

**WOODBURY COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AGENDA ITEM(S) RECORD**



Date: 6/12/2016

Weekly Agenda Date: 6/21/2016

ELECTED OFFICIAL / DEPARTMENT HEAD / CITIZEN: Supervisor Jeremy Taylor

**WORDING FOR AGENDA ITEM:**

Consideration of Veterans Affairs Location / Expansion and Payment of Rent to Sioux Rivers Region

**ACTION REQUIRED:**

Approve Ordinance

Approve Resolution

Approve Motion

Give Direction

Other: Informational

Attachments

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Sioux Rivers Region according to our liaisons Supervisor Ung and Supervisor Monson have insisted that Veterans Affairs now pays "fair market value" for being allowed to serve veterans in the TriView building. This will comply with their request as it was alluded to when we brought suggestions for a space request expansion. It is clear that either way, Sioux Rivers Region cannot abide by Woodbury County Veterans Affairs being there without paying.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Veterans Affairs Department was asked to go into the building when it was not occupied. At that time, no rent was required. Utilities were paid and after renovations and "load shifting," the Board of Supervisors allocates this on a square footage basis. The building is deeded to Woodbury County, insured by Woodbury County, and renovations have been taken care of by Woodbury County including to parking lot maintenance and LED lighting retrofit projects. According to our Assistant County Attorney, the disposition of the building is under the purview of the County.

While case management is no longer handled by the Region, the number of personnel in a building this size has been reduced by over 60% on the "Region side." The Region personnel occupy 74% of the building and Veterans Affairs 26% of the building (approximately 4200 square feet). With the addition of a new Service Officer that the Board approved under Veterans Affairs, space for confidential counsel / management of veterans cases is required.

I am including portions of e-mails to show the back-and-forth from the CEO of Sioux Rivers Region and myself.  
I am also including a space request from the Woodbury County Commissioner of Veterans Affairs.  
I am including the number of traffic by our public--veterans--that frequent the Commission monthly.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

\$19,200 - \$28,800 annually

**IF THERE IS A CONTRACT INVOLVED IN THE AGENDA ITEM, HAS THE CONTRACT BEEN SUBMITTED AT LEAST ONE WEEK PRIOR AND ANSWERED WITH A REVIEW BY THE COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE?**

Yes  No

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Consider at what funding level the Woodbury County Veterans Affairs department should be paying Sioux Rivers Region and subsequent modifications.

**ACTION REQUIRED / PROPOSED MOTION:**

Move to approve the "fair market" value of \$1600 - \$2400 monthly (or other such amount) via a budget amendment given the square footage, current lease rates in that area, and quality of the building from reserves. Move to authorize the Building Services Director to construct a window in the office for the new service officer in the present conference room and give a timeline for when subsequent construction might take place to meet the needs of the Region should conference room prove necessary.



**Woodbury County Commission of Veteran Affairs**  
1211 Triview Avenue  
Sioux City, Iowa 51103  
Phone: 712-279-6605 or 6606  
Fax: 712-224-4093



**Leon Koster**  
Chairman

**Vicki DeWitt**  
Secretary

**William Burkhart**  
Member

**Katherine Moreno**  
Member

**Lincoln Ryan**  
Member

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**Woodbury County**  
**Board of Supervisors**  
620 Douglas Street  
Sioux City, IA 51101

**January 5, 2016**

**Re: New Hire**

**Dear Supervisors:**

We, the Woodbury County Commission of Veteran Affairs, propose hiring another Service Officer for the purpose of assisting the Executive Director and current Service Officer to better serve Woodbury County Veterans. This position is needed due to continued foot traffic, changes in office requirements, changes in available benefits\* and a desire to serve our Veterans more effectively and efficiently. This need was considered in the planning of our office, but became more apparent once doing business in the TriView location. We barely have room for staff and supplies in our current location and absolutely no room to expand.

Word of mouth, easier access and better visibility, has enabled many more Woodbury County Veterans to inquire and to utilize our services. The TriView location is a wonderful asset to our Veterans. To ensure fulfillment of Iowa Code and to properly serve Veterans, we are expected to both provide outreach and obtain continuing education, requiring staff to leave the office. With an additional Service Officer, we could provide more availability to the public, as well as direct contact with potential pensioners. We receive 35-50 new contacts per month from the Iowa Department of Veteran affairs (IDVA). These potential clients receive only a mailer requesting personal and financial information. Therefore, the response to these mailers are extremely limited. One new pensioner in receipt of maximum benefit would bring over \$2000 per month into our county. The ability to serve an even larger clientele would add to the receipt of benefits by our Veterans, as a result of our efforts (FY14 \$34,331,000/FY10 \$22,312.000).

Director Dempster has been working diligently to handle an incredibly increased Federal caseload (from less than 700 clients in 2005, to over 3000 current clients). The office also assists about 1000 clients with issues that do not involve entry into the Federal database (assistance, discharges, drivers license, Iowa benefits, Veterans Home and others). Our foot traffic in 2010 averaged 184 visitors per month. Our current foot traffic averages 222 visitors per month, about 21% more than our first year at the new location, which was a 210% increase over the Courthouse location. The resignation of the last Service Officer was partially caused by a totally overwhelming workload. More and more Veterans are filing for

pension and compensation. The need for more staff has existed for years, but Director Dempster has endeavored to serve without requesting help. Director Dempster has taken a more significant role in the Iowa Association in order to have a more direct effect for our Veterans, to include a chance to influence legislation. Doing so requires even more time and effort on her part, which increases the workload of CVSO Hansen.

The new hire could assist in handling the current and potentially increased caseload. Because this would be a new position, it has not been funded in our past budgets and would need to be added into future budgets (current cost with benefits, about \$52,500). There would also be added expense to expand our space to include another private office. We understand that budget is a huge issue. However, our request for another staff member is merited based on increased business and our desire as a department to reach more County Veterans. Obtaining more benefits improves the lives of our Veterans, as well as improving our local economy. Please provide us with direction and action regarding this staff addition.

Sincerely,

**Leon Koster**  
Chairman

**Vicki DeWitt**  
Secretary

**Bill Burkhart**  
Member

**Katherine Moreno**  
Member

**Lincoln Ryan**  
Member

\*Foot traffic is over 200% more than in the Courthouse and continues to grow. Changes in office requirements include serving more newly discharged Veterans, war-era Veterans retiring and entering nursing facilities, additional training, Veterans Court and more. Changes in benefits include more complicated claims and appeals, presumptive conditions and constantly changing policies.



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**Woodbury County**  
**Board of Supervisors**  
620 Douglas Street  
Sioux City, IA 51101

**February 16, 2016**

**Re: New CVSO**

**Dear Supervisors:**

We, the Woodbury County Commission of Veteran Affairs, were very pleased to have the Supervisors approve a desperately needed County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO). We believe this position will work toward our quest to provide the best service possible to Woodbury County Veterans. This position was requested due to ever increasing foot traffic, changes in office requirements and changes in available benefits. The CVSO will help the current staff to improve effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the potential to reach more Veterans and to improve their lives by obtaining Veterans benefits.

The need for a third CVSO was considered in the planning of our office, but became more apparent upon doing business in the TriView location. Word of mouth, easier access and better visibility, has enabled many more Woodbury County Veterans to inquire and to utilize our services. The TriView location is a wonderful asset to our Veterans. However, our current square footage is insufficient to continue to serve our clients, or to house another staff member. We understand there have been multiple discussions regarding 1211 Triview. We also understand that we may be required to pay rent in order to access the space needed. We request that any future discussions regarding the building would include Director Dempster. We trust her to keep us informed and involved in this process.

To ensure fulfillment of Iowa Code and to properly serve Veterans, we are expected to provide outreach and obtain continuing education, requiring staff to leave the office. With an additional Service Officer, we will provide more availability to the public, as well as direct contact with potential pensioners. We receive 35-50 new contacts per month from the Iowa Department of Veteran affairs (IDVA). These potential clients currently receive only a mailer requesting personal and financial information; response is extremely limited. One new pensioner in receipt of maximum benefit would bring over \$2000 per month into our county. The ability to serve an even larger clientele would add to the receipt of benefits by our Veterans, as a result of our efforts. [FY14 \$34,331,000/FY10 \$22,312,000 (Numbers include all VA benefits provided to Woodbury County residents)].

Our staff has worked diligently to handle an incredibly increased Federal caseload (from less than 700 clients in 2005, to 3177 current clients). The office also assists about 1000 clients with issues that do not involve entry into the Federal database (assistance, discharges, driver's license and plates, Iowa benefits, Veterans Home and others). While located in the Courthouse, we averaged 100 visitors per month. In 2010, the monthly average rose to an average of 184 visitors per month. Our current foot traffic averages 222 visitors per month, about 21% more than our first year at the new location, which was a 210% increase over the Courthouse location. The resignation of the last Service Officer was partially caused by a totally overwhelming workload. More and more Veterans are filing for pension and compensation. The need for more staff has existed for years, but is currently a necessity. The new CVSO will share the workload, ensuring Veterans are served accurately and timely, while allowing Director Dempster to fulfill her increased responsibilities, including maintaining and developing working relationships with community partners.

To allow expanded service and staff, we require the addition of an equipped private office and increased storage. We also require a place to hold Commission meetings (currently held in the shared Conference room) and a break area for staff (also currently in the shared Conference room, if available). There would also be a need for expenses for education/training, database license, etc. Again, the Commission is very grateful for the opportunity to expand our staff and improve our services. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working through any and all requirements allowing us to expand our space. We are excited for the opportunity to obtain more benefits to improve the lives of our Veterans, which will improve our local economy. Please provide us with direction and action.

Sincerely,

**Leon Koster**  
Chairman

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**Bill Burkhart**  
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**Lincoln Ryan**  
Member

\*Foot traffic is over 200% more than in the Courthouse and continues to grow.

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**Woodbury County**  
**Board of Supervisors**  
 620 Douglas Street  
 Sioux City, IA 51101

**June 14, 2016**

**Re: Additional Space/1211 Triview Avenue Location**

**Dear Supervisors:**

This information is presented regarding the current location of our office at 1211 Triview Avenue, in addition to the previous submittals, attached here. Our office relocated to Triview in March 2010, with the grand opening on April 1, 2010. At this time, Director Dempster was the only employee of Veteran Affairs. She has worked diligently to prepare the space and introduce it to the public. She has used \$60,000.00 of allocation funds to continually promote the office on Triview Avenue. Our current location is easily visible and clearly marked with a sign that cost over \$7000 (no cost to taxpayers). When we began our work on Triview, the most common statement was that Veterans did not even know our office existed. We have gone from having 2-3 visitors per day in the Courthouse to having 20 or more walk-ins on a regular basis. The number of Woodbury County Veterans receiving assistance with Federal claims has ballooned from about 700 to 3221 active clients, which does not include those in need of emergency assistance or other issues not involving claims work.

There are many factors to explain this phenomenal growth. Increased outreach, provided by Director Dempster, has reached many Veterans who would not otherwise have been assisted. We expect to continue these efforts in the future. Many of the barriers to service have been eliminated by the move to Triview. We have many elderly clients who can now find parking, without a meter. Our office is handicap accessible, on the first and only floor, with no elevators needed. Our office is bright and welcoming and better equipped to provide services than ever, improving the quality of life for many Veterans. We will continue in our mission to provide the best service possible to Woodbury County Veterans.

Since being located on Triview, our growing clientele has facilitated a need for another Service Officer. Our current Service Officers are overwhelmed with over 1500 cases each. We are extremely grateful the Board has approved a third Service Officer to assist the current staff. Now, we are in need of a private office for the new Service Officer to hold confidential appointments and complete Federal claims work. We would prefer to have a window in the office due to multiple Veterans who are claustrophobic and or extremely guarded or hyper vigilant due to PTSD and other mental conditions. While we do not provide

healthcare to our Veterans, we very often deal with medical records and discuss extremely private information, to include all types of injuries, illnesses, disease and residuals. These discussions may include combat, rape and suicide. Veterans are often emotional about their problems and passionate in their pursuit of benefits. We are a listening ear, mentor, counselor, advisor, case worker, etc., for many of our clients. Sometimes a phone call or a hug can mean a world of difference to a person in pain. We encourage Veterans to pursue health care, to include mental health services, and ensure they are enrolled, scheduled and have transportation.

To uproot this office would be a tragedy. We have a gross of materials with our address, including business cards, folder, brochures, magnets and marketing materials. Veterans finally know where to find us. Moving us back to the Courthouse or into Trosper-Hoyt would bring back all of the barriers to service that existed prior to our move. Issues with benefits may result in reduction or termination of benefits, a loss of income for Veterans and a loss of money coming into the County. (In FY 2015, Woodbury County Veterans received almost \$36,000,000.00 in VA benefits).

The County has shown that Veterans are a priority by providing a great location and equipping our staff. This continues to be the case with hiring a third Service Officer. The Commission realizes that there are complicated decisions to be made in regards to the Triview building, but we ask that you keep in mind the wonderful things that are happening because of Veteran Affairs and how those things are possible due to our staff and our location. Please do not consider relocating Veteran Affairs and proceed with adding and equipping an office for our new hire. We also understand there is talk of paying rent. If necessary, we request the Board of Supervisors find a new item in our administrative budget for any charges. We request that any future discussions regarding the building would include Director Dempster. We trust her to continue to keep us informed and involved in this process.

Sincerely,

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