

Rocky Hill Veterans' Home Working Group
Special Meeting
Tuesday, February 24, 2015
Minutes

Attendees: (See attached sign in sheet)

2:30pm

Minutes were approved from last meeting.

Lieutenant Governor Wyman welcomed all in attendance. Introduced PRI group who would report their findings and recommendations after review/investigation of the Veterans' Home at Rocky Hill.

Carrie from PRI explained how the PRI group was formed, bipartisan group, 12 members, 6 Dem., 6 Rep. When determining what areas in government to review/investigate, majority rules.

In May of 2014 PRI voted to review the Veterans' Home based on complaints that had come in from residents as well as stakeholders. The scope was approved and review began with other options for the Home being key.

Brian/Janelle determined that the Domicile area of the facility was the area that needed the most review. Review concentrated on Domicile.

It was determined by PRI group that this particular review was a very good example of a milestone report.

All recommendations from the PRI report were adopted by committee.

(Slide show presentation by Brian/Janelle – see attached)

During presentation, one of the observations mentioned by PRI was the neither resident group is being appropriately served. Acting Commissioner Perkins asked that Janelle elaborate on that observance. She responded that they analyzed the data they received, surveyed residents and spoke with staff and outside stakeholders. Janelle also stated that it was very difficult to find other facilities comparable to Rocky Hill. They used Minnesota and Mass. Chelsea Home as comparisons.

Janelle also mentioned that veterans at the Home claim that they pay a “program fee” however do not feel they are getting any kind of program for their fee.

Lieutenant Governor asked if PRI could explain why veterans were not choosing to come to Rocky Hill and that the occupancy numbers were low. Janelle explained a mix of factors:

- Other programs offered in the community
- Federal VA reaching out to veterans in a more aggressive fashion than state
- Living conditions/rules at Rocky Hill
- Sobriety length (some programs only require one week sobriety before admittance, Rocky Hill requires 21 days)

Question arose as to if PRI considered the lack of staffing needs at Rocky Hill and what the staffing levels should be. PRI responded that they were hesitant to determine staffing levels as they wanted to waiting until recommendations started to be instituted and what options would actually be implemented before staffing could be addressed. Option of contracting out would also be a major factor in staffing.

Brian from PRI noted that the details in this particular report were much more detailed than other reports.

The question was also asked about cost. It is impossible at this point to put a cost on the reimagining as a decision has not been made as to which way is best to move towards and the legislature will also impact cost and recommendations moving forward.

Brian also briefed on the Healthcare facility on campus. Findings were positive. An increase in a few safety concerns was addressed and an internal committee is being formed to address.

Healthcare facility is also at max. capacity. One recommendation would be to look at outside care for domiciliary veterans when needed vs. using the on-site Healthcare facility to open up more beds for outside veterans.

Michael Thomas asked if PRI had gotten any information on possible transportation issues in Rocky Hill. PRI responded that they had gotten some complaints from residents that there was a lack of transportation from Rocky Hill; however their focus was not on transportation. DVA buses are older and break down and there is a rule that veteran cars can't be brought on campus for one month after admittance. It was also mentioned that when off-site recreational activities are scheduled, majority of veterans do not participate, therefore activities have to be cancelled.

Betsy suggested looking into community based assistance vs. Rocky Hill. Once assessments complete, community based assistance might be one of the options we move to. DVA was not at the table in the past to seek out different opportunities and services for the veterans here. (DVA is currently in the game and will continue working together with all stakeholders)

Brian stated that many of the veterans in Rocky Hill like the facility and consider it their home. It was again reiterated that the plan is not to shut Rocky Hill down.

Lisa wanted to mention that she had gotten to know many of the DVA Staff and felt they were doing a very good job. She observes two separate questions that must be addressed separately:

- What must be done with current status at Home and the veterans
- What must we do moving forward with new veterans needing help

She stated that there is much more exploring that must be done. Transitional housing might not be the best fit for homeless veterans just coming into facilities.

PRI stated that the feeling across the board was strong that the Home should remain open. A thorough needs assessment must be done before making solid decision.

Case management must be a focal point. Current ratio of veterans to case managers is off. Case managers at Rocky Hill are managing far too many veterans. Need additional case managers with current set up, however this is all depends on what the reimaging looks like moving forward.

Veterans in Rocky Hill are rooming with many other veterans (6+ to a room). One suggestion is to create one or two person rooms to make it a bit more private for veterans.

Brian also agreed that with the current setting in Rocky Hill, the current rules are needed, however moving forward to change and reimage, rules will most likely be reconsidered.

Acting Commissioner Perkins expressed to PRI group that they did a good job with their report. He did want to express to the group that the buildings on the facility are 75 years old and that back in the 1980's, barracks for military were set up as one and two man rooms and CT missed the boat by not switching to that type of housing back then for the veterans here.

He also explained that all veterans in Rocky Hill have some type of issue whether psychological or physical and need assistance. The demographics of veterans here is not what most on the outside realize. Rules are mandatory in order to keep order and civility in Rocky Hill. He definitely agrees that there are many programs on the outside that we should be utilizing. Federal way of housing might not be the correct way to go. He stated that he would welcome the ability to remove security from front gate; however we need to keep our veterans safe.

David agreed with Perkins that veterans here have complex issues and we did miss the boat with not modernizing years ago. We must "deinstitutionalize" the Home.

Lisa stated that we must start with "the people/veterans" and decide what "they" need first. We can then look at what is available to meet their needs.

Howard Rifkin briefly discussed HB 6855 (attached). There will be a public hearing on March 5th at 6:30 pm in the cafeteria of the Rocky Hill Veterans' Home. Explained what the recommendations of the bill are.

Sarah from DCS advised that a consultant has been hired to study the facilities on campus. They are not entering this project with any preconceived ideas. They will be looking at all possibilities, will look at private sector facilities, meet with stakeholders, look at site utilities (which are very limited at this time). They will report to group their findings and recommendations.

Howard relayed that projections are already being worked on as to what the future needs will be for veterans. This will assist in the decisions made now and moving forward.

Future meetings will be forthcoming

Adjourned at 4:30pm

