



Vietnam Veterans Of America

Chapter One

www.vietnamvetschapter1.org

MARCH 2025



MINUTES OF CHAPTER MEETING MARCH 12, 2025

Approximately 20 persons attended, a handful on Zoom and the others in person. We were happy to welcome four transferring VVA members from the Chester chapter, including Ronald Farrar, Tom McLean, Edward Davidson, and Stanley Clark. The Chester chapter recently closed.

A nominal meeting of the Board of Directors was held; no business was transacted.

The minutes of the February meeting were accepted as printed in the newsletter.

Treasurer Richard Reed reported the total in our bank accounts.

Membership Chair Dick Doyle reported the chapter has 136 regular members. Dick and Mike Murphy reported 11 new memberships are in the works. Anticipating other transfers from the Chester chapter and Brattleboro, whose chapter also closed, Dick expects Chapter 1 membership may hit 150, likely an all time high. Bill Ellwood said Chapter 1 membership in AVVA (Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America, open to those not eligible for regular membership) is about 15.

Richard Gallo, a veterans outreach specialist under contract to the Vermont National Guard, often serves as a link between Chapter 1 and vets needing assistance. At this meeting he offered to maintain a list of volunteer drivers who might step forward to transport vets needing a lift to appointments or other places. There is a need, he said, not just for the transportation but sometimes as well for the social contact with another person. He's got a couple of volunteers already, he said. He noted that drivers are on their own liability insurance. Anyone interested can email Richard.d.gallo.ctr@mail.mil or call 802-338-4323.

Treasurer Richard Reed proposed filing the forms necessary for Chapter 1 to become a tax-exempt organization. Jack Crowther moved that be done. Seconded by Mike Murphy. Passed unanimously.

A Chapter 1 member came before the meeting to request financial assistance for heating fuel and electricity, describing the financial hardships he was facing, including a potential tax sale of his building. The electricity and fuel bills came to \$1,141.06. The meeting took up the request later, after the person left the meeting. Some discussion revolved around the fact that the person had received help on previous occasions and granting further help would go against chapter guidelines. Our bylaws allow for exceptions. Ultimately, Richard Reed moved to provide \$1,141.06 in assistance, the money to be paid to Green Mountain Power and the fuel dealer, in accord with the chapter's practice of paying the vendor of the service, rather than the individual needing help. Seconded by Mike Murphy. The vote was 9 in favor and 2 opposed.

Ellie McGarry, executive director and co-founder of Companions in Wholeness, discussed the local organization in connection with a request for financial support. Companions operates out of the Rutland Methodist Church at 60 Strongs Ave. It has grown rapidly and will be moving to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church on Lincoln Avenue. Companions offers free breakfasts and lunches Monday through Thursday and provides daytime shelter for homeless people as well as clothing, a food pantry and items such as tents. They provided 55,855 meals in 2024 to more than 1,700 people, along with 44,292 pantry items and 11,406 "essential items" for "surviving outdoors," according to Ellie. Companions provides the only "day shelter" in Rutland County, Ellie said. Opening at 6:30 a.m. on days they operate, the shelter takes in some people who have been up all night keeping warm and

come in to sleep in reclining chairs, she said. Other organizations like Rutland Mental Health and the state Department of Health come in to help the clientele. Companions operates on a budget of \$492,000 and has a paid staff of five, mostly part-time. Volunteers are welcome. Funds are needed for operating expenses. A capital fund drive will be held to allow the move to the Immaculate Heart of Mary church.

Due to a full agenda, the chapter postponed any action on assistance until the April meeting.

The meeting next turned its attention to the June 14 Regional Conference of leaders from VVA State Councils in New England. It is now confirmed that Regional Director Justin Latini and VVA National President Jack McManus will attend and would speak at a banquet celebrating Chapter 1's 45th anniversary, if that were held.

The presence of the two VVA leaders — Latini and McManus — provided the nudge to go ahead with the anniversary banquet, which had been under discussion. Noel's catering, which operates the Franklin Center in the Howe Center in Rutland, has quoted us a price of \$500 room rental, plus a choice of dinner menus at \$35 per plate, plus taxes and gratuity. For 50 people, that would work out to \$2,275. We have envisioned the banquet being free to Chapter 1 members plus one guest each, and invited guests, the cost to be paid by the chapter. Others wishing to attend would pay.

Richard Reed moved to appropriate up to \$5,000 to cover the cost of the banquet. Seconded by Mike Murphy. Passed unanimously. Members are welcome to contribute ideas for the banquet.

Important: Please let us know if you are planning to attend and if you have a "plus-one" (no charge) or paid guests. This will help us estimate the expected turnout, which determines our down payment to Noel's. Please email Chapter 1 at vietnamvetschapter1@gmail.com or call Bill Ellwood at (407) 721 7992.

The VVA National Convention will be held Aug. 5 to 9 in New Orleans. Based on its size, Chapter 1 is entitled to send three representatives. Dick Doyle has expressed interest in attending. Bill Ellwood said he would like to see at least two attend from Chapter 1. Cost of roughly \$3,000 would be paid by the chapter. Anyone interested should put their name forward. Preference will go to officers and board members. A registration form can be found on the VVA website, vva.org. Deadline for filing with national is July 7, but Chapter 1 will want to decide who's going, perhaps by our June 11 meeting. You can fill out the registration form and give it to Bill Ellwood.

The Dodge House, which provides transitional housing for homeless veterans, is back up and running after being closed for a time amid a shakeup in its staff and governance. Dick Doyle reported that Chapter 1 member Bruce Paquin is the president of the Dodge House board. The home currently has five men and two women residents in the divided quarters. Staff includes Executive Director John Tester and Assistant Director Kimberly Jarrait, who have been invited to the April meeting to speak. One or both will be present.

Rutland will again host a Vets Town Hall Friday, Nov. 7, in Rutland. Bill Ellwood said he would propose Chapter 1 again pay for a supper meal at the event, as we did last year.

Jack Crowther put forward the following resolution for action by the chapter:

"Chapter 1, Vietnam Veterans of America, declares its opposition to any wholesale cuts in staffing and services of the Department of Veterans Affairs. While we support reasonable efforts to improve efficiencies across government, savings must not come at the cost of hard-won improvements in programs for those who, as Abraham Lincoln said, 'have borne the battle,' often at a cost of life, limb, and peace of mind."

Tim Lonergan seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Following the meeting, Jack has circulated the resolution to Vermont media and Vermont's congressional delegation.

At the regular veterans luncheon March 11 at Denny's in Rutland the Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging handed out a flyer for 3SquaresVT, which assists folks with food purchases. The federal program "gives you, your family and fellow Veterans food at over 600 stores and 40 farmers markets in Vermont, and anywhere in the U.S. where EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) is accepted." No veteran is subject to the 3SquaresVT work requirement. Further information can be had at vermontfoodhelp.com. If you are 60 or older, you can call The Helpline at 1-800-642-5119, the Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging. I called the number to see if the program was affected by recent federal program cuts but could only leave a message.

Respectfully submitted,

Jack Crowther, Secretary