

# Veterans Advisory Board

## Meeting Minutes

**Date:** January 24, 2026

**Location:** Monroe City Hall, Cassidy Room

### Attendance

- Jim Keane
  - Bob Driscoll
  - Karen Berg
  - Jim Muschett
  - Kathy Childress
  - Lisa Lord
  - Frank Base
  - Jason Chen
  - Tamara Shovelton, Veterans Service Officer (Staff)
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### Call to Order & Introductions

The meeting began with introductions, including welcoming two visitors to the Advisory Board. Bob Driscoll asked Jason Chen if he would serve as liaison for the Veterans Advisory Board.

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### Old Business

#### Veterans Information Session (January)

Bob Driscoll noted that the January Veterans Information Session held at Memorial Hall was very successful and provided valuable information to attendees.

#### Conflict of Interest Forms

Board members were reminded that conflict of interest forms must be completed by **February 4, 2026**, and submitted to Tamara Shovelton for recordkeeping.

#### Gift Card Donation Follow-Up

Bob Driscoll provided Tamara Shovelton with the address of an individual who donated gift cards in December.

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## **Welcome Home Sign Project**

An update was provided on the proposed Welcome Home sign for the front lawn of City Hall. Bob Driscoll reported that he and Mike Buggy met with the mayor, who expressed support for the project and the potential allocation of free cash. Tamara Shovelton shared that a design company is being engaged and that the goal is to have the designers attend the February meeting to explore sign concepts with the Board.

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## **Council Chambers Photo Unveiling**

Bob Driscoll discussed the recent unveiling of veterans' photographs in the Council Chambers.

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## **Cemetery & Memorial Projects**

### **Cemetery Beautification Project**

Discussion was held regarding a potential new project involving brick installation and beautification around the flag retirement ceremony area. Bob Driscoll stated that the mayor is fully supportive. The next step will be to meet with Jack Rossy to discuss project specifics.

### **Food Drives**

The Board agreed to continue seasonal food drives held in the spring around Memorial Day and in the fall around Veterans Day.

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## **Legislative & Advocacy Outreach**

The Board discussed outreach efforts targeting veterans currently serving in the Massachusetts House and Senate to support veterans-related legislation. Additional outreach targets include the National Guard Association and the Military Officers Association.

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## **QR Codes & Historical Preservation**

Discussion continued regarding the installation of QR codes near veterans' monuments. The Historical Commission had previously highlighted the eleven Melrose veterans who died in Vietnam around Veterans Day on social media. The Board discussed incorporating this information into a centralized digital repository.

The Melrose High School Memory Project is currently leading efforts to compile historical information, develop a website to house the content, and potentially design signage for the monuments. The long-term hosting location for QR-linked content is still under consideration.

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## **Memorial Day Programming**

The Board reviewed the decision to discontinue Memorial Day parades due to low public and veteran participation. In place of parades, the agreed-upon alternative is a Memorial Day concert at Memorial Hall featuring a military band.

It was noted that securing a military band for Memorial Day 2026 is unrealistic due to booking timelines (typically one to two years in advance). The Board agreed to focus planning efforts on **Memorial Day 2027**. Bob Driscoll has asked the mayor to encourage state and federal legislators to assist with securing a military band.

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## **Fundraising & Veterans Monument Fund**

The Board discussed hosting a fundraiser to benefit the Veterans Monument Fund. One proposal included an Elton John tribute band (“Benny and the Jets”), whose band leader is personally known to Bob Driscoll. The tentative concept would involve a concert at Memorial Hall around Veterans Day 2026, with proceeds split evenly: 50% to Memorial Hall and 50% to the Veterans Monument Fund.

The Board also discussed involving the VFW to obtain a one-day permit to sell alcohol during the event.

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## **Educational & Outreach Programs**

### **Vets in the Classroom (Reimagined)**

The Board discussed reviving the “Vets in the Classroom” program in a new format hosted at Memorial Hall. The proposed model would include multiple tables staffed by veterans, with small groups of students rotating between tables every 20 minutes for discussion and Q&A.

### **Veteran Outreach & Wellness**

Tamara Shovelton provided updates on ongoing veteran outreach initiatives, including monthly coffee meetings. Additional programming ideas were discussed, including events focused on soldier and veteran suicide prevention and mental health support.

### **Veterans Organization Membership**

The Board discussed declining membership in veteran's organizations and explored ideas to encourage increased participation.

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## **Additional Discussion & New Business**

### **VFW Facilities Update**

Discussion was held regarding the potential sale of the VFW building on Chitman Street. The Board noted the importance of ensuring that appropriate plans and safeguards are in place should the sale move forward. Conversation also included preliminary thoughts on coordination or collaboration with the VFW post located on Main Street.

### **Medal of Fidelity**

It was noted that one Medal of Fidelity application has been submitted.

### **Vietnam Memorial Wall (Traveling Wall)**

A question was raised about the possibility of bringing the Vietnam Memorial Wall to Melrose. The Board acknowledged that this would require further research, including costs related to setup, logistics, and mandatory 24-hour security.

### **Memory Project Update**

Lisa Lord provided an update on the Memory Project, noting that packages and cards have been sent to nursing homes and to an activated postcard committee. The Memory Project team is also continuing to work on developing digital platforms to support QR code integration.

### **Flags & Landscaping Funding**

Discussion included the flags purchased by the Veterans Services Office and the Mayor's plan to allocate \$3,000 toward this effort. The Board also reviewed that the City Council had allocated \$8,000 for landscaping, which was expended by the Department of Public Works exclusively for plantings.

### **Suicide Prevention Programming**

The Board discussed developing a suicide prevention program specifically focused on active-duty service members, veterans, first responders, and family members. Topics included how best to address these issues and the types of speakers that would be most impactful. It was suggested that this program be held during Suicide Prevention Month.

### **City Hall Signage**

It was brought to the Board's attention that the Veterans Services Office is not currently listed on the City Hall directory map.

### **Welcome Home Sign – February Meeting**

In relation to the Welcome Home sign project, it was noted that Marty (the vendor responsible for banners) should be invited to the February meeting to participate in discussions.

### **Memorial Day Flagging**

The Board discussed ordering flags for Memorial Day. Tamara Shovelton will ensure that sufficient flags are ordered not only for the main cemetery, but also for the additional six to seven Jewish cemeteries located in Melrose.

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### **Veterans Agent Projects**

#### **Bishop Square Plaque**

An update was provided that the brass plaque for Bishop Square is currently being fabricated. Once installed, the Board will plan a rededication ceremony.

#### **Memorial Repairs & Replacements**

The Board discussed reviewing memorial signage for spelling inaccuracies and identifying plaques that may have been stolen or damaged, with the goal of replacing or correcting them as needed.

#### **Gold Star Outreach**

Discussion included the idea of targeted outreach to Gold Star spouses and families, potentially through a dedicated luncheon inviting Gold Star spouses, and families.

#### **Vietnam Veterans Day**

Hosting a Vietnam Veterans Day brunch around March 29.

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### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned following discussion of all agenda items. The next meeting is scheduled for February 17, 2026.