



Pennsylvania
**Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs**

SOUTHEASTERN VETERANS' CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

January 8, 2026

The Southeastern Veterans' Center Advisory Council met on January 8, 2026 at 10:00 AM in the All-Purpose Room of Coates Hall at the Southeastern Veterans' Center.

Advisory Council Members Participating:

Barry Amole, American Legion, President
Thomas Applebach, Lehigh County Office of Veterans' Affairs, Vice President
Eric Hofer, Military Officers Association of America
Doug Forsythe, Disabled American Veterans
Kenneth Nadwodny, Catholic War Veterans
Emil Messikomer, Marine Corps League

Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs/Southeastern Veterans' Center:

Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General of Veterans' Affairs – DMVA
Travis Davis, Executive Director, Long-Term Care – DMVA
Barbara Raymond, Bureau of Veteran' Homes Director – DMVA
Michael Belcher, Veterans' Services Specialist- DMVA
Brian Gula, Commandant – SEVC
Johanna Valenti, Deputy Commandant- SEVC
Dr. Sin Kei Yeung, Medical Director- SEVC
Sarah Klufas, Commandant's Assistant- SEVC

Visitors:

Nikki Whitlock, Chief of Staff, Senator Katie Muth's Office
David Buckley, Personal Care Resident
Nate Schaefer, Constituent Specialist, Senator Tracy Pennycuick's Office- via Microsoft TEAMS

Excused Absence:

Kenneth Schweitzer, American Legion, Secretary
John Getz, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Jeffrey Elliot, PA AMVETS
Thomas Coreau, Dauphin County Office of Veterans' Affairs
Robert Richardson, Resident Representative
The Honorable Tracy Pennycuick, PA State Senate
The Honorable Dan Williams, PA House of Representatives
MG John R. Pippy, Adjutant General – DMVA
Mia Woods, Compliance and Ethics Officer- DMVA

Call to Order:

The Advisory Council Meeting was called to order by Barry Amole at 10:00 AM. There was a moment of silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Swearing in of Council Members:

The following council members were sworn in at the meeting:

- Doug Forsythe, Disabled American Veterans
- Thomas Applebach, Lehigh County Office of Veterans' Affairs
- Eric Hofer, Military Officers Association of America
- Kenneth Nadwodny, Catholic War Veterans
- Emil Messikomer, Marine Corps League

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes:

Due to the lack of a quorum at the October 9, 2025 meeting, a vote was held to approve the July 10, 2025 meeting minutes. A motion was made by Thomas Applebach and seconded by Doug Forsythe to approve the July 10, 2025 meeting minutes. Motion carried, and minutes were approved as written.

A motion was made by Thomas Applebach and seconded by Doug Forsythe to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on October 9, 2025. Motion carried, and minutes were approved as written.

Report of the Medical Director - Dr. Sin Kei Yeung - SEVC:

Dr. Sin Kei Yeung, Medical Director, provided an update to the council. On December 15th, Southeastern Veterans' Center experienced a Covid 19 outbreak, with initial cases on Coates Hall 2East and subsequent cases on 1CLC, 3CLC, and Coates Hall 3East. Most of the Covid positive residents presented with mild upper respiratory symptoms, such as nasal drip/congestion, sore throat, and cough. Symptoms have resolved fairly quickly. There was one Covid associated death, and one Covid associated pneumonia. Our facility has implemented enhanced sanitary measures, utilizing N95 masks and eye protection on Covid positive units and have specialty dispensers for gowns, gloves, N95 masks and eye protection in front of Covid positive patient rooms. We are keeping staff on the same units without rotating to other non-Covid units. We are encouraging residents with Covid to stay in their rooms for the 10-day quarantine and are providing face masks if they need to leave their rooms. We have masks available for all residents and continue to encourage hand washing to prevent the spread of infection.

The facility is continuing to give Covid boosters based on patient and POA consent. We have had no flu or RSV cases this fall/winter and we are hopeful this will continue. We credit this to our infection preventionists who have been working diligently to obtain vaccination consents and administering vaccines, providing us an adequate vaccination rate for herd immunity.

Nikki Whitlock asked how many positive residents that the facility had currently. Barb Raymond said that we had about 22 positive residents.

Report of the Admissions and Marketing Coordinator - Jill Alwine - SEVC:

Brian Gula, Commandant, provided the Admissions and Marketing update on behalf of Jill Alwine, Admissions Coordinator. Brian reported that our current census is 245, with 44 residents in personal care,

175 in skilled nursing, and 26 on our secured unit. We admitted 99 residents during 2025. We have 58 applicants on our waitlist, 44 veterans and 14 spouses. Our waitlist times for personal care, skilled nursing and our secured unit is about 3-6 months.

Report of the Deputy Adjutant General – General Maureen Weigl – DMVA:

General Weigl informed the council that Southeast has lost 2 wonderful people recently, our beloved security officer Scott Koniow and our beloved 102-year-old WWII veteran Paul Lynn.

Today is the War Council meeting. Most of our team is at the American Legion post, giving briefs on legislative updates. We encourage you to talk to your state commanders if you have any questions or concerns. Also, if you do not receive the information that we share at these meetings, please let us know.

Starting next week, you will see a brand-new look on our DMVA VetConnect website. The new format will make it easier for veterans to find forms and information.

Our team will have an information booth at the PA Farm Show in Harrisburg next week.

There is a lot of information going out on VA changes. They are doing some reorganization at the National VA headquarters. They are centralizing a lot of the decision making at the Federal level, so that the VISNs and Medical Directors will interact differently. It has not impacted us yet. They have cut some organizations and have opened other organizations. A lot of the 30,000 employees that they are losing are positions that have not been filled, so they are getting rid of those positions. We have not seen a lot of impact on veterans, whether it be going out to appointments or doing claims and benefits. But we are watching that.

Report of the Executive Director, Long Term Care – Travis Davis – DMVA:

Travis Davis started by discussing the new law that made some changes to our Advisory Council. The first change was to the composition of our council, with the addition of 3 seats for community members. The resident councils at the homes held a special election to make the nominations. The nominations will then go to the Governor's office for approval. The second big change was what the Council is required to do. There are two pieces. The first is to give an assessment of 3 different categories: resident care, management, and operations and compliance of facility and services. The second piece is to make recommendations based off the assessment. We had a very tight window this year for when the report had to be turned around. Because of this deadline, we only looked at a July 1st to September 30th reporting period. This window only covered one meeting per home, but we did pull the meeting minutes and tried to determine what kind of recommendations we had from those meetings. We then held a special meeting with all of the Advisory Council Presidents and reviewed all of the recommendations and talked about what this report should look like. Some of the things we do not currently have, like the formal assessment, we are going to build into next year's report. We are going to change the meeting agendas around to help streamline the work of the Council and be able to extract the material from the minutes and put it right into the report. Some of the topics that we report on at the meetings that will help us with these assessments are things like our inspections, surveys, 5-star rating, census, waitlist, revenues, activity programs, construction projects, and regulatory updates. This year's report was reviewed by our legal department and it is going to the Adjutant General for his final approval and then it will be submitted by January 30th to the General Assembly and the VAEP committee.

Nikki Whitlock asked if the report was for a calendar year or fiscal year. Travis Davis stated that the Act did not specify on what it needed to be, it just stated "annual report". After discussion with the legal team, the reporting period that was chosen will be July 1st to June 30th.

Our current census across all six homes is 1167 residents. In December, we had 42 admissions and 52 discharges. It is typical for this time of year to see a higher number of discharges. We have about 240 veterans and spouses on our waiting list.

Our Construction Project Manager position for the eastern side of PA has been vacant. We have had some people serving in this role but not at a permanent capacity. The posting came down and we have selected a candidate. We are just waiting for approval from the Governor's office.

The Hollidaysburg construction project continues on. We are currently waiting on some furniture that still needs to be delivered and working on running cables for the televisions and phones. We are hoping to have our Lifesafety inspection and Occupancy inspection at the end of this month/beginning of February. After those are completed, then we will request an inspection from the Federal VA. We have to have 20 residents residing in the building when the VA comes in and does their inspection. It has to be a completely deficiency free survey to be able to pass. We went through one of these inspections at Delaware Valley about 3 years ago. The inspectors will look at every little thing, but we are confident in our team and that we will pass.

Thomas Applebach asked what kinds of things the Federal VA looks at during the survey. Travis Davis responded that they look at everything from Lifesafety issues to resident care to infection control practices. Thomas Applebach also asked what the process would look like if they came in to do an inspection and we received a deficiency. Travis Davis stated that for any deficiencies received, we would have to write a plan of corrections, submit it for approval, and then they would have to come back out to reinspect. He further explained that it can be something so minor, dust on top of an oven, a penetration in the ceiling, a temperature of a refrigerator, scratched up paint. Barb Raymond stated that we are hopeful that we will not experience any of these kinds of things, since it is a new building.

Travis Davis concluded his report by telling the council that the National Association of State Veterans' Homes is having their annual winter conference in February in Washington D.C. All of the Commandant's from the homes will be attending alongside Travis Davis and Barb Raymond. We receive updates from the VA on regulatory changes and have the ability to ask questions as a group. We also get construction updates, grant updates, and participate in Capitol Hill visits where we talk with the federal congressmen and congress women who represent our districts about things that we would like to see change.

Report of the Director of Veterans' Homes – Barbara Raymond – DMVA:

Barb Raymond started by giving an update on Covid across the homes. We have had an increase in Covid cases across the homes, particularly during the holiday season. We currently have about 36 Covid positive residents between our Hollidaysburg facility, Southeast, and Southwest. For the most part, we are seeing minor cold-like symptoms. We currently have 3 staff between Hollidaysburg and Southwestern with Covid. We do not have any Covid positive staff at Southeast. The numbers are very fluid as people come off and come on. We also have minor flu outbreaks at Delaware Valley, Hollidaysburg and Southwest. We currently have 11 residents with influenza between those 3 homes, 2 of those residents are currently at the hospital. Typically, the individuals that need to go out to the hospitals to be treated also have other

comorbidities, such as COPD or other respiratory issues. We do anticipate both of those individuals to return. We currently do not have any staff with influenza. Regarding vaccinations, 56 percent of our residents are vaccinated for the most recent Covid booster and 80 percent of our residents are vaccinated against influenza. We do not mandate our staff to be vaccinated for Covid or influenza, but we do offer the vaccines to our staff.

We had lots of fun over the holidays with the TAG visits throughout the veterans' homes. Both the residents and staff love having the TAG and his troops come visit in their uniform. We are gearing up for Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day.

Back in the fall, we did make some changes to the menus at the veterans' homes. The goal was to make the menus more standardized from a procurement perspective. Some concerns with the new menus have been raised and we are trying to address as many as possible. We were able to address some issues by changing the wording to allow for flexibility between the homes to fit resident preferences. We are confident that we will have all of the concerns addressed by the time that the Spring/Summer menu comes out.

We have updated our Bed Hold Policy and have updated our Notice of Transfer. Whenever someone goes out to the hospital on an emergency basis or goes out on Therapeutic Leave with family, we have to give them info on how long we hold the bed on a legal basis. None of the regulations have changed, we just updated our own policies.

We also updated our State Veterans Homes' Emergency Preparedness Plans. We review these on an annual basis. These plans include anything from phone outages, heat outages, cooling outages, fires or any other disasters. Travis Davis also added that the importance of these plans is critical to our operations and the safety of the residents. The Bucks County nursing home explosion was devastating. Our veterans' homes were in contact with the home to see if we could assist any veterans and their spouses. We faced a similar situation in Lackawanna county when a nursing home was shut down by the Department of Health on a Friday evening and our team stepped up to help. We ended up taking in 1 or 2 veterans for them. After the incident in Bucks County, we expect the Department of Health to really start looking at these Emergency Preparedness plans more thoroughly, and we anticipate Lifesafety inspections to become even more difficult.

Doug Forsythe asked about the cause of the explosion. Travis Davis stated that it was a gas leak. It sounds like they smelled gas and had Peco out, but that is as much as we know. Unfortunately, it did claim the lives of 3 people.

We recently had an update to the contract for our electronic health record system. We have used our Matrixcare system for about 10 years. The update also included additional training opportunities for our staff. We are revamping some of the documentation requirements that the nursing staff, social services staff, financial staff, and activities staff utilize. Southeast is getting ready for the training, and they are the 4th home to do it.

With the new year, we are going through and reviewing many of our policies and updating as needed regarding regulatory changes. We do this on an annual basis and like to do it at the beginning of the year.

Regarding surveys: we did see a small uptick in our abbreviated surveys. We believe it had to do with the budget impasse. We did not really see our survey teams during the budget impasse timeframe, since they were only going out to nursing homes where the incidents could result in resident harm. Of the recent abbreviated surveys where we self-reported, we did not receive any deficiencies.

We are preparing for our annual Federal VA surveys during the first quarter of this year at Southeast, Gino Merli, and Soldiers and Sailors in Erie.

Staffing still continues to be a challenge, mostly with our nursing positions- RNs, LPNs, CNAs. Social services along with Registered Dietitians are our other two challenges. We recently were able to hire a social worker at Delaware Valley. The Social Services Director position is open here at Southeast due to Johanna's promotion.

Since the last time we met, we had our quarterly TAG briefing, which is where we update the TAG on any concerns that are going on at the veterans homes- whether it be from a resident safety perspective or any other issues or concerns.

Each state veterans' home will have their own individual Facebook page. We are in the very beginning stages of the project. We will make sure to share our Southeastern Facebook page with you once it is up and running. With each home having their own individual page, they will better be able to showcase the home and all the fun stuff they do on a routine basis. General Weigl followed up by saying that it is very important for the organizations to follow their local home, so that people within your organizations can see what is going on. The more organizations that follow, the more people will be able to learn that the homes exist and that they have options other than private care.

Thomas Applebach asked if we have agreements with other facilities in case of emergency situations. Barb Raymond explained that we have transfer agreements with local hospitals and other nursing homes. General Weigl stated that we have these agreements for many reasons, not just big emergency situations, but other things like if the air conditioning or heating were to stop working and we needed to relocate some residents temporarily.

Compliance Report – Mia Woods – DMVA:

Mia Woods was not able to attend the meeting to give the compliance report.

Report of the Commandant – Brian Gula– SEVC:

Brian Gula shared some health inspection information that he feels really speaks to the quality of care at Southeast. Our facility is inspected by the following external agencies: Department of Health, Department of Human Services, the Life Safety division of the Department of Health, and the Federal VA. The Department of Aging and our Ombudsman also visit the facility regularly. Our five-star CMS rating is comprised of 3 different categories, one of which includes the health inspections from these agencies. This rating reflects all Department of Health surveys that the facility has had over the last 3 years, this includes Annual surveys, Abbreviated/ Complaint surveys, and Infection Control surveys. Currently, Southeast's health inspection rating is 3/5 stars. This is the hardest category to score 4- and 5-stars ratings. Over the last 3 years, Southeast has had a total of 36 external agency visits, which include 18 Department of Health visits, 6 Department of Human Services visits, 9 Life Safety visits, and 3 visits from the Federal VA. In the last 3 years, Southeast has only had 3 complaint visits, with none of them occurring

in the last 12 months. Furthermore, we have received no infection control deficiencies over the last 3 years.

There is a list of different resident events that the facility is required to self-report. Some examples include: a resident who experiences a fall with injury, a resident who has an incident and has to go out to the hospital, a resident-on-resident altercation, or an allegation of verbal abuse. In the past 3 years, Southeast had 111 reportable events, this also includes Covid. Out of the 111 reportable events, only 2 citations were issued. Brian explained that we tend to overreport, because we never want to have an incident occur and then be told by an agency that it should have been reported.

Looking back at the last 12 months, Southeast has received 5 deficiencies. The US average for this same timeframe is 9.7 deficiencies, and the PA average is 10 deficiencies. This data can be found on the Nursing Home Compare website and is all public knowledge.

Southeast is actively recruiting for some key positions: Accountant 3 and Social Services Director. We will be holding interviews for 2 key HR positions next week. We are looking for these HR positions to focus on employee engagement, recruitment, and retention efforts.

We had a lot of great events over the holidays. A local barbershop volunteered their time and staff right before Christmas to give free haircuts to our veterans. It went over tremendously and the conversations and camaraderie between the veterans and the barbers was amazing to see. We were also fortunate enough to have the Santa from the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade stop by and visit with the residents. We had our first ever Christmas play that was produced and conducted by one of our residents. The play consisted of both resident and staff participation, and it was enjoyed by everyone. We also had our annual Christmas parties on each floor. Residents enjoyed snacks, punch, beer, entertainment and each resident received a gift from a sponsor.

Report of the Deputy Commandant- Johanna Valenti- SEVC:

Johanna Valenti, Deputy Commandant, provided an update on facility and security upgrades.

Our facility camera system is going to be upgraded in our Coates Hall Building. The current camera system is from 2001 and primarily only covers exit doors. The upgraded system will include resident hallway areas to help promote safety and oversight.

The employee breakroom renovations at Southeast are completed. The final component is to purchase new furniture.

The accounting and volunteer departments are working closely to revamp the canteen expenditures to ensure the best management of the welfare funds. Upcoming changes include the introduction of soda vending machines, optimizing our purchasing of snack items to reduce waste, and enhanced oversight through improved inventory management.

The Dietary department required the emergent replacement of kitchen equipment, including a frequently used kettle and steamers. Future considerations for dietary department upgrades include an infrastructure project, encompassing the redesign of the Tilghman Hall kitchen and serving stations,

freezers, ceiling, and flooring, as well as the restructuring of grease traps. Planned upgrades also include enhancements to the Tilghman Hall café which our Personal Care and staff utilize for all meals.

The CLC boilers failed, necessitating the rental of a temporary boiler unit. The purchase of three replacement boilers is currently underway. Planned upgrades also include the replacement of air handlers for Tilghman Hall and Coates Hall, along with a new roof for Tilghman Hall.

Doug Forsythe voiced some concern regarding bringing in vending machines and how they could impact the residents' health. Johanna Valenti stated that the canteens are for more of the snacks and "fun stuff" for the residents since our dietary department does not serve soda or other treats that we provide in the canteens. General Weigl joked that it would not go over well if we tried to take all of the sweets and treats out of the canteens and replace them with strictly healthy stuff. She further stated that all of the residents' dietary requirements are met through the meals that they receive from our dietary department. The purpose of the canteens is to provide a little treat for the residents. Johanna Valenti also commented that we do limit the number of items a resident can purchase each day in order to provide some balance.

Comments from the Council:

Nothing to Report.

Old Business:

Nothing to Report.

New Business:

Nothing to Report.

Good of the Council:

Thomas Applebach stated that a friend's relative was a resident at Southeast recently, and from admissions through medical care through staff and volunteers, they could not say enough good stuff about the facility and were so thrilled that he was taken care of so well for the last year of his life.

General Weigl stated that the Farm show was starting on Saturday and that the DMVA would have a booth set up there. She also wanted to give a shout out to the PA Wounded Warriors for providing Steelers and Eagles jerseys to residents at Gino Merli. General Weigl concluded by stating that General Pippy sends his regards and that he really appreciates everyone taking the time to be on the Advisory Council. General Pippy plans on dialing in to the Advisory Council meetings once or twice a year.

Time and Date for the next Meeting:

With no further business to discuss, a motion was made to end the meeting. Motion carried. The next regular meeting of the Advisory Council will be held on April 9, 2026, at 10:00 a.m.

Approved:


Kenneth Schweitzer, Secretary

Minutes submitted by: Sarah Klufas