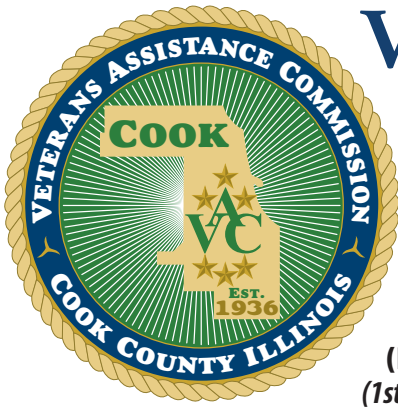




VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION OF COOK COUNTY

Executive Board Meeting Minutes
16 Sept 2026 @1700
American Legion Post 36
1291 Oakwood Ave, Des Plaines, IL 60016

(Executive Board Members): Frank Gutierrez (*President*), Jesus "Chuy" Segura (*1st Vice President*), Dutch DeGroot (*2nd Vice President*), Robert Arciola (*Treasurer*),
At Large Board Members: Greg Jacobs, Randall Tyner, Evamarie Duff. Non voting **Appointees** John Kerrigan (*Secretary*), George Gandara (*Chaplain*), Pete Hlirt (*Judge Advocate*), Eric "Kermit" Morales (*Sargent at Arms*). Elizabeth Soto (*Superintendent*)

I. Welcome – President Gutierrez

a. Board meeting called to order at 1705 hrs.

b. Roll Call / Establish Quorum – 2nd VP DeGroot confirmed the presence of a quorum. Present: 6 of 7 Board Members]. Absent: Jesus "Chuy" Segura.

c. Recognition of Guests: No guests were present.

II. Opening Reflection – Chaplain Gandara

a. Prayer / Reflection: In the absence of the Chaplain, Robert Arciola offered a non-denominational opening prayer.

b. Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Consent Agenda – President Gutierrez

a. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes – 16 June 2026. The agenda and minutes were distributed in advance. No corrections, additions, or removals were requested; the minutes stood approved as submitted. No motion or second was required.

IV. Governance Report – Treasurer Arciola

a. Treasurer's Financial Report: Treasurer Robert Arciola reported a donation from the Cook County Clerk deposited on 1 September 2026 [\$53 – confirm amount]. The beginning balance as of 1 September 2026 was \$5,230.07. The current balance is \$5,283.07.

b. 501(c)(3) Financial and Filing Update: The Treasurer will submit the annual state report in October, ahead of the organization's corporation date in November. He expressed hope that this will be the last year the Executive Board and membership oversee these filings once a separate 501(c)(3) executive board is in place to manage the foundation.

The Board also noted that, per Robert's Rules of Order, no motion and second are required to approve minutes when no corrections are offered.

V. VACCC Office Report – Superintendent Elizabeth Soto

Superintendent Soto, together with Deputy Superintendent Grant and staff, briefed the Board on highlights from the FY2027 budget overview (19 pages). The full presentation will be given at the 22 September membership meeting, and staff will also present an overview of the Commissions Administration portal.

a. Veterans Served / VSO Report: In Q3 the VSO program completed 1,182 claims actions, a slight decrease from the prior quarter (approximately 1,300) following the loss of a VSO manager. The team was recognized for maintaining service levels. Annual compensation brought into Cook County increased from \$12 million in Q2 to \$15 million in Q3.

b. Emergency Financial Assistance and Benefits: See item VI.e for the funding discussion. Monthly financial assistance now averages approximately \$120,000; the prior month was above \$100,000.

c. Staffing and Hiring: Cook County informed the VACCC that, during the countywide standstill, no department or agency is being granted additional appropriated positions. A compromise under discussion would provide 10 additional positions rather than the 15 requested. Two positions that had been added through a county clerical error were used as bargaining chips, reducing the request (including salaries and computers) without the loss of any existing staff. The office reported it can operate into FY2027 without the additional caseworker previously requested, as its priority is

sustaining and learning from this year's onboarding. A newly assigned county budget official was described as strongly supportive of the VACCC and plans to visit the office.

d. Outreach and Operations: Outreach completed 103 operational activities in Q3, including resource events, Vet Talks, and Vet Connect events.

e. Rolling Meadows and Office Expansion: The headquarters at 1100 South Hamilton and the location at 69 West Washington have opened successfully. The 2121 Euclid Avenue, Rolling Meadows location is awaiting carpeting, doors, and technology setup (including a computer lab) and is expected to open before 31 December 2026. A Southland Cook County location remains an FY2027 initiative, with a long-term goal of four fully operational VACCC locations. In response to a Board question, staff explained that financial assistance will not be fully processed at Rolling Meadows until records digitization is in place, due to the risk of duplicate services and the control of items such as gift cards. Veterans may apply at any location, but approvals are currently handled centrally. The office has a recently concluded clean financial audit and wishes to avoid errors; the Board accepted this approach for now.

f. Records Digitization / Power App / Website: The FY2027 request is currently \$5.6 million (approximately a 77% increase), including \$2 million in direct assistance (a 100% program increase). The proposed budget may decrease if Cook County directly provides services currently included in the request, such as the quoted \$100,000 Iron Horse digitization cost. The county is also reviewing whether existing county resources can support services the VACCC has budgeted. The final number was pending as of the meeting.

g. Fleet and Transportation: The first of four county-approved vehicles, a 2026 Ford Bronco Sport, has been received and will be housed at 1100 South Hamilton; it was used for travel to the IACVAC meeting in Peoria. Three vehicles are pending: two 2026 Ford Maverick XLTs and one Ford T-350 medium-roof wagon, the latter intended to transport veterans needing financial assistance between Rolling Meadows and headquarters.

h. Sangamon County Ruling: Staff reported that a briefing on the Sangamon County court ruling will be provided after a meeting with legal counsel Josh Harmon the following day.

President Gutierrez thanked the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, and staff, noting the budget has grown from approximately \$471,000 a few years ago to \$5.6 million.

The President entertained a motion to approve the Superintendent's report as presented. Motion: Dutch DeGroot Second: Greg Jacobs – confirm] Vote: Carried by voice vote; no opposition or abstentions.

VI. Unfinished Business – President Gutierrez

a. Appointment of 501(c)(3) President: The President stated the Board has deferred this matter for some time and that the Executive Board and membership should not be managing the 501(c)(3). He asked members to help identify a suitable candidate. The President will work with the appointee on bylaws and governance guardrails so the VACCC retains oversight. A separate executive board (at minimum a president, secretary, and treasurer) must be formed before the organization becomes operational. Desired qualifications discussed included 501(c)(3) leadership, fundraising ability, accounting or CPA experience, and management experience. The President may be required to be a VACCC member (delegate or alternate); no final requirement was adopted, and other officers need not be members if they are the best-qualified candidates. Members noted conflict-of-interest recusal considerations on any VACCC votes involving the 501(c)(3), and 501(c)(3) filing requirements (Form 990, Attorney General annual report). Two people expressed interest at the last membership meeting, and one has since made contact. The President has a candidate in mind but will present all options to the Board and the membership for a vote. He aims to have the 501(c)(3) moving forward by year-end. No appointment was made.

b. Conflict of Interest Forms: Deputy Superintendent Grant reported the form will be brought to a Board vote and that legal counsel Josh will soon explain the forms and answer questions. No action taken.

c. Hines VA Follow-Up: Members raised continuing concerns, including unresolved patient-advocacy issues, reported veteran deaths, medication side effects, the need for suicide-awareness and prevention training and guidance on recognizing warning signs, and conditions at Freedom Path Hines. The Board acknowledged the recent loss of a member and expressed condolences. A follow-up meeting with Director Prince is being pursued, potentially at Building 217, and other efforts to reach Hines leadership are underway. Members asked whether formal complaints had been filed and noted involvement of the Office of Inspector General. A suggestion was made to invite an appropriate VA official to speak at a membership or post meeting. No specific training commitment was adopted.

d. IACVAC Update: Deputy Superintendent Grant and Superintendent Soto, attending the IACVAC meeting in Peoria, reported that the only business vote was on the organization's stance on the Taking Care of Our American Veterans Act, subject to a specific revision. Sessions covered asbestos claims, maximizing benefits and effective dates, lay evidence, appeals, veteran-focused support, and ESGR. Delegates and alternates had not received an agenda until arrival; IACVAC acknowledged this and will revise its process so delegates, alternates, superintendents, deputy superintendents, and relevant staff are notified appropriately. A full report on the Sangamon County ruling will follow.

e. Veteran of the Year Recognition Program Follow-Up: A program is not expected this year because resources are focused on services and financial assistance. A possible 2027 ceremony would recognize veterans' actions during 2026. In related discussion, Superintendent Soto reported financial assistance funds may be exhausted by mid-to-late October, depending on demand, as the office is using unspent salary funds and other line items. Transferring unused salary funds exceeds \$50,000 and requires county approval. If funds are exhausted, assistance requiring checks (utilities, mortgage, phone) may need to pause, while prepaid gift cards, hygiene assistance, and bus cards continue until supplies run out. October and November demand typically rises. The county is aware and was reported to have a \$330 million deficit; members noted VACCC funds are intended to be separate from the county general budget. Utility-shutoff referrals: veterans with qualifying medical conditions can submit a medical certification or primary care provider letter to utilities, which may delay shutoff an estimated 50 to 90 days while charges continue to accrue. A policy question was raised about adjusting assistance limits for all-electric residences. Members suggested contacting ComEd and People's Gas leadership and reviewing statutes protecting veterans from winter shutoffs. The Board discussed seeking county emergency funding and contacting commissioners. Actions: the Superintendent will obtain CPA Raj's updated projected exhaustion date and final projection; a Board member will contact county commissioners.

f. Board Development and Training: Members were reminded that annual OMA and MVAA training is required and that completion certificates must be on file with the Deputy Superintendent. Several members will confirm or complete training.

g. Board / Staff Operational Communication Protocol: President Gutierrez reiterated that operational concerns are directed to the Superintendent, who reports to the Executive Board. Staff may contact Board members for routine matters, such as newsletter content, as long as the Superintendent or Deputy Superintendent is included in the communication.

VII. New Business – President Gutierrez

a. FY2027 Proposed Budget – Review, Discussion and Ratification Vote: Motion to ratify the FY2027 proposed budget: [name]. Vote: Carried by voice vote; no opposition or abstentions. The budget will be sent to the mass email list that night and is already posted on the website.

b. September 22 Membership Meeting Preparation: The Board clarified that the membership will vote on the budget on 22 September. The Superintendent will explain at presentation that county discussions may change the final amount or service-cost assumptions; the Board need not add comment.

c. Future VACCC Meeting Locations: The location of the 8 December meeting is not yet determined. Locations are chosen to balance travel across Cook County, ensure ADA compliance, and avoid overburdening host organizations. Central options discussed were the La Grange post, Leyden Township, and the Brookfield post. Members shared differing views on fairness of rotating locations, noting that Palatine is not ADA compliant.

VIII. Committee Reports

a. Benefits / Services Provided Committee: No updates.

b. Bylaws Committee / Bylaws Status: No updates; no action taken.

c. Other Committee Updates: None.

IX. Good of the Order

- Northwest Side Homeless Shelter: A \$13 million state-funded homeless shelter initiative was announced. Deputy Superintendent Grant is participating in planning meetings with elected officials, Main Township, and VACCC staff and will send notes to the Board.
- Rocking for Heroes (Fisher House): 15 November. The Fourth District Color Guard will participate; 1,500 attendees are expected, with 100 VIP tickets.
- “Be the One”: Veteran suicide awareness event at 10:00 AM Sunday at the Jen Center, Des Plaines.
- Bash for the Brave: Veteran and children’s fundraising car show Sunday in Itasca, hosted by The Giving Group of Schaumburg.
- Stand Down: 20 November. Scouts collected goods for homeless-veteran survival bags, which still need packing. VACCC staff have joined the planning committee.
- Communications: The Board discussed better publicizing events and resources via Facebook and other channels, and adding the next meeting location to the website calendar.
- Membership: The VACCC has 51 member organizations. Enrollment runs 1 January through 28 February. A membership map or heat map was discussed; no commitment was made.
- Transportation partnerships: A member suggested VACCC fare cards might qualify veterans for transportation-assistance discounts.

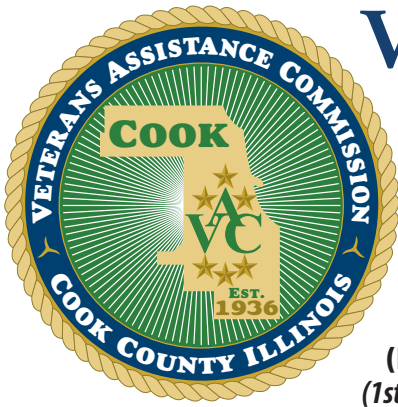
X. Public Comment

- a.** No public comment was offered; no members of the public attended.

XI. Adjournment

- a.** A motion to adjourn was made by Greg Jacobs and seconded by Dutch deGROOT. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at approximately [1838 hrs – confirm].

- b.** The next VACCC Membership Meeting is scheduled for 22 September 2026, 1900 hrs, at VFW Post 2868.



VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION OF COOK COUNTY

Executive Board Meeting Agenda
16 Sept 2026 @1700
American Legion Post 36
1291 Oakwood Ave, Des Plaines, IL 60016

(Executive Board Members): Frank Gutierrez (*President*), Jesus "Chuy" Segura (*1st Vice President*), Dutch DeGroot (*2nd Vice President*), Robert Arciola (*Treasurer*),

At Large Board Members: Greg Jacobs, Randall Tyner, Evamarie Duff. Non voting **Appointees** John Kerrigan (*Secretary*), George Gandara (*Chaplain*), Pete Hlirt (*Judge Advocate*), Eric "Kermit" Morales (*Sargent at Arms*). Elizabeth Soto (*Superintendent*)

I. Welcome – President Gutierrez

- a.** Call to Order
- b.** Roll Call / Establish Quorum – 2nd VP DeGroot / Sec. Kerrigan
- c.** Recognition of Guests

II. Opening Reflection – Chaplain

- a.** Prayer / Reflection
- b.** Pledge of Allegiance

III. Consent Agenda – President Gutierrez

- a.** Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes – 16 June 2026

IV. Governance Report – Treasurer Arciola

- a.** Treasurer's Financial Report
- b.** 501(c)(3) Financial and Filing Update

V. VACCC Office Report – Superintendent Elizabeth Soto

- a.** Veterans Served / VSO Report
- b.** Emergency Financial Assistance and Benefits
- c.** Staffing and Hiring
- d.** Outreach and Operations
- e.** Rolling Meadows and Office Expansion
- f.** Records Digitization / Power App / Website
- g.** Fleet and Transportation

VI. Unfinished Business – President Gutierrez

- a.** Appointment of 501(c)(3) President
- b.** Conflict of Interest Forms
- c.** Hines VA Follow-Up
- d.** IACVAC Update
- e.** Veteran of the Year Recognition Program Follow-Up
- f.** Board Development and Training
- g.** Board / Staff Operational Communication Protocol

VII. New Business – President Gutierrez

- a.** FY2027 Proposed Budget - Review, Discussion and Ratification Vote
- b.** September 22 Membership Meeting Preparation
- c.** Future VACCC Meeting Locations

VIII. Committee Reports

- a.** Benefits / Services Provided Committee
- b.** Bylaws Committee / Bylaws Status
- c.** Other Committee Updates

IX. Good of the Order

X. Public Comment

Public comment for items not on the agenda is limited to three minutes per speaker.

XI. Adjournment

- a.** Motion to Adjourn
- b.** Next VACCC Membership Meeting - 22 September 2026, 1900 HRS

* To allow sufficient time for Commission business, speakers providing announcements for public comment for items not in the agenda or good of the order are asked to summarize their remarks and limit comments to three (3) minutes. Additional details may be provided through handouts, flyers, or other distributed materials.

** Organizations are encouraged to make flyers, event notices, resource information, and community announcements available at the information table near the entrance. Members are also encouraged to submit information electronically for distribution through VACCC communication channels.