



# VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION OF COOK COUNTY

## Membership Meeting Minutes

24 June 2025

### Location:

**Robert E. Coulter Jr. American Legion Post 1941**  
**900 South La Grange Road, La Grange, IL 60525**

**(Executive Board Members):** Frank Gutierrez (*President*), William Browne (*1st Vice President*), Dutch DeGroot (*2nd Vice President*), Robert Arciola (*Treasurer*).

**At Large Board Members:** Greg Jacobs, Chuy Segura, John Steciw. Non voting **Appointees** Jim Parker (*Secretary*), Kevin Ake (*Chaplain*), Peter Hurt (*Judge Advocate*), Lorenzo Fiorentino (*Sargent at Arms*). Elizabeth Soto (*Superintendent*)

### I. Welcome – President Gutierrez.

- a. Call to order at 1902hrs.
- b. Roll Call/Quorum – 2nd VP DeGroot announced a quorum is attending per the sign in sheet. A copy of the Sign In Sheet is attached to and a part of these Minutes.
- c. President Gutierrez introduced the following guests: James Flagg of CEDA, Maria Galo from CC Commissioner Maggie Trevor's office, guests from VAC DuPage County President Bruce Mayor & Outreach & Specialties Manager Brittany Michor.

### II. Opening Reflection – Chaplain Kevin Ale

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

### III. Consent Agenda – President Gutierrez.

- a. Approval of Minutes of March 25, 2025 Membership Meeting. The Minutes were not read but were distributed to all members in advance of this meeting. Motion to Approve the Minutes was made by James Scultz of AmVets Post 66 and seconded by Art Ellingsen of VFW Post 9284. The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.

### IV. Public Comment.

- a. Art Ellingsen of VFW Post 9284 congratulated Chaplain Ade for having his photo appear in the Stars and Strips while wearing his Post Cover. He emphasized the importance of press releases and other such publications in getting new members.
- b. Chappy Ferrer of VFW Post 5151 said his Post is sponsoring a fundraiser for veteran suicide prevention this Sunday. The aim is to find solutions for homeless vets who are at greater suicide risks. He invited all those who may be interested in this topic to attend.

### V. Governance Report – Treasurer Aricola

- a. He reported that the Membership Corp. account balance of \$5,028.57. Some more donations will be added later. Motion to Approve the report made by Art Ellingsen and duly seconded was passed by unanimous voice vote.
- b. Ratification of certain Executive Board Actions. None Required

- VI. VACCC Office Reports – Superintendent Soto read the Mission Statement of the VACCC . She and staff members reported the following for the second quarter:**
- a.** Financial & Disbursement Report. Financial Assistance disbursements increased over last quarter and last year. The preliminary budget request for next year will be for a total of \$5,510,593.03. This substantial increase over last year due to significant increases in staff (+25) and training, transportation, including new staff vehicles, and new office locations. Veterans Served. Also large increases over last quarter and last year.
  - b.** Derrick Giffen gave the VSO Report. He stated that Cook County has over 141,000 veterans but only about 28% are receiving the benefits they earned. This is primarily due to barriers in access, awareness and follow through. The VSO's mission is to increase services by expanding direct support and streamlining claims processing. They are accelerating the accreditation process for VSO new hires and hiring two new VSO managers. For the future they will be adding a new claims management system for use by VSO staff and will attempt to have at least three in person out reach events in each of the 17 County Districts. Additionally they will institute a "Vet Talk" initiative to reach more vets with information about, among other things, the claims process and the role of VSOs in that.
  - c.** Connor Intress gave the Outreach Report. He started by reading the VACCC Mission Statement. Through Outreach they will attempt to reach out to more veterans at various locations throughout the County to increase their visibility and expand VACCC programs to underserved areas. He said that in Q2 they started a new, improved direct out-reach program to focus on areas that are underserved or have a high veteran density at different types of community spaces such as churches, veterans centers , and offices of elected officials. They had 37 such events in Q2.
  - d.** President Gutierrez led the swearing in of Grant Jacobson as Deputy Superintendent of the VACCC. Grant gave an address stating how proud he is to accept this appointment and pledged to support Superintendent Soto and serve the 141,000+ vets of Cook County.
  - f.** There were a number of questions for Superintendent Soto about the report that she addressed satisfactorily. The "questions" included a lengthy speech by James Flagg about the services provided by his organization.
- A motion to approve the Office Report was made by Todd Moore of DAV Chapter 33 and duly seconded. The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.
- VII. Bylaws – John Steciw Not present**
- VIII. Budget – 1st VP Browne**
- a.** No report at this time as the 2025 Budget has been approved but members will have the opportunity to serve on the Budget Committee next year.
- IX. Services Provided Board Member Kern Board Member Kern. Not present**
- X. Future Meeting Sites Update -- 2nd VP DeGroot**
- a.** Lyons Twp. Post 1941, 6404 Joliet Road Countryside Il 60525, has agreed to this location for the December 17, 2024 (1900 hrs.) meeting.

## **XI. Unfinished Business -- President Gutierrez**

**a.** Report on the Membership Corporation. Secretary Parker reported that questions about the Membership Corporations and the status of its formation documents were raised a few months ago. He stated that, pursuant to a passed motion, he researched the corporation and documents and, quite simply, they don't exist. He discussed this with Treasurer Aricola and they concluded that the corporation should be officially formed so the VACCC could legally accept tax exempt donations through the Membership Corporation. He requested a motion authorizing him to prepare the preliminary incorporation documents and present them for discussion and approval at the next meeting. The motion was made by 2nd VP DeGroot, duly seconded, and passed by unanimous voice vote. Jim Schultz of AmVets Post 66 agreed to assist with the documentation.

## **XII. New Business -- President Gutierrez.**

**a.** 2nd VP DeGroot read a retirement letter from AL Board Member and By-laws Committee Chairman, John Steciw. His retirement is primarily for health reasons. Dutch said that John was a founding father of the VACCC and for the past 20+ years he has worked tirelessly to improve and keep it going. Richard Nielson of Amvets Post 268 suggested that the VACCC write a letter of thanks and appreciation to John Steciw for his many years of service. 2nd VP DeGroot agreed and suggested that a plaque might be in order.

**b.** 2nd VP DeGroot said that when a Member organization misses two consecutive regular membership meetings its membership in the VACCC should be revoked. Absent members negatively affect our ability to meet the Quorum requirement for a meeting.

**c.** He also mentioned that with John Steciw's retirement there is a vacancy on the Executive Board.

**d.** 2nd VP DeGroot pointed out that the VACCC is one of the largest VACs in the nation (and the largest in Illinois). With that growth comes additional responsibilities and a much bigger budget, both of which expand the need for legal representation at membership meetings when all significant decisions are made. For this reason he said that Josh should attend all meetings, not just the ones where we request him to be there. Josh said that he was proud to be our counsel and looked forward to attending our meetings. Art Ellingsen, Delegate from VFW Post 9284, made a motion to authorize Josh to attend all meetings and to pay his expenses for this. The motion was seconded and passed by unanimous voice vote.

## **XIII. Comments from Special Guests:**

**a.** Maria said that she was honored to represent Commissioner Trevor who invites all veterans to contact her office with any issues she is capable of addressing. She also mentioned that recently a veteran had contacted the office with a request for assistance with VA benefits. The vet was put in contact with a VSO from the VACCC and eventually got the benefits he sought.

**b.** Special guest Megan Everett also a member of AL Post 1052 spoke briefly about her organization, "Illinois Joining Forces". It provides many services to vets, especially the homeless.

**XIV. Good of the Order.– President Gutierrez.**

**a.** Paul Bezazian of VFW Post 8322 announced an upcoming Stand Down coming up this Friday at the Armory located at North Avenue and Kedzie Avenue. He then introduced Mike Rogers of the Forest Park Veterans Center who explained the purposes of a Stand Down and the benefits they provide for veterans. He requested that someone from the VACCC attend and take notes and join in the planning for the next Stand Down.

**b.** Art Ellingsen of VFW Post 9284 announced that the moving “Wall that Heals” will be in Antioch from July 17 through the 20th. This moving event is sponsored by the Antioch Chamber of Commerce.

**c.** Commandant Alejandro Morales of MCL 1408 also mentioned the upcoming Stand Down, that Serenity Housing Service Incorporated hosts virtual veterans support groups on Thursdays at 1830 hrs. and 1930 hrs., and Harper College is offering a Veterans Resource Fair Saturday, June 28, from 1000 hrs. to 1400hrs.

**d.** There was some discussion among several attendees regarding the procedure involved in the temporary appointment of an At Large Board Member and election of a permanent AL Board Member. President Gutierrez said that he will appoint a temporary at the end of this meeting and a formal election of a permanent replacement will be held at the next regular meeting.

**XV. Future Meeting Sites Update -- 2nd VP DeGroot**

The date will be 23 September 2025 but another date was first mentioned). 2nd VP DeGroot is trying to get the Lyons Township Bldg. located at 6404 Joliet Road, Countryside, IL. He added that he is looking for suggestions for alternate sites for future meetings but they should be centrally located if possible so some members don't get stuck with long rush hour rides.

**XVI. Executive Session -- President Gutierrez**

**a.** Laura Matuszak of AL Post 525 made a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss possible litigation. The motion was seconded and passed by unanimous voice vote. Attendance at an ES is limited to Delegates and Alternates. Other attendees were asked to leave but were invited back at the conclusion of the ES. The doors were closed and the ES was called to order.

**b.** When the ES was adjourned President Gutierrez made a motion to resume the regular meeting. The motion was seconded and passed by unanimous voice vote.

**XVII. Appointment of Interim At Large Board Member.**

In accordance with applicable provision of our By-laws, President Gutierrez appointed Randall Tyner of Marine Corps League Chapter 553 to be the interim At Large Board Member to replace John Steciw. A permanent AL Board member will be elected at the next regular meeting.

**XVIII. Adjournment.-- President Gutierrez**

President Gutierrez closed with a thank you to the Board, Members and guests for their contributions to a very productive meeting. Upon a proper Motion by James Schultz, duly seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 2047 hrs.

*Submitted by Jim Parker, Secretary*



# VACCC MEMBERSHIP SIGN IN SHEET

## 24 JUNE 2025 MEETING

Sheet 1 of 2

Organization	X	Delegate	X	Alternate Delegate
American Legion 36	X	Patrick Flannigan	X	Gregory Jacobs
American Legion 87		Willie Mack		Ashley Shine
American Legion 104		Dennis Chavez	X	Michael F Tuman
American Legion 183	X	Peter Papuc	X	Timothy Bodkin
American Legion 208		Greg Padovani	X	Walter Parus
American Legion 216	X	Kevin Ake		
American Legion 335		Lorenzo Fiorentino	X	Chuy Segura
American Legion 478		Beverly Fitch		Nickola Rogers
American Legion 525		William "Bill" Starr	X	Laura Matuszak
American Legion 615	X	Ken McClory	X	John Kaminecki
American Legion 687		Eugene Weaver		Alejandro Segoviano
American Legion 758		Beau D. Butts	X	Frank Gutierrez
American Legion 806		Al Pizarro	X	Pete Hirt
American Legion 829		Chevonne Woodward		Ray Doeksen
American Legion 888		Anthony Muro		Andy Anderson
American Legion 923		Clemente E. Rodriguez		
American Legion 943		John Steciw		Adam Bihun
American Legion 973		Eden Puente		
American Legion 974		Anthony Siciliano	X	Thomas Zito
American Legion 1052	X	Megan Everett		Brian Phenegar
American Legion 1941	X	Robert Stoltz	X	Edward Krzeminski
American Legion 1932		Charles Salley		James McGee Jr.
American Legion 1983	X	Frank Kelly		Antony (Tony) Thomas
American Legion 1987		Charles Henderson		Ron Bellamy
AMVETS 66	X	James Schultz	X	James (Jim) Parker
AMVETS 268		Eddie Brown Jr.	X	Richard Nielson



# VACCC MEMBERSHIP SIGN IN SHEET

## 24 JUNE 2025 MEETING

Sheet 2 of 2

Organization	X	Delegate	X	Alternate Delegate
DAV Chapter 33	X	Todd Moore		Joseph J. Donovan
DAV Chapter 84	X	Kenneth Boor		William Byers
Jewish War Veterans 710		Dr. Jerry Field		Howard Goldstein
Marine Corps L 553	X	Randall L. Tyner		Paul Zogg
Marine Corps L 1408		George Gandara	X	Alejandro Morales
Mil Order WW	X	Zhi Cheng Chen		
MOAA		Mike Peck		Dean Farr
Navy League 69		Leo Alicea		
PVA Vaughan	X	Robert Arciola		Robert Statam
Polish Legion 72		David Piecuch		
VFW Post 311	X	Bill Browne		Aretha Spurlock
VFW Post 981	X	Stewart Abbink		Larry Blieski
VFW Post 1337	X	John "Dutch" DeGroot	X	Wally Beckman
VFW Post 2202	X	John Healy	X	Joseph Wein
VFW Post 2868	X	Eric Morales	X	Evamarie Duff
VFW Post 2978		Ray Doeksen		Scott Frit
VFW Post 3579		Ramon Prieto	X	Keith Renner
VFW Post 5079		Antonio Munoz IV		
VFW Post 5151	X	Phil "Chappy" Ferrer		
VFW Post 5979		Richard Wojewnik		David Ruiz
VFW Post 7186	X	Thomas J. "Jim" Hughes		Jason Kruger
VFW Post 8322	X	Paul J. Bezazian		Paul Knudtson
VFW Post 9284	X	Arthur J. Ellingsen		Wallace Campbell
VFW Post 10778	X	Chuck Bosko		
VVA 242		Kevin Calkins		John Andres
SFA 37		Patrick Crimmins		Pending State Charter
33 of 51 attended		41 delegates and alternates attended		