

Coos Bay Town Hall Meeting Minutes

Paul Evans provided an overview of the Task Force, its process and objectives.

A veteran was upset with the VA system, saying his experience has been a nightmare. He has filed a claim for service connection for dental disability due to his Navy job as a deep-sea diver. He has been denied. He feels the VA does not have the expertise to understand how the helium/oxygen mixtures and the pressure of deep dives affect the teeth. Tom Mann met with the veteran off line to discuss his claim and the veteran will follow up with Tom.

This same veteran said the state should open the armories to veterans so they can work out. He said allowing them to keep in shape with help them.

A woman asked if it is ever too late to file a claim. She said the VA told a veteran he could not file a claim because he was too late. The Task Force assured her that it is never too late to file a claim and to meet with Tom afterward to discuss the details of this issue.

A World War II veteran said he heard the care at the VA hospital was terrible. Jack, Bob and Mike all responded that their experience is the care is excellent.

A veteran said the Roseburg VA is terrible at returning phone calls. A representative from the Roseburg VA admitted that its new phone system has been a problem as has return phone calls, but they are working on it.

A veteran asked what the rules are for accrediting a Veteran Service Officer. Director Willis explained the process and told the audience to be sure to send veterans to federally accredited veteran service officers not “sea lawyers.”

A veteran said that he has nothing but good things to say about the VA health care system.

Several veterans asked why Coos Bay cannot have VA urgent care. Jack Heims explained the VA health care model (local primary care, with specialty care at the hospitals) and that Coos Bay doesn't have the veteran population base to warrant urgent care or other VA services locally.

Paul Evans explained that he believes now may be the time to push congress to implement universal health care for veterans via the VA health care system.

A veteran who had always had good experiences with the VA health care system said he was let down for the first time. He had a motorcycle accident and called the VA from the local hospital to be transported because he was stable as per the rules. The VA (Roseburg) said for him to come to the hospital but called back saying he could not come because they did not have an x-ray technician available. The veteran had to stay at the

local hospital for a couple more days and the VA is not picking up that bill, even though it said he could not come to the VAMC.

A veteran was concerned because service organizations (VFW, American Legion, etc...) are losing their buildings. He wanted to know if the state could provide buildings. Paul Evans said the solution may be partnerships with non-profit organizations, such as the Elks and Eagles to share space.

A veteran was concerned that that the CBOC being moved from Bandon was placed in the wrong location in Coos Bay. He thought it should be placed on Broadway and Virginia instead of the Safeway parking lot.

There was concern about outreach to veterans – how to communicate information to them and how to find them. Mike Burton noted that the community colleges may be the place to coordinate veteran outreach based upon the new GI Bill and the colleges being a comfortable place for veterans.

There are a lot of homeless in the area. There is a Mission and a second homeless facility. However, each requires the person to be clean and sober for five days before coming to the facility. A lot have not been sober in the last 24 hours. The veteran was concerned that there is no transitional housing. Tom spoke with the veteran off-line and asked that the veteran contact him so OHCS could be brought in to develop a plan for transitional housing. Director Willis explained working models such as Orchard Knolls, The Home of the Brave, and Oxford House as examples of local options for housing. He also noted that Habitat for Humanity may be willing to build transitional and homeless housing.

The meeting adjourned at 9 p.m.