

VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Thursday, February 26, 2004
County Council Room and Kona Mayor's Office (Via Videoconferencing)
3:00 p.m.

Present

Members

Penny Fox
Roy Hinokawa
Paul Johnston
Louis Kaoiwi
Wendall Kekumu
Morris Kihara
George Mukai
Patrick Pavao
Hideo Segawa
Dale Wilson

Kona Mayor's Office (Via Videoconferencing)

Members

Peter Callahan
Richard Highley

Guests

Major Neal Mitsuyoshi, Engineer (Department of Defense)
Carswell Ross, Acting Interim Director (Office of Veterans Services)
Less Chess (Big Island Golf Course Superintendent's Association)
Pete Hendricks (Deputy Managing Director, Kona Mayor's Office)
LTC Daniel Malakie
Himeo (Boss) Hanato
Bob Welter
Herb Lum
Ted Funk
Alfredo Tobias
Arthur M. Mahi
Minoru Honato
Dick Scritchfield
Delbert Nishimoto
Martha Kawai
Bernard Mochizuki

Ex-Officio

Patricia G. Engelhard, Director, P&R

Also Present

Nathalie Santos, Department of Parks and Recreation

Absent

Denny Austen
Charles Mayes
Gilbert Sampaia
George Yamamoto

Call to Order

- Chairman Louis Kaiwi called the meeting to order at 3:03 p.m. (12 members present – 10 in Hilo and 2 in Kona.)

Swearing In Ceremony

P&R Deputy Director Pamela Mizuno conducted swearing-in ceremony for new Kona members Peter Callahan and Richard Highley.

STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No public statements made.

Previous Meeting Minutes – January 15, 2004

- The Minutes for the January 15, 2004 meeting were approved as circulated.

STATE VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD – REPORT

Mr. Delbert Nishimoto, Big Island representative on the State Veterans Advisory Board reported from the Kona Mayor's Office via video that he along with West Hawai'i Veterans and DOD representatives made a site visit and have been discussing improvement priorities for Veterans Cemetery III - West Hawai'i.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Veterans Cemetery I – Expansion of Flagpole Area

George Mukai apologized that the material list is not ready and the plans have been misplaced. P&R will provide an additional copy.

Veterans Cemetery II, Phase II Expansion Project

Mr. Mukai reported on a discussion held earlier at Veterans Cemetery II with a representative from M&E Pacific regarding tree removal. He said that excavation is going well and wanted to confirm that the large roots would be hauled away rather than buried on site. He also recommended that the palm trees be relocated or completely removed and hauled away from existing area.

Trees at Veterans Cemetery II

Trees at the Center of Cemetery

Motion

Mr. Mukai made a motion and Mr. Kekumu seconded the motion to remove existing trees from the center of Cemetery II.

Discussion (Amendment)

Mr. Pavao asked to amend the motion to include planting new palm trees along Laimana Street next to the four foot wall.

Motion Passed

All members present voted in favor of the amended motion.

Norfolk Tree and Avacado Tree

Norfolk Tree at Cemetery II will be removed with the approval of the new owner since part of the roots were removed during excavation and it is now a safety concern. Park Planner James Komata will be discussing removal with Director Engelhard. James will also discuss removal of the avocado tree on the mauka side. M&E Pacific will need to know decision as soon as possible since the heavy equipment is still on site.

Chairman Kaiwi shared that if trees in the center were to be relocated there would be a cost factor as well as a difficult task for P&R to drive heavy equipment near plots to prune in the future.

DOD Engineer Major Neal Mitsuyoshi recommended that members table the tree issue because any changes could impact the scope of contracted work and DOD could be found in violation.

Chairman Kaiwi responded that M&E Pacific representatives will be contacting Major Mitsuyoshi to discuss any proposed changes to contract.

Major Mitsuyoshi proposed that we not agree to remove those trees until we confirm that it doesn't affect contract.

Chairman Kaiwi confirmed that M&E will contact Major Mitsuyoshi directly before any decision is made.

Ms. Fox wanted clarification on tree removal since at the January meeting Director Engelhard said she received requests from residents to save trees, but today after visiting cemetery, those trees are also being recommended for removal.

Chairman Kaiwi confirmed that those trees are also recommended for removal.

Director Engelhard reminded committee that all members are doing now are making recommendations, it doesn't mean that is what will happen.

Gates at Entrance

Chairman Kaiwi said that while at Cemetery II, he asked Deputy Director Mizuno about gates and she responded that it would be difficult for someone from the County to lock gates and the cost factor to hire security would be approximately \$4,000 per year. He said that the recommendation would be for Director Engelhard to look into it, however, a resident at today's meeting shared that because the area is now clear, kids may not hangout since area is visible from nearby homes.

Director Engelhard asked committee that even if the recurring cost is high to lock gates nightly, is the committee still recommending it?

Chairman Kaiwi confirmed that request is important because of the damage and graffiti kids have done in the past, especially the damages and graffiti at Cemetery I.

NEW BUSINESS

Veterans Cemetery III – West Hawai‘i

Richard Highley reported that representatives from Kona veterans organizations, Department of Defense Engineer Major Mitsuyoshi and OVS Acting Director Ross have been in conference discussing priorities for improvements to the Veterans Cemetery III-West Hawaii. He wanted public record to reflect that there are a lot of unhappy veterans in West Hawai‘i.

Mr. Highley said that State Representatives are aware of the many problems and the cemetery in its current condition is a disgrace. Representatives Takamine and Kokubun visited cemetery in December and agree.

Mr. Highley stated that there is currently \$100,000 available for improvements and some additional organic assets through community support. The original scope for this cemetery called for Phase I and II. However, there are no funds for Phase II. This excludes any facilities. The only expected additions at this point will be landscaping and graveliners. Kona veterans will be requesting funds from State Legislators. Burial numbers are not very high, however, veterans served our country and deserve a nice cemetery. West Hawai‘i has the highest growth rate in the State of Hawai‘i and burial rates are expected to increase. However, the catch 22 is that no one wants to be buried at Cemetery III because it looks so horrible.

Chairman Kaouiwi stated that East Hawai‘i Members and Veterans will continue to support the requests to improve West Hawai‘i Veterans Cemetery III.

Soil – Maintenance Difficult

Mr. Nishimoto said that Mr. Alani told him that the type of soil they are receiving from Hilo has a lot of sleeping grass and is creating maintenance problems at the cemetery.

Combination Lock

Mr. Nishimoto shared that an elderly lady complained that she has a difficult time opening the combination lock. She has to lay on the ground and it takes her a long time to get lock open. He recommended improving the lock at the cemetery.

Les Chess, President of the Golf Course Superintendent’s Association Community Service Project at Veterans Cemetery III-West Hawaii

Mr. Highley introduced Mr. Les Chess, President of the Golf Course Superintendent’s Association. Members of their organization would like to assist with landscaping and making improvements at the cemetery on a voluntary basis. Mr. Highley asked for County’s approval of this volunteer project.

Mr. Chess said that he visited the cemetery last year and recommended to Advisory Group that members take on this community improvement project. Personnel of the Kukio Resort would help with labor, materials, fix irrigation problems and possibly add more top soil. He also reported that they have liability insurance.

Director Engelhard responded that she would confirm acceptance of volunteer project by Monday, March 1, 2004.

Martha Kawai of the Elks Lodge stated that her husband is buried at Veterans Cemetery III-West Hawai'i, that she is very disappointed in the condition of the cemetery and requests committee's help to do something about improving it.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Kekumu announced that PRRP graduation will be held next Friday, March 5th.

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Carswell Ross, Acting Interim Director of the Office of Veterans Services requested committee's support to obtain additional funds for Veterans Cemetery III-West Hawai'i.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on March 18, 2004 at 3:00 p.m. in the Hawai'i County Councilroom and video-conferencing at the Kona Mayor's Office.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Nathalie Santos
Secretary