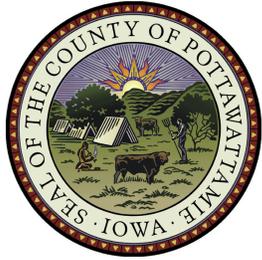


**Pottawattamie
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Board Secretary**

DATE: July 11, 2013

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Loren T. Knauss

RE: Commission of Veteran Affairs request for new office space.

I want to start off by thanking the members of the Pottawattamie County Commission of Veteran Affairs, Veteran Affairs Director Darlene McMartin, and the staff of the Veteran Affairs office for the time and effort they have spent on the discussion of future services they wish to make available to the veterans of Pottawattamie County, and the discussion of the space needs for the department. Their efforts show their commitment to the veterans in our county and I'm proud to have the opportunity to work with them.

The Commission of Veteran Affairs has made the request that the Board of Supervisors begin the process of developing a plan to provide the Veteran Affairs office with office space that will better serve the veterans of the county. The decision to make this request is based on the fact that the current office space is not handicapped accessible, and the office does not have enough space to provide services that we feel our veterans need.

Handicap Accessibility.

Due to the fact that many of the clients that come to the Veteran Affairs office have some form of physical disability, a new office that is handicapped accessible is required.

The Veteran Affairs office is located on the first floor of the County Annex building. The south entrance door of the building has an automatic door, but this is the only handicap accessible door in the building. There is a men's and women's bathroom located on the first floor of the Annex. Both bathrooms are not handicap accessible and most wheelchairs are unable to fit through the doors. The waiting area for the Veteran Affairs office is located in the hallway of the Annex building, with chairs along the south wall for veterans to sit while waiting. This area is so narrow that it is difficult for more than one person to walk through, and it is difficult for people in wheelchairs to turn around or move easily if people are present.

Due to the configuration of the office and the size of the doors, it is difficult for veterans with physical disabilities that use wheelchairs to move in the main office area, and it is often difficult for them to enter individual offices. Due to the size of traditional wheelchairs and the size of automatic wheelchairs, it is sometimes impossible for some veterans to enter offices.

New services provided to veterans.

When looking at the space needs of the office, we began to look at what services could be enhanced and what new services could be provided to veterans if new office space was made available. We would like to move forward with the development of partnerships with organizations that provide essential services to our veterans. We want to help facilitate providing enhanced services that address Homelessness, PTSD (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder), Suicide Prevention & Awareness, Substance Abuse, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, Outreach and Education, and services to those service members returning from Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF). There are organizations in Iowa and Nebraska that provide services that address these issues, but the organizations often do not have office space in our county to work with our veterans. In some cases, this requires veterans to travel as far as Sioux City, Iowa to receive the services they need.

The Sioux City Vet Center and the Omaha Vet Center are examples of organizations that we currently work with, and we refer veterans to these organizations for service. These are potential partners that we could work with to enhance the services to our veterans. Both organizations provide services to veterans who have served in combat zones and are suffering from PTSD and other issues resulting from their combat experience. Pottawattamie County is in the service region of the Sioux City Vet Center, and our veterans are initially referred to their office. Our veterans are either required to travel to Sioux City, or the Vet Center staff will travel to our county and meet with the veterans at their homes, in restaurants, churches, and any other locations. Due to our limited space, the Sioux City Vet Center does not use our current office. The Sioux City office does contract with the Omaha Vet Center to work with some of our veterans, but not all.

I spoke to the Sioux City counselor Michele Kuhlmann about the possibility of partnering with us to utilize space to provide services. She stated that if we were to allow them to use office space, they could possibly use it up to once a week while meeting with veterans, their spouses, or their families. They said the use of a professional office space would help with the treatment of clients and that the veterans would benefit greatly.

I spoke to Team Leader Edward Licht of the Omaha Vet Center about the veterans they work with from Pottawattamie County and whether or not his office would utilize space in our area if it was made available. Licht stated that they have approximately 12 veterans from Pottawattamie County on their caseload at any given time. He said that although Omaha borders our county, he feels veterans from our area would be more comfortable meeting in their own community. If the option was available, they would utilize it.

These are just two examples of organizations we can partner with to provide enhanced services to our veterans if we have the right space. If the Board of Supervisors agrees to move forward with providing new space for the Veteran Affairs office, the Commission of Veteran Affairs would begin the process of meeting with all potential partners to discuss how their organizations could better serve our veterans.

Proposal.

The Commission of Veteran Affairs is requesting that the Board of Supervisors commit to moving forward with the construction of a new office space for the Veteran Affairs office. The Commission has identified the partner organizations they wish to connect with, and with the commitment by the Board of Supervisors, the Commission will meet with these organizations and formalize partnership agreements. Once the Commission develops the partnerships, they will present a report to the Board of Supervisors and request that a space needs assessment is conducted to determine what space is needed to adequately provide current and new services.

After the space needs assessment is completed, the Commission is requesting to work with the Board to determine a building design and site location, and to work with the selected architect firm to prepare a building design. The Commission also wishes to work with the Board to discuss funding sources, and will work with the Board to secure funding for this project.

Because State Code places the Commission of Veteran Affairs in charge of providing services to all Pottawattamie County veterans, the Commission has asked to be placed in a lead role of this project under the authority of the Board of Supervisors. This partnership between the Board of Supervisors and the Commission will ensure that the needs of the veteran population will be met now and in the future.