that part of the issue is there isn't enough room at the VA clinics for our offices. Additionally, Secretary Prosser stated that most of the VA facilities don't want us there because they need the space and the VA has notified us of their intent to repurpose the area that we share. We (NCDVA) are there three days a week and share with DAV and American Legion who are there other days of the week. We've traveled from the Canton office across the mountain in the winter to support that office when the Buncombe County office is two miles straight down the road. Those are some of the issues and not just the computer. Secretary Prosser stated that we can get into some of their systems with the PIV (personal identification verification) card but when in Charlotte, VA has to furnish the equipment but most don't have enough equipment to go around for their own employees so what we get is not the best so we've come to the decision to pull out and do what we do best which is to file claims. Further, when a person comes into the clinic, they may be from three counties over and they're not going to come back to see you every time they need to do something on their claim. They need to see the local veteran service office, either state or county.

Chairman Braswell asked if there were any more questions for Secretary Prosser then called on Mr. James Woodard to give a report on State Cemeteries and Nursing Homes and announced that the Commission will break for lunch at 11:30am.

Mr. J. Woodard started with good news in that he was not asking for new money this time and began with Black Mountain Cemetery. He stated that one of the goals this year was to file for an expansion grant unfortunately with that a designer will need to be hired to produce a design. Mr. Woodard stated that he called the company that designed twenty-three years ago and they are still in business and the individual that designed the cemetery is still there. He stated he's looking at \$25,000-\$30,000, but with Jacksonville and Sandhills, it will be different and a little more so he will have to find or figure out a way to get it funded through the General Assembly. He also said he need to post and interview for a Grounds Worker position.

Mr. J. Woodard stated the facility in Jacksonville is fully staffed and we have four grounds worker so we now have six employees there full-time. Diane Norris has done a grant application to come in and raise/realign/clean the headstone as well as some sod (217,000 sq. ft.). The grant requested is \$613,992.75 and we're at the mercy of the VA in Washington, DC. Jimmy Woodard stated we took the floral requirement and reinforced them to which they were not before. New floral signs were made and installed with everyone given a month's notice to comply. He and Diane have been taking calls, some good, some bad and threats but try to tell the people this is what the National Cemetery requires and we're trying to do the same since we're inspected by the National Cemetery.

Secretary Prosser interjected to comment on a controversial broadcast on TV down in Jacksonville where there was a four-foot tall cross made of white PVC pipe with spinners on the end, a light panel that shined up and balloons on the end. He said that is not a military cemetery and is the "straw that broke the camel's back". When it got that far, it was decided to tone this back and not let them put all these things in there. There was a lady on TV that was upset that we were making her take this stuff down that was a memorial to her mother but it was out of hand. We're trying to restore back to the military tradition.

Mr. J. Woodard commented on Sandhills Cemetery where there is a new position hired and five employees there but missing a Superintendent. Again, Diane Norris has filed for an O&M that a maintenance-type grant the cemetery program has to realign and clean the markers there. That a little over \$283,000. Again, we're going to have to do an expansion grant and hire a designer. In the Goldsboro cemetery, the Eastern Carolina State Cemetery, opened last February and is working fine. Mr. J. Woodard encouraged all to go by and take a look stating he chose to go back to the uprights and they're putting those up. This will look like a military cemetery like Secretary Prosser said and wish all were that way. Those headstones weigh 250lbs. so getting them in and getting them set is a tough job. Secretary

Prosser mentioned they came up with an ingenious way of doing it in Goldsboro. They dug a huge trench and lined it with rock then put the vaults in. The vaults have a lip on them so when they set a headstone, it sits on the concrete lip so it won't shift like the ones we need to go going back to realign. The headstone will stay on a good, firm base. Secretary Prosser said it was a brilliant idea and Jimmy Woodard said he got the idea from Virginia when he sent a crew to the state cemetery in Suffolk to train and that's the way they were doing it.

Commissioner Shillito asked about previous inspections that had quite a few deficiencies and asked about the status. Jimmy Woodard said the deficiencies were small like realign headstones, sod/grass and sprinkler systems. Diane Norris picked out trash cans that will be ordered. We've got flower holder stands we're having designed for Goldsboro so families can come by and pick up a cone if they want fresh flowers put out. One big thing was the BOSS (Burial Operations Support System) computer system. We went back and told our people to get the paperwork in and we've done that. This was the second time that every one of them has expired because Washington has not moved on it. The NCDVA staff is getting upset with it and ask why keep doing this. So, with Secretary Prosser's blessing, Jimmy Woodard is looking to send an email to George Eisenbach and pretty much say "unless you tell me that when we get the paperwork up there, it'll be approved within three weeks, I'm not moving."

Secretary Prosser said it is a backlog on security background clearances and by the time they get to the paperwork, the fingerprints have expired. Secretary Prosser also said it is the same thing with our County and State Veteran Service Offices with their PIV cards. He also mentioned that when we get those reports, those inspections, we have to get them our plan and we've been following up very well on corrective actions but one of the things we'll always get written up for and is never going to change is the alignment of the headstones. They call it Sandhills because it is sandy soil and that soil shifts those headstones. Every time they come in and shoot that laser down the row, one's 3% (off) this way and one's 3% (off) that way; that's a rut. We'll get that continually and we're always going to get that because of the type of soil we have. Mr. Shillito interjected "like Arlington" and Secretary Prosser agreed and it's never going to look like Arlington and they write us up and say they understand; no big deal, every time they do. Mr. Woodard said it could which requires money and staff. Secretary Prosser said when you have two people doing the burials and you've got burials every day, when do you have time? Then you have to mow, then you have to trim, then you have to take care of the trees and do everything else, when are you going to have time to realign those headstones? It's not an easy job; it's a physical job to get those realigned. Jimmy Woodard added that he included the number of gravesites we maintain.

Commissioner Phelps asked about the expansion grants and when we do that, if we do that, would we put the vaults down like was done in Goldsboro? Jimmy Woodard replied they can dictate that and he can't answer but has a feeling they're going to say put crypts.

Jimmy Woodard moved on to discuss veteran nursing homes and started with Fayetteville with 135 residents right now but lost our admission person and is currently working on this important function. We had the VA come in two weeks ago and had a deficiency-free survey "clinically". The sprinkler system had some leaks after the freeze and snow but he met with a person from the State Construction Office and looked at the pipes. The pipes are pretty good but where they're joined, the gaskets start to leak and rust where the metal is very thin, we'll replace them out. The HVAC system, we're getting ready to hopefully start replacing that system. Jimmy Woodard stated that Diane did paperwork to apply for R&R funds. They approved \$3.6M for our facilities and one is the HVAC and Federal which is \$2.1M. they're going to come in and refurbish our HVAC system. Regarding telehealth, Jimmy Woodard stated he is working with hospital of jurisdiction in Fayetteville to get telehealth. Jimmy Woodard has met with the Director at Fayetteville VA Medical Center and will try to get equipment, computer screen, camera system and dedicated system and if they'll let us tie in with them, it'll be fantastic to be able to converse on items such as heart issues and do it from our facilities using telehealth. Our hospital jurisdiction is Durham and the plan is to go meet with the Director. I want to get telehealth set up in some way. If Durham doesn't want to work with us then switch us to Fayetteville, I know

they'll work with us. The other home in Salisbury is not a big deal since they are eight miles down the road from the VAMC in Salisbury.

The census at Salisbury is 95 and the VAMC is there right now conducting a survey. The last word was the survey was going well but found a few issues. R&R funding has \$450,910.00 to repair the elevators there. We're trying to find a contractor now to give us some ideas and costs of what they think it is going to be. Generator replacement project has been approved by State construction for \$1.346M and should go out for bid in the next three weeks

At Black Mountain, Jimmy Woodard reminded the Commission that the facility wanted to name the Black Mountain Zebulon Doyle Alley State Veterans Home. He showed a drawing of what has been decided and referred to the handout the facility would be named "Zebulon Doyle Alley State Veterans Home". He stated they plan to install to match the beige siding and costing a little more than \$2,000. The contract has been awarded and working on it now. Jimmy Woodard asked if there were any questions. Chairman Braswell asked how much we would get from the Legislature for this and Jimmy Woodard said we would get \$10,000. Secretary Prosser said they would also do something in the lobby like a portrait, a little explanation of his history and a plaque next to it. Jimmy Woodard said part of that money would be used for that and he referred to the facility in Fayetteville where something similar was done. Jimmy Woodard said the geothermal cooling tower is operational in Black Mountain. The WanderGuard system contract was awarded to Fusion but they could not get bonding so we had to go to the next highest bid and was only a difference of \$2-3 thousand dollars. Commissioner Mitchell asked if the security project at Black Mountain being put in because there is an additional emphasis on memory impairment or they also at Salisbury and other places. Jimmy Woodard responded there is a camera system at Salisbury and Fayetteville and WanderGuard system but we lost the WanderGuard system at Fayetteville. We need to look at putting a new WanderGuard system there.

Jimmy Woodard referred to Kinston and our funding has been awarded.

Chairman Braswell interrupted and asked if somebody has the amount of money somebody owes for all the work we had done in contract there. Mr. Woodard asked if he was referring to the geothermal and Mr. Braswell said "the whole nine yards". Mr. Woodard said the geothermal was around a million dollars. Chairman Braswell asked if we were pursuing that and Jimmy Woodard has contacted state construction and AG's office. Chairman Braswell urged to keep on it and talk to new Secretary Hall and make sure we follow through. Mr. Woodard said A-wing has started and is 60% complete now. We're not doing the whole building, we're doing each wing so we want to make sure we have a good company doing this and doing it correctly. Then we would offer a chance to bid on the second wing. That is the way the State wanted to do it. Chairman Braswell reminded that was the reason for the bond previously passed by the NC voters for repairs and Jimmy Woodard concurred. Commissioner Mitchell agreed with Chairman Braswell that we don't need to send the signal to other contractors that they can essentially rip off the State and get away with it and that is exactly what happened here. Commissioner Mitchell is curious if the statute reads lowest bid or lowest and best bid. Chairman Braswell said the statute reads that we are required to take the lowest bid. Mr. Woodard said "unless you can justify" and Secretary Prosser said "unless they don't meet all the requirements".

Jimmy Woodard said all the R&R funds are approved for Kinston: \$300K for the sprinkler system, \$600K for the sewer system and \$600K to repair the roof. We had some leaks there during the snow and ice but we think we got more issues than just that. Right now, that's been approved for R&R and has already been coded for funds.

All four homes, right now, are under a Medicaid audit for fiscal year 13-14. We have this every year and are in the process for the four homes. FEMA, Secretary Prosser brought it up, we've met about three hours with them and they explained the process and we're going back looking. At the stage we're at now, Diane has come back to State insurance to see what they would cover. If they cover it, FEMA will back

out, if they don't cover it then FEMA will come in and we'll have to do paperwork to get the money. Chairman Braswell said we would be a whole lot better off from FEMA because we could tack on any labor fees that would be added back in, even overtime and would be to our advantage. Jimmy Woodard said we're working with that and with Lacy Pate, in our office.

Chairman Braswell announced that we would break for lunch and adjourned at 11:45am.

The Commission reconvened at 12:45pm.

Jimmy Woodard began by stating there wasn't much more to say but said that our veterans state trust fund is \$46,495,000.00. He said this breaks it down on what we have obligated, grants that we received and gives you an idea. Jimmy Woodard asked if there were any questions on what we're doing with the money. He introduced Mel Davis who does all our Medicaid/Medicare costs as well as when we get in things on how that is affecting us. Or sometimes when the Commission wants information, Jimmy Woodard said that Mr. Davis will get with him and Diane to work something up. Jimmy Woodard announced Mr. Davis was open to any questions about this program and what we're doing. One thing Jimmy Woodard is working on and mentioned briefly is the census has been down a little bit and part of it is because we do not have an admissions director at this time.

Jimmy Woodard then asked if there were any questions for Mr. Davis or him, or for the nursing homes and cemeteries. Jimmy Woodard then encouraged all when they see their Senator or Representative to speak up, especially for the cemeteries. We cannot operate and keep the cemetery up with what we've got as far as staffing and money. Secretary Prosser spoke to a person at the National Cemetery in Salisbury and the individual said he didn't know how we do anything except burials. Jimmy Woodard said they do a lot more than we do per day but they have a tremendous amount of staff. We're spending about \$900K per year; salaries and operations. Virginia has a budget for three cemeteries, we have four. Their budget is \$1.7-\$1.8 million; almost double of our entire budget. We can't bury people and maintain over 5,000 graves meaning edging, trying to keep headstones aligned, sink holes, mowing, all of that. It's just impossible. So if you get the opportunity to speak to your Senator or Representative, on behalf of the veterans it would be greatly appreciated.

Chairman Braswell asked if there were any questions for Jimmy Woodard.

Commissioner Mitchell wanted to make sure what she heard is correct that the 70-100% percent disabled that we don't take those or do take those. Mr. Woodard responded that we do take those but we limit the numbers. Most of our homes have a higher percentage more than what we set which is 5%. We get a veteran in at 40% and the next thing we get paperwork awarding 100%. If they are in the building, we don't discharge them. We limit those that are at 100% from coming in.

Chairman Braswell thanked Jimmy Woodard for his great report.

Chairman Braswell moved to the report of Scholarships awarded for Class I and Class IV Scholarship that have been verified so we need to approve the action to ratify the Assistant Secretary's award of the scholarships which were granted since our last meeting on October 21, 2016. Vice-Chairman Smith made a motion to approve the scholarships as recommended. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Suggs. A vote was taken and all approved. The motion carried.

Chairman Braswell asked if there was a desired date from the Scholarship folks for the meeting in April. Mr. Wayne Peedin asked for April 18th. Chairman Braswell asked Vice Chairman Smith to hold the meeting at the VFW Building in Raleigh.

Chairman Braswell addressed Ethics Training and Substantial Economic Interest form that must be filed by April 1st. He advised all to go online and either file as no change or revise. Chairman Braswell

reminded that they must be mailed in after complete not just filling out online. He asked Assistant Secretary Prosser for a copy as he has become the Ethics Liaison for the Commission and gets a list of training requirements and will pass on those requirements.

For other business, Chairman Braswell thanked the sub-committee for their work and expressed appreciation so the sub-committee will be dissolved. Also, he referred to the bio request sent by Ms. Heilig for members to fill out and asked about those that needed to complete.

Chairman Braswell asked to meet in a Closed Session to discuss follow-up for a scholarship revoked and ones that gave personal information. A motion was made by Commissioner Mitchell to go into a Closed Session and seconded by Commissioner Phelps. A vote was taken and all approved.

Before the Closed Session and dismissal of non-Commission and non-Staff members, Ms. Elizabeth Cannon from the NC State Council of the Vietnam Veterans of America shared on behalf of President Mr. Rossie Nance an event of NC State Council of Veterans Affairs in cooperation with Sam Lambert, NC Indian Commissioner for the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians want to put on an Agent Orange Town Hall meeting in Hollister with Chief Ridge. This event will take place on Saturday from 1-4pm at the Government Complex. A promotional flyer was left with Chairman Braswell and passed to Secretary Prosser for distribution.

The Closed Session of the Commission began to take action on Scholarships at 1:20pm and ended at 1:35pm.

After the Closed Session, Chairman Braswell reconvened the Commission meeting then asked for Board Comments. Commissioner Mitchell asked of members of the Commission who do not make meetings, some of them, all of them, lots of them as opposed to an occasional lapse and if there was Board policy or a Department policy who should fail to show up. Secretary Prosser stated it is built into the structure of the legislation. Chairman Braswell made a suggestion that when minutes are recorded that we include members present and members absent to include names. This way we can have a record.

Vice-Chairman Smith reminded the Commission talked about reviewing the General Statute that we operate under and making some changes. The NC Veterans Council will be having their designated legislator at some time before they go out of session or before they cross-over to poll the legislators to get a feel of where they stand. This Commission as long as he been involved and has been involved for a number of years, we represent all the parties. This has never been a political committee. We look at the veterans. He feels what is good for veterans is good for North Carolina and good for America. If we have a party, we have an American Party because we look at the veterans and their families and their children. He said this Commission has always functioned at a high level. We had some very, very honorable people that served on this Commission. We are here to serve Veterans. Yes, we are appointed by the Governor but we are here to serve and represent Veterans and their families and their interests. We want to remove the idea that we are political on whatever part. We represent the Veterans and we are going to at the highest level. That has been our hallmark over the years since we were created. He hopes will be like that a hundred years from now if still in existence.

Chairman Braswell commended Vice-Chairman Smith for his great comments and the Commission applauded his words.

Mr. Peedin wanted to clarify comment made by Vice-Chairman Smith that he asked at the October meeting for a group of the Commission to study the scholarship statutes and items need to be changed. He said based on Vice Chairman Smith's words, Mr. Peedin wanted to make sure he understands if Vice-Chairman Smith's thoughts had backed off anything that needs to be looked at and reported to the General Assembly. Vice-Chairman Smith said his thoughts were strictly on things that we know need to change.

Chairman Braswell said a group would meet in Raleigh to determine what needs to be done with the statute. Some suitable dates would be suggested and emailed for approval.

Chairman Braswell stated he is appointed by the Governor. As the Chairman, whoever Governor Cooper appoints, he would work with them. He stated he had a great four years as Chairman and previous three years as a member of the Commission. We're here to work for the Veterans so whomever Governor Cooper appoints will be fine with him. He stated that Governor Cooper asked him back in November if he would continue to serve and has not heard back from them.

Mr. Peedin asked for clarification that the minutes were to reflect those Commission members who are present and those that are absent. Chairman Braswell confirmed that is correct.

Chairman Braswell called for a motion to adjourn the Commission meeting was in order and reminded members to submit their expense forms. Commissioner Shillito made a motion to adjourn and was seconded by Commissioner Carol Phelps.

The meeting adjourned at 1:55pm.

Jimmy G. Braswell
Chairman

James E. Prosser
Assistant Secretary for Veterans Affairs