

**Texas Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes**  
**4th Quarter Commission Meeting (F.Y. 2021)**  
**August 12, 2021**

- I. Chairwoman Laura Koerner called to order the 4th Quarter Commission Meeting of the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) at 9:00 a.m. on August 12, 2021, via live gotowebinar. The following Commissioners, constituting a quorum, were present:

Chairwoman Laura Koerner, Vice-Chair Kevin Barber, Secretary Kimberlee Shaneyfelt, Commissioner Mike Hernandez, Commissioner Mary Dale.

Also present was Executive Director Thomas P. Palladino.

Secretary Kimberlee Shaneyfelt led the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag, and Commissioner Mike Hernandez led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Texas Flag.

Chip Osborne led the Commission in prayer.

II. **Public Comment.**

Members of the public were encouraged to register for the webinar at the following link:  
<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/1257461287524277774>

III. **Approve the FY2021 Third Quarter Meeting minutes held May 13, 2021.**

The minutes for the FY2021 Third Quarter Commission Meeting held May 13, 2021, were previously distributed to the Commissioners.

**Motion:** Approve the FY2021 Third Quarter Commission Meeting minutes.  
**Made By:** Secretary Kimberlee Shaneyfelt  
**Seconded By:** Commissioner Mike Hernandez  
**Action:** The motion passed unanimously

IV. **Annual Election of Vice Chairman and Secretary of Commission.**

Commissioner Kimberlee Shaneyfelt nominates Commissioner Kevin Barber.  
Commissioner Kevin Barber accepts the nomination.  
No other nominations were given.

**Motion:** Approve the election of Commissioner Kevin Barber as Vice-Chair  
**Made By:** Chairwoman Laura Koerner  
**Seconded By:** Commissioner Kimberlee Shaneyfelt  
**Action:** The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Kevin Barber nominates Commissioner Kimberlee Shaneyfelt as Secretary.  
Commissioner Kimberlee Shaneyfelt accepts the nomination.  
No other nominations were given.

**Motion:** Approve the election of Commissioner Kimberlee Shaneyfelt as Secretary  
**Made By:** Vice-Chair Kevin Barber  
**Seconded By:** Commissioner Mary Dale  
**Action:** The motion passed unanimously.

**V. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding Agency Programs and Division.**

The Commissioners reviewed the Quarterly Program Reports that were previously provided before the Commission meeting.

**A. Charles Catoe, Division Director of Program Operations,** briefed the Commissioners: First, I wanted to update you on a pilot project called the ETS sponsorship that we're working on with the Department of Veteran Affairs. The idea is that we will provide sponsorship from local communities to those transitioning service members who are getting out. If anyone is interested in helping veterans, you qualify as a sponsor, and the V.A. will train you in getting qualified as a trained sponsor. This is a pilot project going on right now in Arizona, California, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. It's also only with currently army transitioning service members from several posts. It is starting small, this is a huge endeavor, and it could get very big if the evaluation goes well. We have Community Integration Coordinators (CIC's) responsible for recruiting, training, and managing the ETS sponsors for transitioning service members. In Texas, the two that have signed MOUs with ETS sponsorship, and the V.A. are Combined Arms Houston and then Bexar County and will cover more than just Bexar County. TVC is part of this is and has partnered with them and signed an MOU to access their database. We have been working with communications and outreach, and they are developing an e-Welcome package on our website. This is still an evaluation project with the V.A., and if everything works out, it will expand to all services and expand to all states. I had a meeting with the V.A. Representative, Dr. Joe Jaroski, yesterday, and he informed us that this program had made it on the V.A. Secretary Strategic plan.

**TVC Reconstitution:** I just wanted to update you on where we are with the agency reconstitution. As you can see in your charts, as of yesterday morning, we had two staff sick with COVID; I'm sorry to report when I looked at it this morning, that number has already jumped to four. This is updated in real-time by everybody out in the field. The staff showing under other status are folks on vacation, those who may be sick but not COVID-related, or on emergency leave. So, you see, we got 44 of those. Staff working from home includes those working from home due to COVID or those on a regular telecommuting plan, and it is their normal day work from home. We've got 80 or, as of yesterday morning, had 88 folks in the office. We'll transition to the chart on the right; where left is people, the right is actually locations. It's somewhere around 90 people working in offices every day. Currently, we have 151 locations that we are monitoring and stepping through our reconstitution plan.

As you can see, only 12 of them are not reconstituted, and most of these that are not reconstituted are either due to the snowstorm and for damage, and they're still trying to get them reopened, or they are in transition. Most of our offices are in phase three, which means up to 75% of our staff can occupy that space at any time. Phase one is 25% phase two is 50%. The dynamic nature of this H.Q. was actually at phase III, but due to the COVID rise, H.Q. has now moved back to phase II.

**VCSSO AT:** The Veteran County Service Officers Association of Texas is holding a training conference at the end of August in South Padre Island. Right now, it is planned to be in person. The chair, the executive director, and a small training team from TVC will be participating, and our training team will be giving them their required 12 hours of training to get certified or accredited. We also have a team from our FVA. They are going down to provide grants instruction to the County Veterans Service Officers Association participants. We are monitoring whether it will be virtual or hybrid.

**Education:** Veterans Exceptional Education, Recognition Award, or you'll hear it called VEERA looks like it will be held on September 23rd or 24th. It'll be virtual, and it'll be for all the recipients who got the award. This is a separate agenda item, and Sue Jevning, our director of Veterans Education, will give you more details.

**Employment:** The Red, White, and You statewide hiring event usually happens around veteran's day, and this year is no different. The event will be held on November 4th across the state because it works with TVC and 28 workforce boards, it is all different, and I suspect there will be in-person and hybrid online elements.

**Virtual VEAC:** Finally, another project that we are partnering with the V.A. is the Veterans Experience Action Center (VEAC). It's planned for the 16th and 19th of November, 2021. It is a virtual event. They call it the virtual VEAC. This is the V.A. slide to describe it. Before the event kicks off, we do a lot of training with the V.A. and our Claims Benefits Advisors (CBA's) register veterans. The blue "VSO" is our CBA's and a couple select VCSSO's, and there will be 20-30 of them for six hours over three days. It's a three-day event with set appointments to get as many veterans as we possibly can. Anything that needs to go to the V.A., the V.A. is now available right away, standing by to help them so that it will be a warm hand-off. They've done this in about 9 or 10 states previously, and the feedback has just been incredible. It's a way to get directly into the V.A. Get your issue resolved, discussed, and get the train moving. They can't do all of Texas at one time, so that this November event will be for San Antonio and kind of the southwest portion of Texas. They design the event to capture about 300,000 veterans. In the future, they have committed to doing a virtual VEAC for the Houston area and a virtual VEAC for the DFW area and the Austin area. We've asked them to take a look at El Paso too. This will be in the 22-23 timeframe.

**HCAD Exceptional Item:** The legislature was great to us during the exceptional item for expanding our HCAD. I'm going to call up Gary Lee to discuss how HCAD is doing on the expansion. For the record, I am the HCAD Director, and my name is Gary Lee. I would like to take a moment to thank Chair Koerner and all of the other commissioners, as well as Mr. Palladino, for their contributions in facilitating the passing and approval of this legislative exceptional item. It is going to assist us in assisting a great deal of more veterans throughout the great state.

As you can see before you, that is the current schedule of expansion. We have the September schedule of Lake Jackson, Kerrville, Lubbock, and Charles Wilson in Lufkin. The October schedule of Wilson, Young and Ector County, Abilene, Doris Miller in Waco, and Laredo. In November, we have Grandbury, Beaumont, San Angelo, and Victoria. We've been very progressive. The department established and added a Staff Services Officer, and we have established and recently selected four district supervisors. We eventually will have 24 regions throughout the state; we've divided that into four districts to decentralize the H.Q. element of HCAD. The expansion is creating restructuring and creating career opportunities, enhancing our

career ladder, and making more advocates themselves. Patient care being a top priority for the Veteran Health Administration, we communicated many months before this in anticipation of the legislative approval. We spoke with the hospital directors and asked them if the exceptional item gets passed could they provide us with the office space and basic computer connectivity? Everybody was saying yes. Still, of course, the quarantine has dictated they add more health care personnel in those months since, so a few of the promised office spaces were repurposed. We went to our backup and engaged our county offices, some individuals will be placed into county offices, but we will continue to plan for our expansion. The last thing I want to mention if there is an issue with the opening of the first of the expansion months, we will rotate to the 15<sup>th</sup>, but it will not impede our progress.

*Mr. Palladino wanted to give a shout-out to Gary when the legislature passed this; it was an exceptional item to double the number of healthcare advocates that TVC has to serve our veterans because the need is so great, and the commissioners and legislatures supported that. So Gary has been out there, I asked Gary to contact all of the V.A. and county leadership to place them, and he did. Mr. Palladino complemented Gary in being proactive to make sure we have space, and it's all free space; we don't pay rent on any of this space, and the vast majority of this space is in V.A. healthcare facilities, and a few are in county facilities so that they can be in the proper place to provide that patient advocacy.*

*Mr. Palladino asked: Are you successful now? Were you successful in finding locations for all 24?*

*Response: We were able to get all but two. Grandbury was one, and San Angelo, we should know something within the next couple of days.*

*Mr. Palladino asked: You also stated in your plan that by November, you should have them all in place, correct?*

*Response: Yes, sir, our target is November 1<sup>st</sup>, but if that doesn't happen, we will move it to the 15<sup>th</sup>.*

*Chairwoman Koerner: I have one question, and it is more to you, Tom, or Elaine. Do we plan to do a little media outreach to let the veterans know this new advocate is out there for them? i.e., Sending out a message to the paper to let them know?*

*Mr. Palladino stated: Yes, we are working on that, but we don't want to do that prematurely, so as soon as they're in place, we will use every avenue we have to get out the information.*

*Elaine stated: Yes, Shawn will be speaking about our social media paid ads. We did do a new contract for the same vendor, but we plan to use some of those funds to notify those specific areas about the new HCAD employees.*

**B. Chip Osborne, Division Director of Resource Management,** briefed the Commissioners: For the record, we have 13 more working days in this current fiscal year, so therefore a lot of our reports will not be briefed until the November Commission meeting. So my portion is very short. However, I would like to introduce Elisabeth Webster from our FVA Communication and Outreach; she will give you all an update on our big Check presentations.

**Elisabeth Webster, FVA Communications Coordinator:** Good morning, Chairwoman Kerner, Commissioners, and Mr. Paladino. We have charted out a course for the Commissioners to our Tour of Texas in 2021. You will see the map indicating the original locations where we plan to hold these events on the left.

**South Texas Region:** Our first tour is Brownsville, where we had previously planned to do an in-person event in addition to a virtual event for the South Texas region. We have invited 13

organizations to accept checks for 15 grants. Chairwoman Korner and Executive Director Palladino will be presenting.

**Alamo Region:** The second tour stop is also with Chairwoman Koerner that's going to be on Friday, August 27th at 11:00 a.m. We will have a virtual event for the Alamo Region with 12 organizations invited to accept checks for 14 grants.

*Mr. Palladino asked Elisabeth to explain the coordination with the regions.*

Yesterday I spoke with our hosts for each of these different tour stops. The Cameron County Veterans County Service officer was generous enough to help us arrange this event in person, but they also did

agree that due to health and safety conditions on the ground that a virtual event might be better at this time, the same thing holds true for the Alamo region of the scheduled. I touched base with the Bexar County Misdemeanor Veterans Treatment Court, and they were going to be our host, and due to health and safety conditions on the ground, it looks like this will be a virtual event.

**West Texas Region:** Our third tour stop, Commissioner Hernandez, will present checks virtually to grantees on Wednesday, September 1st, 10:00 a.m. I touched base with our host, the El Paso Veterans County Service Officer, and the Veterans Treatment Court. They agree that health and safety conditions currently on the ground would make this advisable. We're looking at five organizations accepting checks to represent six grants.

**Panhandle Region:** Our fourth tour stop Lubbock, is scheduled for Thursday, September 2nd at 10:00 a.m. This is going to be another online event for Commissioner Hernandez. We have already invited seven organizations to accept checks for nine grants. The previous host was going to be the Tech University Museum, and they agreed that a virtual event is advisable due to the health and safety conditions on the ground.

**North Texas Region:** Our fifth event is going to be the North Texas region tour stop. This is going to be Commissioner Shaneyfelt presenting checks for 27 organizations, 32 grants. This is going to be another online event due to the health and safety conditions on the ground. I did touch base with them yesterday, and they agreed that this is probably the best way to move forward to keep everyone safe due to the local circumstances. That has been scheduled for September 7th at 1:00 p.m., again will be an online event. We'll be streaming this on our social media platforms.

**East Texas Region:** Moving on to our sixth tour stop, this will be our first in-person tour stop. It looks like in Tyler, Habitat for Humanity of Smith County is still looking forward to hosting us. This will be the tour stop presenting checks for the East Texas Region; seven organizations are invited to accept checks for eight grantees. We are still looking at having an in-person check presentation in Tyler. I will, of course, update if we, any new information on the ground but fingers crossed, it does look like we will be able to have an in-person event for Tyler.

**Gulf Coast Region:** Our seventh tour stop is scheduled for Friday, September 10th at 1:00 p.m. with Commissioner Barber. I did touch base with Combined Arms, and due to the local situation on the ground with health and safety conditions, it does look like a virtual check presentation is advisable right now. Commissioner Barber will be presenting checks for 23 organizations representing 26 grants on a virtual event that will be streamed, of course, online on our social media platforms.

**Central Texas Region:** The last tour stop on the tour of Texas is in the Gulf Coast Region; we have still planned to hold an in-person event in San Marcos at the Hays County Government Center on Wednesday, September 5th, 15th at 1:00 p.m. and will be presenting checks for 32 organizations, representing 35 grants.

**C. Shawn Deabay, Deputy Executive Director**, briefed the Commission on the following: Good morning Chairwoman, Commissioners, Mr. Palladino, and guests for the record; my name is Sean Deabay, the Deputy Executive Director for the Texas Veterans Commission. I will make sure I am super brief with this and update you on things going on with my team.

**Women Veterans Program:** The Women Veterans day was June 12th. They hosted a 2021 Women veteran's day networking mixer leading into Women veteran's day. The event included five breakout rooms facilitated by 12 community partners, with the event having 128 attendees. I want to thank Dr. Krystle Matthews and her team for doing an excellent job putting that together. I was able to attend, and they did a phenomenal job.

**I.T. Section:** We're working from home, which has increased the workload on our I.T. section, a three-person team. We are adding a fourth person to the team, a systems analyst who will start next week. They'll be able to handle a lot of the day-to-day issues that happen with our I.T. items.

**Communications:** Our website was created in 2014, making it nearly eight years old. From my understanding, a year or two and the website is obsolete, right? We are close to identifying a website developer to develop a new WordPress site, so we've narrowed it down to two companies. Our target is May 22nd for a launch, but I will definitely keep you posted as we get closer.

**Government Relations:** And lastly, our government relations team is taking a significant loss. Greg Talamantes is leaving us at the end of the month. We're sad to see him go for sure he's moving on to start the next chapter of his career. As you know, Greg and Arnold Alaniz did a tremendous job in these last two legislative sessions were very, very successful, and that is due to a large part of their hard work. The good news is that James Crabtree will be serving as the new Director for Government Relations as of August 2nd.

**Introduction of new Government Relation Director:**

My name is James Crabtree, and I am honored to be taking over for Greg as the new government relations director for the Texas Veterans Commission. I will give you a quick background about myself. I've been the Veteran Affairs and Border Security Committee director, Texas Senate working for Senator Campbell for the last five years. So, because of that, I had a chance to work closely with Colonel Palladino and Greg Talamantez. Not just on legislation coming through our Committee, but also with Senator Campbell being on the Finance Committee working on the budget requests and exceptional items requests. Before working in the Senate, I worked for about 12 years at the Veterans Land Board. I'm a Lieutenant Colonel in the Marine core reserve and then on the personal side. My wife and I live near Liberty Hill, and we've got four kids, so I am glad to be here with the TVC.

## **VI. Quarterly Reports from Veterans County Service Officer Advisory Committee.**

**A. Earl Newsome, Chair of Veteran Services Committee**, provided a summary of the Advisory activities since their last report to the Commission. The Veteran Services Committee has been tasked with looking at what the commission could do for homeless veterans and improving services to veterans involved in the justice system and suicide prevention. The Veteran Services Advisory (VSA) Committee will have met twice, virtually, since the May Commission meeting. First, the Committee met on Tuesday, June 22, 2021, via GoToWebinar to discuss the recommendations made by the Homeless Sub-committee to improve outreach and information that is being provided to homeless veterans in Texas. At the time of this report, the Committee is scheduled to meet on Thursday, August 5, 2021, via GoToWebinar with TVC Executives to review and discuss the Homeless Recommendations report created by the VSA

Committee. The next Veteran Services Advisory Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, October 12, 2021, via GoToWebinar at 10:00 a.m.

*Commissioner Shaneyfelt thanked Earl Newsome for the information and said he has a heart for service and a mind for solutions. You have come up with some resource-free assistance to help homeless veterans.*

*Chairwoman Koerner thanked Earl for his time and that the committee recommended some quick wins.*

**B. Spencer Kimball, Chairman of the VCSO Advisory Committee, was absent, and no report was provided.**

## **VII. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding Advisory Committee Membership.**

**Shawn Deabay, Deputy Executive Director**, presented the Commissioners with a report regarding the Advisory Committee Membership application process. What we are trying to accomplish with this agenda item is to establish a staggering of Advisory Committee members for all three committees. In your folder, item

1.a., the adopted rule from the last Commission meeting allows us to stagger terms. Item 1.b., which is the advisory committee procedures that show the process for adding a committee member. These are available in case you have any questions about them. On your documents, you have three tables, all three advisory committees. Our goal is not to lose more than three members in any given year to allow for continuity of the committees. We solicited volunteers who wanted to extend their term. If we received more volunteers than we needed, we made a random selection of those who volunteered. Based on this process, you can see the recommendations in each of the three tables to the right. That is our recommendation, so we have good continuity with these advisory committees. I would like to add that if any of these members leave before their ending date, the person we bring on will take that term.

**Motion:** Approve the extension of the Committee Member terms as presented.

**Made By:** Commissioner Mary Dale

**Seconded By:** Secretary Kimberlee Shaneyfelt

**Action:** The motion passed unanimously

## **VIII. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding Internal Audit for Veterans Employment services.**

**Liz Meyers, McConnell, and Jones** provided reports to the Commissioners. Good morning Madam Chairman, Commissioners, and Mr. Palladino, for the record, my name is Liz Myers, and we serve as your internal auditors. Today I am presenting the Veterans Employment Service audit report and the FY20-21 Annual Internal Audit report. But before I start presenting the reports, we wish to thank you and all the agency staff for your support over the past four years. Your packet includes the Veteran Employment Services Audit report. We rated the controls as effective. The objective of this audit was to assess the program's ability to attain goals and objectives that had been established for each VES program, ensure compliance with governing laws, rules, and guidelines follow established procedures, and ensure reports submitted to the Department of Labor are accurate and timely. We did also identify activities that we would like

to recognize the staff for their efforts; the agency and the VES team rose to many challenges they faced during the pandemic, including but not limited to finding loaner laptops for the VES team members to use until the nationwide supplier backlog for laptops, was resolved.

Additionally, updating the TVC website to provide a direct link for veterans to click to access VES services, requesting and receiving permission from the Department of Labor to service veterans without the ACJ staff triaging them in advance, receiving significantly increased requests by phone or online for assistance from pre-triage veterans and holding virtual job fairs for employers and job seekers. We commend the agency's and the VES team's efforts to find new and effective ways to continue providing the level of service Veterans have come to expect from them despite the challenges they face in this remote world. They achieved this while remaining in compliance with their grant operational and reporting requirements.

**IX. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding Fiscal Year 2021 Annual Internal Audit Report and F.Y. 2022 Risk Assessment.**

**Liz Meyers, McConnell, and Jones** provided reports to the Commissioners.

The FY2021 Annual Internal Audit report and the FY2022 Risk Assessment, are The report summarizes the FY2021 internal audit activities, and the report is required to be submitted to the governor's office, Legislative Budget Board, and the State Auditor's Office by November 1st. The annual Internal Audit report requires the FY22 annual audit plan to be included. Therefore, once your internal audit service provider finalizes the FY22 audit plan, a revised FY21 annual internal audit report will need to be resubmitted. Regarding the risk assessment, we completed the risk assessment based on the risk assessment results in audit history, and we suggest the following 2022 internal audit; first, human resources regarding return to the office and agency-wide staffing strategy and then data security for both electronic and paper data. This information is included in the FY21 Annual Internal Audit report and can be found on page seven of your report. Our risk assessment was based on an electronic survey and review of the agency's annual audit history.

*Mr. Palladino thanked Liz and her team for conducting these audits and working with them for four years. It's been a pleasure working with you all, and I appreciate your hard work in helping us improve our operations.*

**X. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding Internal Audit Contract Services for F.Y. 2022.**

**Shawn Deabay, Deputy Executive Director**, presented the Commissioners with a report regarding the Internal Audit Contract Services for FY2022. As you know, McConnell and Jones have done an excellent job at being our internal auditor over the past four years, which is the maximum number of years before having to put out a request for proposal or RFP. We initially agreed to contract with them for a one-year contract with three one-year options, and we took advantage of every option because they were doing such a great job. We put out the RFP beginning of this calendar year, and we received bids and then completed the scoring. I'm going to spend my time on the master score sheet, which is number one. But for your information, number 2 is a blank evaluation form used to score the bids. There were five criteria to let you know there was project approach, ability to perform, qualifications and experience, overall cost, and project understanding. Those were the criteria we used when we scored. They were independently scored by Charlie Catoe, Division Director for Program Operations, Tina Marberry, Human Resources Director, and myself. In other words, we scored them without



knowledge of the other person's scores and then came together at the end. Once the contract manager did his piece and what you have is on line 15, those scores were averaged, and the contract manager then on line 16 added the price points based on costs associated with the bid and then lastly, the ranking of all the vendors. We are recommending awarding the contract to Weaver Tidwell since they were ranked number one in this process.

**Motion:** Approve the internal audit contract services for FY22.  
**Made By:** Commissioner Mike Hernandez  
**Seconded By:** Commissioner Mary Dale  
**Action:** The motion passed unanimously

**XI. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding the Fiscal Year 2021 Third Quarter Operating Budget.**

**Michelle Nall, Chief Financial Officer,** provided a detailed agency summary regarding the Fiscal Year 2021, 3rd Quarter Operating Statement, and a summary of the programs' financial activities since its last report to the Commission.

**XII. Report, presentation and/or action on Fiscal Year 2022 Operating budget,**

**Michelle Nall, Chief Financial Officer,** provided an in-depth agency summary regarding the Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budget. This is a report that will outline the detail of what was appropriated to us this past legislature. If you focus on the number highlighted at the bottom, the top part is the operating expenditures estimated by strategy on how they will spend those appropriated dollars. The bottom part is our method of finance, our MOF, and there are different types of methods of financial resources.

I am not going to go into detail about the expenditures; I'm going to talk more about the method of finance.

**Motion:** Approve the Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budget.  
**Made By:** Commissioner Mary Dale  
**Seconded By:** Commissioner Mike Hernandez  
**Action:** The motion passed unanimously

**XIII. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding the Intent to File Administrative Rules.**

So this agenda item is to seek your approval to move forward with the rulemaking process. In your folder, you have one attachment that lays out three bills. Although not all bills require rules, TVC leadership met to discuss which bills needed rules in place to better inform the public of our role.

**SB-886:** Citizenship assistance for veterans, the bill requires a TVC to educate and direct veterans to become U.S. citizens and facilitate the naturalization process on the veteran's request.

**SB 938:** This bill re-implements the franchise tax exemption for veteran-owned businesses. Our role is to verify veteran-owned businesses.

**H.B. 33:** This is an energy industry program for veterans' professional development. This requires TVC to develop and administer a program to help veterans seeking certification or training to prepare for employment in the energy industry. There's also a coordinating outreach

campaign to foster participation. This bill does require a rule, as it states the Commission shall adopt rules. So we are recommending that we move forward with the rulemaking process for these three bills. If approved, we will have the rule language for your review at the next Commission meeting. Then the rule would be placed on the register for public comment, and then during the second quarterly meeting, we'll come back to finalize the rules.

**Motion:** Approve intent to file administrative rules in response to SB-886, SB-938, and H.B. 33.

**Made By:** Secretary Kimberlee Shaneyfelt

**Seconded By:** Commissioner Mary Dale

**Action:** The motion passed unanimously

**XIV. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding Veterans Education Excellence Recognition Awards (VEERA).**

Sue Jevning, Director of the Veterans Education Department, briefed on the Veterans Education Excellence Recognition Award (VEERA). This award is a program that the Texas Legislature provided to recognize our public institutions of higher education not only for the great educational programs they offer but more specifically for the related services and support they provide to our Veterans Service students and their families, as well as the military-connected community. Since the program's enactment, the Commission has worked to develop an application that addresses the 11 evaluation criteria noted within the statute and provides a mechanism for these institutions to highlight the depth and the breadth of the services they provide our veteran students.

This year, in the fiscal year 2021, TVC launched the inaugural year of the awards program. We invited all public institutions of higher-ed colleges universities to submit a self-nomination application package to recognize their efforts during the academic year 2019-2020.

The application nomination period opened on November 1st, 2020, and with each given recognition year, it closes on April 1st of that given year.

Given some of the challenges we experienced this year in fiscal 21 related to weather events in February and January and the current and ongoing COVID impact, we extended the application deadline to April 8th of this year. After the deadline and self-nomination period closed, we set up an awards committee to evaluate each application based on the materials submitted. The awards committee comprised three commission staff members: me, Jim Bracken (Director, FVA), and Dr. Blake Harris (Director, VMHD). All applications were scored independently. Of these 16 applications we received, we selected 14 colleges and universities for recognition under VEERA. Nine of those colleges and universities receive a gold-level award. Three will receive the silver, and two will receive the bronze award. We notified the schools of their selection and that they will be recipients of these awards and at what tier. We are working with the Communications Department to coordinate and develop a virtual award ceremony, which will be held at the end of September.

*Chairwoman Koerner comments: "Commissioners just wanted to let you know we are not required as a board to approve the awards because it is the authority of this staff.*

*But since our names will be signed on the awards, I thought it would be a good measure. That we do a motion to ratify so that we could show that we are all in support of these awards being presented."*

**Motion:** Ratify the Veterans Education Excellence Recognition Awards (VEERA)  
**Made By:** Commissioner Mike Hernandez  
**Seconded By:** Secretary Kimberlee Shaneyfelt  
**Action:** The motion passed unanimously

**XV. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding a New Grant Service Category – Veteran Small Business Support.**

Anna Baker, Program Manager for the Veteran Entrepreneur Program, briefed the Commissioners. Today I'm presenting to you for a vote the addition of a new category under the General Assistance Grant program, the Veterans Small Business Support Grant. The proposed veteran small Business Support Grant will help veteran small business owners start and grow their businesses and help veterans sole proprietors maintain self-employment. Veteran-owned businesses have grown to represent almost 17% of all Texas firms, with over 5% women-owned. A 2020 report published by the Penfed Foundation ranked Austin, Dallas, and Houston as among the top 20 in the country for veteran entrepreneurship, and McAllen jumped 48 points from the previous year to rank 26th on the list. The impact of Texas veteran-owned businesses on the Texas economy in 2019 totaled \$9.7 million and exceeded \$8 million in 2020, even with COVID. More and more veterans are seeking small business ownership. However, access to capital funding, especially during COVID, is the biggest obstacle for post 911 veteran entrepreneurs and veterans or denied capital, more so than non-veterans. The proposed grant category also augments the one-on-one services provided by the veteran entrepreneur program business consultants—a team of four, including myself. Since 2016, the program has exceeded key performance metrics, driven mainly by our efforts in support of Senate Bill 1049, which waived business registration fees and provided a five-year franchise tax exemption for 100% veteran-owned businesses. Our primary role in fulfilling the requirements of the bill is to verify the honorable service of the veteran, providing the veteran a letter of verification that they send to the Secretary of State. From January 1st, 2016, through December 31st, 2019, 15,360 veterans requested the letter of verification, and 10,662 registered their businesses with the Secretary of State.

This legislative session, Senate Bill 938, was signed by Governor Abbott. This bill reinstates the benefits provided in Senate Bill 1049 and will go into effect on January 1, 2022. While we have made some strides in automating the process of obtaining the veterans' proof of honorable service and generating the letters, this is an activity that taxes the capacity of the team. The Veteran Small Business Support Grant fulfills the veterans' small business training needs expressed by veterans in the 2020 TVC needs assessment. It is in line with our government code section 434.022, item 11, to provide training workshops which our program does not have the budget nor bandwidth to provide. In addition, the grant provides two other key components. The first is up to \$2000 to the veteran for tools, equipment, software, or other related business products, and the 2nd is a referral to small business financial lenders. Our request for your vote to approve the addition of the veteran small business grant category to the General Assistance Grant program comes after a year-long collaboration between the Veteran Entrepreneur team and the Funds for Veterans' Assistance team. The one-page proposal, including considerations touched on this morning, is in your folder.

**Motion:** Approve the New Grant Service Category – Veteran Small Business Support  
**Made By:** Vice-Chair Kevin Barber  
**Seconded By:** Commissioner Mary Dale  
**Action:** The motion passed unanimously

**XVI. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding grant renewals criteria for the 2022-2023 grant period.**

Jim Bracken, Director of the Fund for Veterans' Assistance Department, presents the Commissioners with a detailed update of the Request for Applications 2022-2023 FVA grants for the General Assistance, Housing for Texas Heroes, Veterans Mental Health, Veterans Treatment Court, along with corrections and recommended changes for the Commissioners approval.

*Chairwoman Koerner: From our previous grantees that have received the money in this category, would this change what they would be reimbursed for, or would this just make it easier for you to review their expenditures?*

Response: It would make no difference to our current pro-bono legal service grantees.

*Chairwoman Koerner: Commissioner Barber, does the word products in the RFA address your concerns? We are reimbursing the delivery of products versus financial dollars.*

*Commissioner Barber: Yes, it does.*

Jim Bracken: Commission Barber, your concern about cash or cash equivalents are addressed in item d of the RFA. Where it says no cash or cash equivalents are allowable.

*Commissioner Dale requested a better look at the non-profit definition. As part of the application process, are we asking for their eligibility? IRS application with their Tax ID?*

Yes, ma'am. We confirm all of those things before we grant them a license. When they registered for a license for Gov Grants, we verified that they are, in fact, a real organization. An actual entity based in Texas and that they are in good standing with the Secretary of State. As a non-profit, we look at all those things before we even give them a license so they can apply.

*Commissioner Dale: If we are confirming they have the exemption approval, then I think we are fine.*

*Response: Ma'am, we don't confirm the exemption with the IRS. With the eligible action, are you a 501.C3 or not are you legitimate, lawfully stood-up, and registered. If you marked "yes" to all of that then you are eligible to apply. When we review the application we review the copy of their IRS confirmation of acknowledging you are a non-profit organization, you must provide a copy 990 from your last tax year to prove you file taxes as a non-profit. So there are other items required from the organization that also help us screen and ensure only those non-profits that are legitimate, fictional, operational with the IRS and currently reporting to the IRS that they are the ones the commission sees when the Advisory Committee presents them for recommendation.*

*Commissioner Dale: Ok, great.*

*Commissioner Hernandez wanted clarification on the definition of a rural county. I was reading the threshold of the population, and it mentioned the population number. On the definition, should it be more or less?*

Sir, that is a good point. The U.S. Census Bureau's definition is all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area which is classified as an area of 50,000 or more

people. Generally, it is a geographic area that is located outside cities and towns. Now there is another definition called Highly Rural Area, which is a threshold below 50,000. So that might be what you're referring to is those counties that have fewer than 50,000. We consider those as highly rural areas.

**Motion:** Approve the Fund for Veterans' Assistance 2022-2023 requests for the application.

**Made By:** Commissioner Mary Dale

**Seconded By:** Vice-Chair Kevin Barber

**Action:** The motion passed unanimously

**XVII. Report, presentation, and/or action regarding Acceptance of Gifts.**

**Chip Osborne, Division Director of Resource Management,** provided an Agency Summary regarding Appropriation Year 2021, 3rd Quarter Donations. There were no donations received for the third quarter, FY21.

**XVIII. Executive Director report.**

**Thomas Palladino, Executive Director,** provided a report on the agency's priorities and activities over the last quarter, meetings, and events he has attended to include relationships with other State and Federal veteran agencies. All TVC staff have been providing virtual services to veterans and their families remotely since March 2020 in accordance with the governor's directive to state agencies dated March 19, 2020, to protect employees and the public from COVID-19. In April 2021, the agency started to return to our offices in accordance with Phase 1 of our reconstitution plan (up to 25% of personnel working from their offices). We have accessed each office location based on criteria outlined by the State Department of Health Services to reopen. The Commissioners will conduct FVA grant check presentations to all new FVA grantee organizations in August and September 2021. Elisabeth Webster from the FVA has planned and coordinated the presentations. Shawn Deabay, Charlie Catoe, and I will attend the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) conference in Reno, NV, September 12-15, 2019.

**XIX. Executive Session. None.**

**XX. Discussion and take possible action on the items considered in Executive Session.**  
There were no items to act on.

**XXI. Discussion about setting the date, time, and location of the next Commission Meeting.**

The Commission agreed that the 1st Quarterly Commission Meeting of FY22 will be held on Thursday, November 18, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. HQ Austin TX, SFA Bldg. room 170.

**XXII. Adjournment.**

Chairwoman Koerner asked each Commissioner for any closing remarks.

Each Commissioner extended their gratitude to Texas Veterans Commission staff for their support and hard work in serving Texas Veterans.

Chairwoman Koerner provided closing remarks as well.

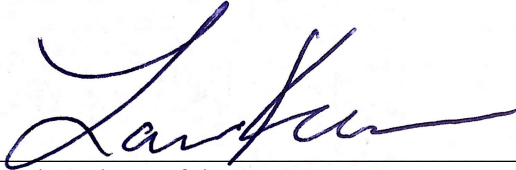
**Motion:** Adjourn 4th Quarter Meeting

**Made By:** Vice-Chair Kevin Barber

**Seconded By:** Secretary Kimberlee Shaneyfelt

**Action:** The motion passed unanimously

Chairwoman Koerner adjourned the meeting at 11:44 a.m. Minutes approved by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kimberlee Shaneyfelt', written over a horizontal line.

Kimberlee Shaneyfelt, Secretary