

VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Thursday, August 17, 2006
County Council Room and Kona Mayor's Office (Via Videoconferencing)
3:00 p.m.

Present

Members

Denny Austen
Don D. Bennett
Richard Highley
Roy Hinokawa
Louis Kaoiwi
Wendall Kekumu
Edward Lee
George Mukai
Gilbert Sampaia
Richard Stevens

Kona Mayor's Office (Via Videoconferencing)

Members

Antonio Gaspar

Guests (Kona)

Davin Carlson
Boss Hanato
Minoru Hanato
Lee Pretsch
Joe Pretsch

Guests (Hilo)

None

Ex-Officio (Hilo)

Patricia Engelhard, Director, P&R

Also Present (Hilo)

Nathalie Santos, Secretary
Herring Kalua, Representative, State Veterans Advisory Board

Absent

Penny Fox
Morris Kihara
Patrick Pavao
George Yamamoto

CALL TO ORDER

- Chairman Richard Highly called the meeting to order at 3:10 pm.

- Louis Kaoiwi announced that Mr. Morris Kihara is recovering from surgery and Mr. Patrick Pavao is on the Mainland, both are unable to attend meeting and asked to be excused.

- Mr. Edward Lee representing NG Retirees and Mr. Wendell Kekumu representing Vietnam Veterans of the Vietnam War were sworn in as members of the Veterans Advisory Committee by Director Patricia Engelhard prior to the meeting.

STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No Statements from the public.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS MINUTES – JULY 20, 2006

- The minutes of the July 20, 2006 meeting were approved as submitted.

REPORT ON CEMETERIES – STATE VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD

Hawaii Island Representative Mr. Herring Kalua

Veterans Cemetery III - West Hawaii

Mr. Herring Kalua read the attached notes of the State Advisory Board Meeting on Veterans Services held Friday, August 4, 2006 relating to West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery.

Mr. Kalua has requested copies of the State Veterans Advisory Board Meeting minutes be sent to P&R Director Pat Engelhard regularly.

Veterans Cemeteries I and II - Columbariums

Mr. Kalua gave P&R Director Engelhard a photo of the columbarium at the Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery which shows how they cover the niches.

Veterans Cemetery III - West Hawaii - Graveliners

Mr. Highley said he hopes this is not the end of the discussion concerning graveliners. He's been doing research on the history of the graveliners for Veterans Cemetery III-West Hawaii. He stated that on June 22, 2005 a letter was sent from Major General Robert G. F. Lee (Adjutant General of the Department of Defense) requesting \$25,000 of state funds be released for design. Letter also states that the installation of lawn crypts will improve workers safety by eliminating the hazards associated with the shifting volcanic soils currently experienced during grave excavation. The lawn crypts will also ease cemetery operations, enhance the overall appearance of the section of the cemetery containing the crypts and will increase the capacity of the cemetery by allowing double interments per grave plots.

Mr. Highley asked Mr. Kalua if when you say the project is cancelled, is the Office of Veterans Services setting a precedent that says we shouldn't talk about graveliners anymore on the Big Island, because these issues relating to safety of workers is still an issue. It' still an issue for crypts to be put in at Veterans Cemetery II. Crypts have been put in at the Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery in Kaneohe.

Director Engelhard responded that lawn crypts would not be brought up for West Hawaii. Her understanding in talking with Neal Mitsuyoshi was that the soil remediation process would address safety issues for employees. Process would be to dig up all of the right

side of the cemetery (the part that has not yet been used), remove all of the loose soil and boulders, put in 6 inches of appropriate soil and tamp it down, put in another 6 inches of soil and tamp it down until its done. Those graves could then be dug like regular graves. The families in order to avoid having the grave sinking in can elect to put in their own crypts. OVS is no longer considering the lawn crypts as part of this project.

Chairman Highley asked if the Department of Parks and Recreation is satisfied with this proposed procedure, that procedure would address employee safety and prevent graves from caving in.

Director Engelhard responded that Major Mitsuyoshi assured her that it would be like digging a grave at Veterans Cemetery I and II. He said the reason the grave site falls in is that the soil and rocks are so big and so loose that there is no control. By tamping down and remediating what they've already done and bringing in new soil should resolve the issue.

Mr. Kekumu requested clarification from the chairman on what the issue is because there are separate items, 1) safety and 2) is the project cancelled. He said Mr. Kalua already reported that the funds for that project were going to lapse, so they got transferred, so there are no funds for that. Mr. Kekumu asked where are we going with this, what is the point of this discussion and what are we trying to accomplish here.

Director Engelhard said that Mr. Kekumu is correct that the project has been cancelled because the funds were transferred to another account. They could still be made part of another funding source, its just that the Veterans Administration does not recognize lawn crypts, the State could request more funding and make that a separate contemporaneous project (going on at the same time). We feel the safety issue is resolved if what Major Mitsuyoshi says is correct that they will be able to dig the graves just as they do in other cemeteries without having the sides cave in.

Mr. Kaiwi stated that the State Veterans Advisory Board tried to remedy the problem in Kona, however, the federal government said they don't have the money to fund crypts. The alternative is to request funds from the State to install crypts for both East Hawaii and West Hawaii instead of requesting separately. He suggested writing a letter now to Representative Sakamoto, Chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs to request funding and Mr. Kalua should meet with him so that he can submit bill for 2007 Legislative Session. Draft of all bills to be introduced should be ready by December so it's important to request funding now. Mr. Kaiwi said that we shouldn't linger on what lapsed and what didn't take place, but instead move forward.

Mr. Kalua said it's very important that Colonel Cruickshank communicates with P&R Director Engelhard about the cemeteries. The other concern is the amount of funding for maintenance provided by the State to the County. Mr. Kalua will meet with Senator Kokubun and Representative Cindy Evans to discuss two concerns; 1) the County's operating budget and 2) the graveliners. He will also speak to Representative Sakamoto about these matters.

Chairman Highley said that the \$300,000 was originally passed two years ago in the legislature for a committal shelter to be built at the West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery; \$25,000 for design and \$275,000 for construction. The \$25,000 was released in June 2005, on October 9th he received an email from Representative Cindy Evans that she received a phone message from Colonel Cruickshank that the entire \$300,000 had been released by Governor Lingle. The project was turned over to DAGS where four people would be working on it and the point of contact would be (inaudible). In November as space for burials was running out, P&R Director Engelhard sent an email to Colonel Cruickshank urging his office to proceed with plans for the installation of graveliners. Nothing has been done and the fact is the Office of Veterans Services has been sleeping on this for the last year. The people of Hawaii probably think there is a committal shelter at the West Hawaii Cemetery unless someone has told them that the \$300,000 has been transferred to other funds. We now hear from the State Veterans Advisory Board that \$106,000 has gone to Design Partners. Who are the Design Partners? What work have they done on cemeteries and what types of landscaping do they have in mind? Scope of work? What improvements will be made at the entrance? What columbarium work will be done. Why are they spending \$106,000 for work to be done by Design Partners and why are they talking about landscaping when non-profit organizations through grants had been out there for the last two years doing landscaping. Chairman Highley also questions if OVS would have the Design Partners come meet the veterans and find out exactly what they want for their cemetery and if they are willing to work with them? Or is the \$106,000 just money spent with no accountability and the \$194,000 left out of the \$300,000 going to the general fund. Is it going to be accountable not to this committee, not to the people of West Hawaii, but to the taxpayers of the State of Hawaii who appropriated this \$300,000 in the first place. Chairman Highley said he doesn't expect Mr. Kalua to have all of the answers, but feels that someone should. He said the buck always stops all the way from Congressmen in Washington D.C. to the State Legislature. They all say that the buck stops with the Director of OVS Colonel Cruickshank.

Mr. Kekumu recommended that the Chairman write a letter to Office of Veterans Services addressing those questions.

Chairman Highley said he's been sending many emails which he could supply copies of.

Mr. Kaiwi said no offense to anyone, but suggested that Chairman Highley not depend on email and instead write a hard copy of a letter requesting what happened to the crypts and the funding for Kona and to also ask about the crypts for Hilo.

Chairman Highley said he will be sure that Colonel Cruickshank receives a copy of these minutes which include his questions.

Mr. Kaiwi said that this island is part of the State of Hawaii and the OVS needs to address the neighbor islands and not just the Veterans Cemetery on Oahu.

Motion - Write Letter to OVS

Mr. Kekumu made a motion to have Chairman Highley write a letter to the OVS Director addressing these concerns that are on the record.

Don Bennett seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of sending a letter to Colonel Cruickshank.

Mr. Kaiwi suggested that P&R Director Engelhard help put letter into perspective so that no one is offended.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

VETERANS CEMETERY II – EXPANSION PROJECT

Director Engelhard reported that the ground at Veterans II is getting better although its not yet finished. She just checked it yesterday. Project has not yet been accepted, but it should be soon.

VETERANS CEMETERY III – WEST HAWAII (Reforestation Project)

Vice Chairman Stevens reported the reforestation project is rolling on. Everyone is invited to attend the next big planting scheduled for Saturday, September 9th. Opening ceremony will begin at 9am, then everyone will plant and pull fountain grass until lunch is served at 11am. Goat proof fence is approximately 99% complete. Begun planting large trees along the access road that leads in from the highway. Vice Chairman Stevens encourages everyone that can come join them in this all volunteer effort on the 9th.

Chairman Highley said the fence at the cemetery is quite impressive, it encompasses the 60 acres, its 4 foot of hogwire, bobwire on top, wooden posts and metal posts inbetween. It goes 1,300 feet one way, 2,600 feet the other way and 3,000 feet across the top. It's very well made and has gates on both ends of the ancient Hawaiian trail that goes through there. Fence comes right up to the pavement of the entrance to the cemetery. The only place the goats can get in is at the entrance where the 1% is not yet finished, but will be closed up with a gate soon.

VETERANS CEMETERY III - WEST HAWAII Gate Closure

P&R Director Engelhard reported that she contacted Glen Taguchi, Superintendent of State Parks for the Big Island, who put out to bid the closing of two State Park areas: Kekaha Kai State Park which includes an area two miles north of the airport and another section called Maniniowale which is right across the Veterans Cemetery and got **no bids**. He called every single security company that operates in West Hawaii and they all told him they would bid, however they did not. He will try to put it out to bid again in a couple of months. If that happens and he gets anything, he will let P&R know so that we can join in. It's a very expensive proposition getting gates locked up that far away from Kailua.

NEW BUSINESS

Veterans Cemetery II - Faucets **Annual Cleaning of Headstones by Korean War Veterans**

Mr. Austen announced that when they clean the headstones at Veterans Cemetery II, they share the faucet with the families at various times throughout the project. They need to turn off their power washer, disconnect hose to allow others to use the faucet and then reconnect afterwards. Members of his organization were wondering if it would be possible for the Department of Parks and Recreation to put a "T" on the top and have two bibs so they could share the faucet and not be interrupted while cleaning.

Director Engelhard said that someone contacted her regarding this suggestion and her immediate thought is good idea, but since it's a project that is done once a year unsure if its worth putting another "T" on the hose bib. She said we could consider putting it on one of the pipes.

Someone mentioned that it's not that expensive and Director Engelhard responded that its not the expense, but the time is a concern. Two plumbers cover all P&R facilities on the entire island.

Mr. Kekumu suggested purchasing plastic elbows that are sold at the garden stores for approximately \$3 and just put that line "splitter" on once a year.

Chairman Highley asked how many volunteers helped to clean headstones.

Mr. Austen responded that there were (9) Korean War Veteran volunteers on Friday and (7) on Saturday working all day on both days to clean the headstones.

Chairman Highley thanked the Korean War Veterans for their assistance in caring for the cemetery on behalf of the committee.

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

None

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SEPTEMBER 2006 MEETING CANCELLED

Chairman Highley will be on the mainland in September and unable to conduct the September 28th meeting.

Vice Chairman Stevens reported that he has a new teaching schedule at UH this semester and will be unable to attend these monthly meetings during the first semester and possibly for the entire year. He has no control over teaching schedule. He will continue to be active with the West Hawaii Veterans group.

Chairman Highley asked Director Engelhard where that would leave the representative for Order of the Purple Heart Organization and she responded if the organization is okay

with not having representation, that is up to them, but what this group needs is a Vice Chair. Dr. Stevens needs to resign.

Chairman Highley is also concerned about the quorum and asked about the organization appointing an alternate.

Director Engelhard said Dr. Stevens would need to resign if they want to have representation. He can still participate through letters to the committee and he could continue to receive the minutes. But if they want participation they need to select someone that is able to attend the meetings.

Chairman Highley confirmed the process is Dr. Stevens would need to resign and the organization would have to appoint another member.

Director Engelhard said its more important at this moment to elect another Vice Chair, however, since an election is not on this agenda, an election cannot be held today since something as important as that cannot be added on. Next month's meeting would have to be cancelled and the Election would have to be on the next agenda.

Chairman Highley and Vice Chairman Stevens are both unavailable to conduct the September meeting, therefore, the meeting is cancelled. The next meeting will be held in October.

Motion

September Meeting Cancelled - Election for Vice Chair To be On October Agenda

Mr. Kaouiwi made a motion to cancel next month's (September) meeting and to add the Vice Chair Election to October's agenda.

Members voted unanimously to cancel the meeting and add election to the next agenda.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, October 19, 2006, at 3:00 p.m. in the Hawai'i County Councilroom (***if the location changes, members will be notified**) and video-conferencing at the Kona Mayor's Office.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 4:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathalie Santos
Secretary