

Illinois Veterans Advisory Council – Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 9, 2020– 10:00am

Illinois Department of Affairs

Video Teleconference & Phone Conference Line

Attendance:

NAME	APPOINTED BY	PRESENT
Stanley Olenjack	Marine Corps League	X
Anthony Ortiz	IDVA Director	
Al Reynolds	Disabled American Veterans	X
Senator Toi Hutchinson	President of Senate	
Senator Sue Rezin	Minority Leader of Senate	
Rep. Lance Yednock	Speaker of the House	X
Rep. Dan Swanson	Minority Leader of the House	X
Bill Wolff	IDVA Director	X
Clayton Young	IDVA Director	
Megan Everett	IDVA Director	X
Quinn Triplett	IDVA Director	X
Command Sgt. Maj. Dena Ballowe	National Guard	
Tom Banning	Attorney General	X
Greg Curran	IL Secretary of State	X
Jorge Bermudez	IL Department of Securities	X
Myron Kirby	The American Legion	X
Keith Wetherell	AMVETS	X
Peggy Arick	Blue Star Mothers of America	X
Pat Noel	Catholic War Veterans	X
Dr. Jerry Field	Jewish War Veterans	X
Joe Schaler	Military Order of the Purple Heart	X
Michael Peck	Military Order of the World Wars	X
Lou Myers	Reserve Officers' Association	X
Steve Fixler	IACVAC	X
Vince Long	Veterans of Foreign Wars	X
Roy Dolgos	Vietnam Veterans of America	X
Ariel Shivers-McGrew	IDVA Director	
Bob Tyler	MOAA	X
Bill Browne	Cook County VAC	

New Members: Welcome to Peggy Arick from Chairman Kirby

Guests:

Call to Order 10:00am

Roll Call

Pledge of Allegiance

Introductions:

IDVA Staff:

Linda Chapa LaVia, Director

Crystal Womack, Programs Manager

Gwen Diehl, Homes Manager

Amy Brenan, Legislative Liaison

Jenny Franklin – Director Chapa LaVia's Assistant

Mark Patterson – Programs Manager

Bridget Dooley - PIO

Approval of September 9th, 2020 minutes

Motion to approve the Minutes by Bill Wolff

Greg Curran seconded motion

Chairman:

We do have a new member to welcome to IVAC. Peggy Arick with Blue Star Mother's will be joining us.

We will now hear from the Director of IDVA for an update.

Director Chapa LaVia:

Good morning everyone and thank you for being present on the phone call today. I am going to start my report with a request for a moment of silence. Our federal VA homes have now reached 5,300 covid deaths. I am the secretary for NASDVA and currently all of my colleagues are going through an outbreak at their homes. We have all suffered drastically every day. As a department I feel that we have the best staff at each of our homes and have kept covid at bay for over 8 months. We have called when the outbreak happened. We contacted the federal side and IDPH to do a thorough report. Then we had a follow up report to make sure that any corrections advised were implemented. We have also under my administration called for a private investigation from one of the other departments to come in and do the report so we can find out what exactly transpired. From the report that was originally done at the homes, there are corrections that could have led to the virus to get into the home but there is no hard evidence. I need hard evidence on how it got into our home.

Our positivity rate at LaSalle was at 20.8%. We know that there are rumors that some of the employees were in the community maybe at a party or in a car smoking. At this time these are just rumors. This is why I have requested an investigation into the

allegations. I am not a clinical psychologist and I do not have a medical background. Each of our facilities is run by longtime certified care folks. We have contracted a physician assistant as Medical Director to be part of the programs. I do not want to digress, but we all understand that every single senior home across the state is making up for almost 50% of the deaths reported. We have a population that already has co-morbidities. On average at any one of our locations we lose from 5 to 11 percent of our population monthly because they are in their twilight years. We have the most fragile population. Anybody can make a mistake, and everybody is human, these folks show up to work each day and they love our veterans. I do not believe that anyone meant to bring the virus into our homes. Our workers are devastated and emotional wrecks right now. Anything you all can do to send the hope and love, please do so.

The communities which surround each of the homes has experienced extreme surges of positivity. And the idea that a mask has become a political point to whether you wear it or not is not joke. We have lost colleagues in the general assembly along with some of their family members as well. We feel at this point we do have the right people. We have a Marine, our Assistant Director overseeing the home in LaSalle as well as our adjutant in Quincy, Dawn Whitcomb coming up to assist. We have removed the administrator and the Director of Nursing is on administrative leave until we can get to the bottom of what transpired and how my veterans go so sick.

You know that once it gets into a facility, if you read any headline right now, we are not an anomaly. I have a call today with 15 other directors who are in the same position as we are to see if together, we can find something that we have missed. Since March we have learned so much about Covid but every day there is something new coming up.

We have reported the cases as they have come up and the report for that is posted. When I was in the general assembly, I helped to pass legislation to make that a requirement. We have been extremely transparent since the minute this has happened. Every one of my general assembly partners have a received a monthly what's going on update. It's so important that you know we have been in constant communication. Every step of the way during this pandemic we have reported numbers to the Federal VA to make sure they understood what was going on. We have been so fortunate that have had great resources from IEMA, the local health department in making sure that we have all the equipment and everything that we need.

Everything changes daily. In the initial report there was some issue about our hand sanitizer. Now there is another journal that has come out saying that it is not as ineffective as they thought it was towards the beginning of this virus. Everyday something new comes out about how to better protect our men and women.

Tomorrow's briefing will be very thorough. I hope to answer a lot of questions that some of our legislators need to know so they can take it back to their community. What I have appreciated about this committee is that some of you guys have reached out. We are all in this together. We don't need to torpedo each other on this issue. Across this country our veterans are dying at homes because we are not set up like hospitals. We have the sickest of sick veterans that we are caring for.

Rumors that are in the community about nurses killing our veterans is killing our nurses. We need to stick together guys and stand up with them more so now than ever before. If any of you have a question, please reach out to myself or let Crystal know you need to talk to me. It's the bad things that are said about us in the communities that not only reflects upon us it also reflects upon you. It also reflects that we are not working together on the steps forward to protect our veterans. It is so important that you know what is going on in your community.

I can say that every one of our employees are dedicated to taking care of our heroes. But right now, in our communities the biggest issue us communal transmission. In LaSalle the states attorney does not want to wear a mask and does not like the term mandate. Because people in the community are disrespecting the idea that we need to wear masks and wash your hands as well as keeping a good distance between yourself and others.

You hear it almost every day from our governor, please follow the protocols. I have lost friends to Covid. This is a travesty.

I want you to understand that we are committed to finding out how this happened. This is why we have called for an outside investigation. Our veterans and their families have the ability to decide to go to the hospital or to stay at the home where we can make their transition peaceful. We cannot force anyone one of our veterans to go to a hospital. It is the wishes of the family that we follow.

Our employees are receiving rapid testing before they go onto their shifts. It takes approximately 15 minutes. This allows us to know before they enter the facility if they are positive or not.

I will be sure to share my personal cell along with my state cell. If you do not have it, please just ask Crystal. We are being as transparent as possible right now and I look forward to talking to any of you.

Mike Peck:

Mr. Chairman, this is Mike Peck. I would like to pass a motion at this time that we the advisory council give a vote of confidence to the director in her handling of the situation.

*Due to the chairman being disconnected at this time, Mike Peck asked to entertain for a motion for a vote of confidence

Vince Long:

The VFW will make a motion for a vote of confidence.

Bob Tyler:

I will 2nd the motion. We hope that the Director received the letter that the MOAA council passed last week thanking her for all of her and her staffs hard work.

Director Chapa LaVia:

I was blessed and humbled to receive the letter. Thank you.

Mike Peck:

We have a motion and a 2nd. Any further discussion? All in favor say "I".

Motion passed

Director, would it be beneficial for someone from the committee to attend the hearing tomorrow?

Director Chapa LaVia:

Let me get back to you on that.

I want to also give a shout out to Roy Dolgos. When we did the Chicago Home ribbon cutting ceremony. We were at the point where we could only allow 15 people on site. One of my biggest regrets is not being able to have Roy present. I am hoping that we will soon have the ability for each of you to contact our legislative liaison to set up a time to do a tour with 15 of your brother or sisters.

This is the end of my report. Thank you to each and every one of you for your support. I am very humbled to have served with each one of you.

Mike Peck:

We know that you are doing your best on behalf of the veterans. We are here to support you.

We will move to Gwen Diehl with the home's projects update: Gwen....

Veterans' Homes Coordinator Gwen Diehl:

As everyone is aware, the Department shut down most visits to the Illinois Veterans' Homes in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus. In response to the threat IDVA requested emergency projects at each Home from the Illinois Capital Development Board (CDB) to create airborne isolation rooms that enable us to keep our residents in their Home for routine care and still maintain the safety of the other residents and staff. If the care requirements for any resident exceeded the capability of the Home to meet their medical needs, they were transported to the hospital.

In the early days of the pandemic, there was little guidance regarding construction standards for temporary units, so the Architect/Engineer teams for each Home used guidance from the CDC and the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE).

- Heppa air filtration units were installed in each room and UV-Light purification in the air ducts.
- Rooms were sealed to provide the negative pressure (additional caulking and seals around windows, baseboards and doors). Where day wall was incomplete above the ceiling, additional geoboard was added to extend to the roof deck.
- Lay-in ceiling tiles were replaced as necessary in some Homes to prevent air leakage at that point.
- Air exchanges in the resident rooms were increased to 12 per hour and exhausted above the roofline.

- **Equipment was tied into the existing building automation systems to allow for remote monitoring by the engineering staff.**
- **Isolation room equipment is served by the emergency backup generator to consistent power even in a power outage situation.**

The Emergency Isolation Room Projects are substantially complete at the Homes;

- **ANNA** – converted two single occupancy rooms in the facility. Five additional rooms are in a converted mobile office trailer. Two of the rooms are large enough to accommodate double occupancy.
- **LaSalle** - The northwest wing of the facility was converted.
- **MANTENO** - Converted R-1 and R-2 residential buildings. The R-1 conversion could be served by the existing emergency generator and a new Emergency Backup Generator was added to serve to serve the R-2 conversion. The new generator will also serve Prince.
- **QUINCY** - Fifer Wings A & C were converted.

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The Department’s capital projects have been halted for the most part, due to the COVID threat. Projects that require only outside access have been allowed to continue but these are limited.

Ongoing Capital Projects

(Estimated costs)

- **Illinois Veterans’ Home at Anna**

• Replace Nurse Call System	\$193,700
• General Building Repairs and Improvements	2,166,700
• Water Heater Replacement – NEW	+ 37,523
	\$ 2,360,400

- **Illinois Veterans’ Home at Chicago**

• 200 Bed NHC Building	\$ 120,523,968
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Substantial Completion was April 24, 2020 and the contractors continue to complete punch list items.

 - A ceremonial ribbon cutting was held November 11, 2020, however, due COVID restrictions, the even was not open to the public. I was honored that the garden was dedicated to me and hopefully the plants will survive the winter and it will be a beautiful place next year.
 - Home Administrator is T’Kira Wilkerson; the Department continues with hiring additional staff hiring. IDPH has conducted preliminary inspection of the construction and will return for inspection of the clinical for licensure. We are ordering, accepting and inventorying moveable equipment and installing it. We still need:
 - Inspections by IDPH and USDVA
 - Recruit and hire additional staff; provide staff orientation
 - Accept waiting list applications.
 - Admit veterans after licensure by IDPH and certification by USDVA.

Water safety measure have been designed into the mechanical and plumbing systems to ensure we are proactive in dealing with potential problems.

- **Illinois Veterans' Home at LaSalle**
 - Replace Wander Guard and Nurse Call System (Original Building) \$ 583,100
 - Replace Original Generator, Chiller and Mechanical Systems 2,203,600
 - \$ 2,786,700**

- **Illinois Veterans' Home at Manteno** - The Emergency Automatic Flush Valves and Mixing Valves has continued to evolve as undiscovered conditions are revealed and we want to ensure the utmost safety standards are attained through the project.
 - EMERGENCY Automatic Flush Valves, Mixing Valves & Water Filtration \$ 9,934,118
 - Replace Air Handling Units in residential buildings 6,369,100
 - Replace Various Roofing Systems 5,683,200
 - Replace Water Mains on campus 2,038,000
 - Central Kitchen Renovation 750,700
 - Renovate Restrooms 3,187,300
 - \$27,962,418**

- **Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy** –
 - Construct Domestic Water Loop (constr est not avail at this time) \$ 3,000,000
 - Moving forward to facilitate the footprint of the new buildings
 - Construct New Nursing Home and Domiciliary (less Asbestos Remediation) 240,564,444
 - Bridging Documents were completed October 2019.
 - Veterans United Constructors were selected & approved by CDB
 - Notice of award and contract completed by CDB.
 - Design development will begin
 - Project submitted to USDVA and approved for reimbursement
 - Substantial Completion o/a December 31, 2023
 - Residents will be moved from Anderson and Somerville when the Domiciliary is complete
 - Kitchen and Laundry operations will be moved from Neilson Dietary and Ehle Laundry when the new building is complete
 - Residents of Schapers and Markword will move into the new buildings and those buildings will be demolished
 - Abate Asbestos in Seven Buildings Prior to Demolition to make way for the footprint of the new building 724,000
 - Roof Replacement at Ehle Laundry and Tradesmen Buildings 406,700
 - \$ 244,695,144**

Construction Project Cost Recap:

Illinois Veterans' Home at Anna	2,360,400
Illinois Veterans' Home at Chicago	120,523,968
Illinois Veterans' Home at LaSalle	2,786,700
Illinois Veterans' Home at Manteno	27,962,418

Mike Peck:

Any further questions?

Hearing none we will move to the legislative report

Legislative Report:

Amy Brennan:

Mike Peck:

I have a question before we get started. We have been advertising to the VAC 10 bills that we did not get through the legislature, notably SB110. I do already have a senator to reintroduce that. Could you address that? We will have to get new sponsors for those bills.

Amy Brennan:

Thank you for the update.

Good morning everyone. There is a lot going on with IDVA right now regarding Covid. The legislature is no different in not being able to convene.

Representative Swanson is online, so I welcome his thoughts on what is upcoming.

Representative Swanson:

As Amy said, we did not have veto session. It is still to be determined when we will go back our 2nd general assembly. There is a possibility we will go back but we do not have any dates established yet. We are not sure who the next speaker will be or if Speaker Madigan will maintain his position.

We will be moving to the 102nd general assembly and when we make that transition, all previous legislation has to be reintroduced. Depending upon how long the lame duck session is possibly some legislation could be introduced then but very unlikely. Lame duck session would already have a full calendar of things to get through.

Amy Brennan:

Thank you, Representative Swanson. It is a crazy time for everyone right now.

With what the agency is focusing on right now, this group has done a great job of being patient while we work on getting a resolution passed. Thank you to the folks here in helping to draft and encourage us for the Medal of Honor Highway resolution. This will make highway 20 across the state the Medal of Honor Highway and we will join a national movement. The resolution is drafted and we have spoken with the Governor's office and have all green lights to move forward. We have also had to work with IDOT in regard to the signage that would be needed. Since there was no fall veto session this year, we now will be putting this resolution in the spring session.

Other areas that we are looking at is mental health, housing support for veterans also focusing on women veterans.

With the focus being on the LaSalle home, we did have a hearing over a week ago with the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. We are hosting a briefing trying to allow a virtual hearing with the house. This would allow us to be transparent.

The ribbon cutting took place at the Chicago home, we did invite a very small group of representatives close to where the home is located. Within the home there are a number of available positions that are being posted. I want to be sure to get all that information out to you.

I wanted to thank everyone for the opportunity of allowing me to join. I know this team is doing everything they can to protect our veterans and their families.

Please remember your voices are important in your community. Reach out to your elected officials and let them know that we are doing everything that we can.

Question:

Is it possible to put a hearing synopsis on the IDVA page with upcoming hearings and legislation?

Amy:

We can connect after the call to better understand what I can do to help.

Myron Kirby:

I would like to thank Amy. I appreciate the update. A big thanks goes out to Representative Swanson as well as our other representatives. We appreciate your continued support of our veterans.

I do want to echo what Director Chapa LaVia. LaSalle is no different than other long-term care facility in the United States. I know a great job is being done and I appreciate all the hard work.

Before we move onto old business, I would like to say it's been a pretty wild 2 years. It does not feel like it's been that long. I will be turning over the reins to a new chairman at the conclusion of this meeting. I would like to thank everyone for being understanding during the unprecedented times and joining via teleconference.

Amy Brenan:

Mr. Chairman, can we please take a moment to allow Repetitive Yednock to provide an update as well.

Representative Yednock:

The veteran's home in LaSalle is in my district which brings pain to us. I have confidence in Director Chapa LaVia's leadership at the home. I believe she is going to do as much as she can to try to get to the bottom of this. We are not going to make this political, we are going to make this about healthcare. You will see in our hearings that we are going to take an open mind and try to determine what has happened and to keep it from every happening again. I will echo that I have been less than happy about some of my local leaders. Some have decided to turn a blind eye to some of the things. I think it's fair to say that I wish everybody would have taken this more seriously. Maybe

that would have contributed to not such a horrible outbreak. I'm not a doctor so I can't say that for sure, but this has been a great source of pain for myself and our district. I want to express my confidence in the veteran's home itself. I would be happy to hear from any of the committee members or anyone else on what their questions or thoughts are before we have this hearing.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make a statement to the committee.

Myron Kirby:

Any other comments? Hearing none we will move on.

Old Business:

Myron Kirby:

Is there any old business that we need to discuss?

Hearing none, we will move on to new business.

New Business:

Myron Kirby:

This is the time that we will nominate for chairman for a 2-year term. I had earlier appointed Greg Curran to the nominating committee. I will call on Greg for his report for chairman.

Greg Curran:

I do have the nomination committee report. Thank you to those who expressed an interest in running.

The nominations for chairman are: Al Reynolds and Mike Peck

Both are interested in the position of chairman.

No other nominations were announced.

Myron Kirby motioned to close the nominations
Stanley Olenjack 2nd the motion

Crystal Womack: I have sent the nomination form out to the committee with my email and phone number to text or email your choice back.

Myron Kirby:

The new chairman of IVAC is Mike Peck. Al thank you for running and hope you continue with the committee.

Mike Peck:

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Myron Kirby:

We will now move on with the Vice Chair position. Greg can you please provide the report.

Greg Curran:

Chairman, the committee has 2 individuals who are interested in the vice chair position.

They are:

Joe Schaler

Dr. Jerry Fields

Myron Kirby:

Are there any other nominations at this time?

Hearing none, I would entertain a motion to close

Greg Curran makes a motion to close

2nd by Stanley Olenjack

All in favor I

Nominations are closed. You will vote for Joe or Jerry

Myron Kirby:

Jerry Fields will take the Vice Chair position.

Elections are now complete. It did take a bit more time doing this electronically, however we are now in good standing.

Is there any other new business to discuss?

Stanley Olenjack:

I have a couple of items that I would like to talk about. What is the issue of Governor Pritzker taking on the American Flag being left at half-staff? I don't think the flag should fly at half-staff for this long of a time.

Greg Curran:

I am often referenced on the flag etiquette. The two authorities over the flag are the President and the Governor. He does have the authority to do this.

Stanley Olenjack:

I believe there should be a time period for this to happen.

Greg Curran:

Duly noted.

Stanley Olenjack:

I would like to address the opening of the new home in Chicago. I was watching the news and seen the Governor cutting the ribbon at the new home. I understand with Covid we cannot get everyone out there, but I think we should have been notified and told about it. I feel that cutting the ribbon in November and opening the facility in March makes no sense. We could have waited.

Bridgett Dooley:

There is a possibility when the new residents are set to move in February, we may be able to invite the Veteran Service Organizations. You would be able to welcome them into the facility. If that is something that you are interested in, let Crystal know and we can see about making that happen.

Myron Kirby:

I appreciate that input

Amy Brennan:

I would like to chime in and say that we are working on putting together a whole tour as we get closer to the open time.

We are also putting together a virtual link that we will be able to send out to the group for you to share as well.

Myron Kirby:

Any other comments?

Bill Wolff:

We were talking about information and I think that my own opinion should get some sort of a letter to keep updated about what is going on as opposed to learning via the television.

Director Chapa LaVia:

We will be sure to get a letter out to each of you. There were organizations represented at the ribbon cutting as we were able to do so.

Crystal Womack:

Director, I did send a letter to the committee about 2 weeks ago that Amy sent for forwarding.

Bill Wolff:

I did receive your letter but that was about 2 weeks after the news broke. I would like to have known prior to finding out on the news.

Myron Kirby:

Any other new business?

Steve Fixler:

I have 2 things that I would like to say. Hines Hospital hired the Community Engagement Program Coordinator knows as CEPC. They will go out to the western counties and put together a veteran suicide prevention program similar to what we started in DuPage county. LaSalle county will be the first county that she works with.

I would like to be part of the live tours for the new Chicago home as well as I have watched it being built for the past few years.

Answer:

The state of Illinois is part of a program called the Governor's Challenge. This is a joint venture between the USDVA and SAMSA. Recently the Pritzker administration allocated \$2 million towards veteran suicide prevention. There are additional programs coming up as well.

Amy Brennan:

Steve I will put you down for the live tours at the Chicago home.

Myron Kirby:

Any other comments or business we need to conduct?

Representative Swanson:

Mr. Chairman, I have a couple of comments I would like to make. First, as a state organizations I think that we should be looking at our regions. Coming up the last week of May and the first weekend in June the Mercer county Veteran Organizations will be hosting the Vietnam travelling wall. I am working with many of the Legions and VFW's and other groups in my district to provide them with our full support. I have seen the wall in DC and the travelling wall, and it is very moving. Secondly, I would like to take the opportunity to express my thanks to the department and to your leadership Director Chapa LaVia and to your staff who have been working and burning that midnight oil to keep us legislators informed and doing your best to try and keep the public informed as well. As I hosted and was part of a video conferencing event, I was asked a question by Gary Bishop from one of the media outlet groups referencing the outbreak at LaSalle and the terrible losses we are facing with our veterans but as well across the state in our senior nursing homes as well. As we look for the vaccine to be coming forward, certainly we need to keep our eyes open as this is a priority. I did request a report from the DOD on their plan and I received it today. The plan is for immunizations across our military branches. I'm hoping there are some ways we can take care of our active duty brothers and sisters through the DOD.

Director Chapa LaVia:

Thank you Representative as you know where my heart is. I have sat in that chair for 16 years next to you on the house floor and we have fought side by side for our veterans by making their and their families lives better.

Myron Kirby:

I would like to thank you Representative Swanson. With your help and what you have done to help our veterans.

Let's have a moment of silence and reflect on our veterans that are fighting for our freedom today as well as those that have passed.

I would like to say a few things before I turn this over to the new chairman to close this meeting.

I appreciate you Director Chapa LaVia, it's been a quick 2 years and I wish I could have done more to help. I appreciate your support and your commitment by taking helm of the director. I really want to thank Crystal Womack personally who has worked with me so much over the phone. She has done a great job for us. I hope that the new chairman takes care of her.

Nothing else to be said and I now turn this over to our new chairman, Mr. Peck

Mike Peck:

Myron, we want to thank you for not just 1 term as chairman but 2 terms. You have done a tremendous job and we know where your loyalty is towards the veterans. The committee wishes Director Chapa LaVia the best in overcoming this problem and I know she will find success in that.

With that said, I am asking for a motion to adjourn.

Motion made by: Greg Curran

2nd by: Vince Long

All in favor meeting adjourned

General Discussion:

For the Good of the Veterans:

Retire the Colors:

Next Meeting Date: March 10, 202 – WebEx

Adjourn: Mike Peck, Chairman