

Albany Leadership Meeting Minutes

Mike Burton provided an overview of the Task Force and opened the floor for comments.

The Albany Mayor said that the main issue he sees for veterans is the large mental health needs and the homeless problem. Albany is on I-5, Highway 99 and by the river, which draws a high number of homeless. He feels a larger percentage of these homeless are veterans. He wanted to know how to reach out and provide services.

Jim Willis explained that first place to go was to the County Veteran Service Officer. The Mayor had never met the CVSO (who was in the room) and the two agreed to meet. The CVSO explained the difficulty of providing services to the homeless due to their transient nature. Claims take up to six months or more and homeless veterans do not stay in contact during this period of time, making claims development very difficult. Further, even if you get a homeless veteran into the health care system, it will take 30 days to get the veteran a primary care appointment, which, for a transient homeless veteran, does not really work. Also, if a homeless veteran needs emergency care, he/she cannot really get to the Portland VAMC emergency room. There are many barriers to helping the homeless veteran population.

The Mayor stated that there is a lack of transitional housing as well. Jack Heims and Jim Willis encouraged the community to apply for VA grants to build transitional housing, explaining a number of models around the state.

Medical transportation also is an issue in Albany; however, during the discussion a possible alternative was discovered. There is a DAV van; however, Linn, Benton and Lincoln counties also have a Ride Share (or Ride Line) program where people can arrange pick up and drop off at doctor appointments anywhere in the state. It is not a free program; however, ideas were postulated about raising funds through the local legion or providing state funding for veteran vouchers to pay for veterans to have rides to and from appointments. Ride Share apparently is a large system and might be workable for many regions. In Linn, Benton and Lincoln counties the Council of Governments runs the program, as well as the county mental health. This system can accommodate wheelchair bound veterans, which makes it very attractive.

The Task Force asked the city and county if they collected information as to who is a veteran, explaining the issue of first identifying veterans before services could be provided. Jim Willis detailed how Utah is working at the state level to identify veterans through the DMV process and then provide services to those veterans. The Task Force encouraged the city and county to consider a way to capture veteran information and then pass it to the CVSO.

The County Administrator expressed his dissatisfaction with the language in SB 1100 which said counties cannot supplant E&E money for county general fund monies. The Administrator said for years his county had supplemented the state system with its own

general fund, but the state would not grant flexibility with the E&E funds, which he found unfair. He asked that if more funds come to the county they come with fewer restrictions.