

VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Thursday, April 21, 2005
County Council Room and Kona Mayor's Office (Via Videoconferencing)
3:00 p.m.

Present

Members

Penny Fox
Richard Highley
Roy Hinokawa
Paul Johnston
Louis Kaoiwi
Morris Kihara
George Mukai
Patrick Pavao
Gilbert Sampaia
Hideo Segawa
Dale Wilson
George Yamamoto

Kona Mayor's Office (Via Videoconferencing)

Members

None

Guests (Kona)

Ted Funk
Minoru Hanato
Boss Hanato
Herb Lum
Dick Scritchfield
Dr. Richard Stevens

Ex-Officio (Hilo)

Patricia Engelhard, Director, P&R

Also Present (Hilo)

Delbert Nishimoto
Nathalie Santos, Secretary
Keith Ribbentrop

Absent

Denny Austen
Wendall Kekumu

Call to Order

- Chairman Kaoiwi called the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m,

STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

Previous Meeting Minutes – March 17, 2005

- The Minutes of the March 17, 2005 meeting were approved as submitted.

STATE VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD – REPORT

Delbert Nishimoto, Big Island representative on the State Veterans Advisory Board reported the following:

Veterans Cemetery II

Mr. Nishimoto shared that he has visited site twice recently. The sleeping grass continues to be a problem, the sign is still not placed, and there are other conditions that need attention. He will inform Mr. Ito of the DOD Engineering office of the problems so he can contact M&E.

Culdesac – Distance to Cemetery Plots – Planning for Funding Needs

Mr. Kaiwi said he was asked why the culdesac ended way down at Veterans Cemetery II compared to the old side, which leaves a longer distance for County employees to transport the caskets to cemetery plots.

Mr. Nishimoto said that the normal procedure is for the casket to be brought to the committal shelter for the service instead of direct burials. After the service, the families are asked to leave and the cemetery crew will take the casket to the plots.

Mr. Kaiwi shared his concern that this puts a burden on County employees. He said that the County should be informed of these plans ahead of time since they will need more employees and equipment to accommodate these changes.

Mr. Nishimoto shared that the committal shelter has been constructed for a purpose and it hasn't been utilized as intended. Veterans' families and mortuaries need to be informed that the shelter should be used for services rather than direct burials. Another factor is to be sure there are enough chairs at the shelter to accommodate people. He will ask if the VA could provide equipment to transport caskets and purchase chairs under cemetery improvements.

Mr. Nishimoto also suggested that the Veterans Advisory Board submit a priority list of items needed, such as equipment to transport caskets because of the distance. There may be discretionary funds available for these purchases.

Chairman Kaiwi shared that he just wants P&R to be a part of these changes/plans so if necessary the County can include personnel and equipment in their budget request.

Mr. Nishimoto said other concerns at Veterans II include installation of a gate, improving the lighting at the culdesac, and extension of the flagpole. A priority list should be made.

Chairman Kaiwi asked Mr. Nishimoto if the contractor would be held responsible for the changes of the roof at the committal shelter. Mr. Nishimoto responded that he didn't

know, but it has been brought to the attention of M&E. M&E is the firm hired to inspect and oversee the project.

Chairman Kaiwi reiterated his concern about the problems that the County may inherit at Cemetery II as occurred following the acceptance of Veterans Cemetery III. The County should not be held responsible if the punch list items are not remedied.

Mr. Nishimoto said that the County wouldn't be responsible as long as they don't accept the project. M&E has been terminated, the State is now taking over the project and writing to the bonding company. He suggested we just wait to see what happens at this point since we are not in a crunch situation like West Hawaii III was at that time. He said they have a punch list and highly recommends that the County not accept project until items are completed.

Director Engelhard said the County will not accept the project until items are remedied.

Veterans Cemetery III – West Hawai'i

Temporary Columbarium

Mr. Nishimoto reported that he received an e-mail from the DOD Engineer stating that within a six-month period a 96-unit columbarium should be in place. The contract and funding has been approved and are awaiting final signatures. Mr. Steve Morifuji (Park Superintendent) is the County of Hawaii P&R contact for that project. There is a glitch on the covers for the columbarium, which can be obtained free of charge from the VA, but requests must be initiated from the OVS office. Received photos showing the accomplishments completed by veterans and volunteers from the west side.

Kauai and West Hawaii Cemeteries are in the same package for receipt of the temporary columbariums, however, Kauai has not answered the request at this time.

Boss Hanato shared his concern about proper preparation of the area for installation of temporary columbarium. He said without a concrete slab, the columbarium could tilt.

Mr. Nishimoto said the plans call for compacted base course. The contractors will work with Steve Morifuji of P&R and look at the ground to be sure its compacted properly. The key to compacting is water and rolling over with the compactor. He said that the temporary columbarium doesn't call for concrete, because when the permanent one is installed, you would have a slab to remove. He suggested leaving plans as is and to let the contractor make the final call.

During Mr. Highley's report he shared that Director Engelhard told him they would be pouring the slab in place for the foundation.

Mr. Mukai also shared his concerns about the stability of the columbarium.

Chairman Kaiwi said that the contractor will be liable if he doesn't follow the specs.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

VETERANS CEMETERY II – EXPANSION PROJECT UPDATE

Director Patricia Engelhard reported that the County will not accept expansion portion until the sleeping grass problem and other punch list items are remedied.

VETERANS CEMETERY III – WEST HAWAII (Urn Burials)

Director Engelhard reported that she, Park Superintendent Steve Morifuji and Park Planner James Komata visited Cemetery III approximately 3 weeks ago and met with Boss Hanato, Minoru Hanato, Rick Highley and County employee Kimo. In summary, they are considering installing urn faults in one section of the cemetery. At all County cemeteries, P&R encourages people to place urns in an area where you cannot do body burials in order to provide more space for the future, however, if families want to be buried next to each other, they are entitled to a regular plot.

VETERANS CEMETERIES I & II (COLUMBARIUMS – GRANITE COVERS)

Director Engelhard said that the granite covers were partially vandalized. The remaining covers are being stored at Parks Maintenance. At each columbarium we need (8 Large and 2 Small) and we have (Vets I - 1 Large and 1 Small) (Vets II - 4 Large).

VETERANS CEMETERY III – WEST HAWAII – Mr. Highley's Report

Cemetery Lawn

Mr. Highley distributed a monthly report. He stated that the cemetery lawn has been and will be fertilized every two months as recommended by the Golf Course Superintendent's Association. Requested that the Director write a letter to the families to allow them a certain amount of time to claim items that were removed prior to removing headstones. These items are marked and still in the small building. After that period, items will be disposed.

Funds - \$100,000

Mr. Highley shared his concern about the discontent from West Hawaii veterans because they were told that they have \$100,000 to spend and then it never materializes, so he suggested that those statements not be made.

Mr. Nishimoto responded that there needs to be a starting figure for budget purposes, however, if its allocated for a particular project, if there is a balance, the remainder does not go to other items at the cemetery.

Mr. Highley explained that the priority list changed many times. When DOD initially met with the West Hawaii veterans and said there is \$100,000 available for the cemetery, what do you want, everyone agreed that a pavilion was a priority, but Engineer Mitsuyoshi said that you need graveliners more, so that was okay with everybody. They were told that this project was going to start in November. November has long passed and nothing has been done. He suggests being careful about what is said about when and what will be done. If we're not sure its going to be done, lets not say it. The wording

should instead be we're trying to do this and we're trying to get \$100,000. The Chairman told us you better get things done or the money will be lost.

Chairman Kaoui explained that he knows how the state works and that is why he is concerned about funds lapsing and getting pulled elsewhere.

Reforestation Project

Mr. Highley reported that some of the trees and plants are doing well and some are not, but it's just an experiment. Jeff Knowles will be in charge of the funds for the fencing project.

Dr. Stevens reported that the \$47,000 grant (75% of fencing cost) has been received. A request has been made to Kukio for the other \$16,000 or 25%. There has been some indication that they are favorable to that request. He was happy to share that he received a copy of a letter from Representative Ed Case to the Chairman of the Congressional Appropriations Committee which includes in his request with many items, the following: A request of \$75,000 towards the Reforestation Project at the West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery III, island of Hawaii, a Community based native tree reforestation project sponsored by the Kona Soil and Water Conservation District and Veterans groups. The funds would help fence out feral goats and extend the irrigation system for young trees that will eventually provide habitat for native birds.

Dr. Stevens also said there are 70 plants from about 20 different species that were planted and all except 2 species are doing very well.

WHVCDEA – West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery Development and Expansion Association

Mr. Highley reported that they received their 501c3 tax-exempt status and are still planning to sponsor a golf tournament to help improve the cemetery with items such as cups, trees, maintenance, beautification and memorials. Currently gathering prizes for the tournament. Organization doesn't want to be responsible for building a pavilion or items that could be accomplished through the VA.

Accessible Portable Restroom – Removed (Request to Have it brought back)

Mr. Highley said that he has seen the vendor (Kona Lua or whomever is contracted by the County) come to the cemetery and leave without cleaning portable restroom. Unsure if their responsibility was to clean it, pump it out or just check it. He was going to complain that they weren't cleaning, however, the entire accessible restroom is gone and now we're back to just the small portable. With Memorial Day Ceremonies soon approaching, requesting the disabled portable restroom be put back at the cemetery.

VETERANS DAY PARADE

Mr. Wilson reported that he has nothing to add until he hears from the various organizations about insurance that could be used for a possible Veterans Day Parade.

NEW BUSINESS

MEMBERSHIP STATUS

Mr. Wilson stated that he will be on the road and unable to attend any future meetings. He the Military Order of the Purple Hearts organization will submit a letter to the Mayor's Office nominating Dr. Richard Stevens as their representative. (He has turned in his binder to P&R).

VETERANS CEMETERY I & II – COLUMBARIUMS SUB-COMMITTEE - REPORT

No report.

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

No Reports.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Veterans League of Hawaii Island

Chairman Kaiwi announced that he received a copy of a letter from The Veterans League of Hawaii Island announcing that the Big Island Veterans Association (BIVA) was reorganized effective April 1, 2005. The reorganization involved policy, organizational and procedural changes. Its name has changed and the League consists of two co-equal organizations: VLHI – East meeting in Hilo and VLHI West meeting in Kona. (Information including letters from VLHI and BIVA and the Preamble to Reorganization are on file).

KMC Events

Chairman Kaiwi announced various dates of activities occurring at KMC during the month of April.

Disabled Veterans

Mr. Ribbentrop announced that Arnold Kaeo who is a wheelchair veteran has invited members to participate in a public forum to review the plans of the State Veterans Long Term Care Home from a physically disabled persons point of view the week of May 13-16. Items to be reviewed include restroom accessibility, hallways, sizes of doorways and how they swing. If anyone is interested, Arnold can be contacted at 935-3962.

PTSD Treatment Center – Possible Closure

Chairman Kaiwi announced that he received a letter from PRRP about the possibility of moving the PTSD Treatment Center from the Big Island to Oahu. He suggested that members go back to their organizations and send letters expressing concern about moving facility to Oahu.

Veterans Services

Mr. Wilson said that he has been travelling to Washington D.C. for the past few months attending House and Senate Combined Sessions in the Veterans Affairs Committees. He is very concerned because the current administration's agenda is desirous of cutting (not increasing) veterans budgets and are looking at everything.

Mr. Wilson suggests that veterans be vocal loudly and often. Cuts will not only affect PRRP, committee's are being formed to revisit such things as current receipt, demolishing categories 7 and 8 altogether, removing Purple Heart people out of Level 3, etc. He has met with Senators Akaka and Inouye and they are supportive, he knows that Representative Case is also supportive, unsure about Representative Abercrombie. He is more concerned about congress members outside the State of Hawaii.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on May 19, 2005 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 4:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Nathalie Santos
Secretary