OKLAHOMA VETERANS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE
JULY 17, 2026, REGULAR MEETING
ODVA CENTRAL OFFICE
2132 NE 36TH STREET
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73111

The Oklahoma Veterans Commission (OVC) held a regular Meeting on Friday, July 17, 2026, at 10:00 a.m., at the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA) Central Office, 2132 NE 36th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73111. ODVA Executive Assistant Jessica Stuehler was appointed by the Chair to serve as the Clerk of the Meeting, to make a record of the proceedings at the Meeting, and to produce the Minutes of the Meeting. The Minutes of the Meeting are set out below:

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Martin called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

II. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

A. ROLL CALL

Chairman Martin asked the Clerk to call the roll. The roll was taken as follows:
Commissioner Allen – Present
Commissioner Dukes – Present
Commissioner Ellington – Present
Commissioner Martin – Present
Commissioner Mutchler - Present
Commissioner Offel – Present
Commissioner Orr – Present
Commissioner Perry – Present
Commissioner George – Present.

The Clerk notified Chairman Martin that nine Commissioners were present.

OVC General Counsel John M. O'Connor was also present.

B. DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Chairman Martin declared that a quorum of the OVC was present.

III. VERIFICATION OF PROPER NOTICE OF MEETING AND OF THE AGENDA

The Clerk verified that proper notice of the Meeting was given, pursuant to Title 25 O.S. § 311, as follows: (1) on January 22, 2026, Notice of the Meeting was filed with the Oklahoma Secretary of State; (2) at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to the Meeting, at the principal office of the OVC, which is the principal office of the ODVA: (a) the Notice and Agenda of the Meeting was posted in prominent public view and copies of the Notice and Agenda were made available to the public; and (3) this Notice

and Agenda was posted on the OVC's page on the ODVA's website, https://oklahoma.gov/veterans.html.

IV. INVOCATION

Commissioner Ellington led the Invocation.

V. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Orr led the Pledge of Allegiance.

VI. WELCOME TO VISITORS AND GUESTS.

Chairman Martin welcomed commissioners, staff, and guests.

VII. BUSINESS: DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING:

A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE APRIL 17, 2026, OKLAHOMA VETERANS COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING.

Commissioner Allen made the Motion to approve the April 17, 2026, meeting minutes.
Commissioner Dukes seconded the Motion.

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion. There was no discussion.

Chairman Martin called for a vote on the Motion:
Commissioner Allen – Aye
Commissioner Dukes – Aye
Commissioner Ellington – Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye
Commissioner Mutchler - Aye
Commissioner Offel – Aye
Commissioner Orr – Aye
Commissioner Perry – Aye
Commissioner George – Aye.

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 9 Ayes, 0 Nays.
Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

B. ELECTION OF FISCAL YEAR 2027 COMMISSION OFFICERS:

1. Chairman
2. Vice-Chairman
3. Secretary

Commissioner Ellington made the Motion to nominate Commissioner Orr to be the next Commission Chairman.
Commissioner Mutchler seconded the Motion.

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion. There was no discussion.

Chairman Martin called for a vote on the Motion:
Commissioner Allen – Aye
Commissioner Dukes – Aye
Commissioner Ellington – Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye
Commissioner Mutchler - Aye
Commissioner Offel – Aye
Commissioner Orr – Abstain
Commissioner Perry – Aye
Commissioner George – Aye.

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 8 Ayes, 0 Nays, and 1 Abstained.
Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

Commissioner Ellington made the Motion to nominate Commissioner Dukes to be the next Commission Vice-Chairman.
Commissioner George seconded the Motion.

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion.
There was no discussion.

Chairman Martin called for a vote on the Motion:
Commissioner Allen – Aye
Commissioner Dukes – Abstain
Commissioner Ellington – Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye
Commissioner Mutchler - Aye
Commissioner Offel – Aye
Commissioner Orr – Aye
Commissioner Perry – Aye
Commissioner George – Aye.

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 8 Ayes, 0 Nays, and 1 Abstained.
Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

Commissioner Ellington made the Motion to nominate Commissioner Mutchler to be the next Commission Secretary.
Commissioner Allen seconded the Motion.

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion.
There was no discussion.

Chairman Martin called for a vote on the Motion:
Commissioner Allen – Aye
Commissioner Dukes – Aye
Commissioner Ellington – Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye

Commissioner Mutchler - Abstain
Commissioner Offel – Aye
Commissioner Orr – Aye
Commissioner Perry – Aye
Commissioner George – Aye.

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 8 Ayes, 0 Nays, and 1 Abstained.
Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

C. ELECTION OF FISCAL YEAR 2027 COMMITTEE CHAIRS:

1. Audit Advisory Committee
2. Finance Advisory Committee
3. Foundation Advisory Committee
4. Human Resources Advisory Committee
5. Other Committees to be discussed

Chairman Martin made the Motion to nominate the following:
Commissioner Allen for Audit Advisory Committee Chair
Commissioner Perry for Finance Advisory Committee Chair
Commissioner Ellington for Foundation Advisory Committee Chair
Commissioner Offel for Human Resources Advisory Committee Chair
Commissioner Orr seconded the motion.

After an opportunity for discussion, Chairman Martin called for a vote on the Motion:
Commissioner Allen – Aye
Commissioner Dukes – Aye
Commissioner Ellington – Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye
Commissioner Mutchler - Aye
Commissioner Offel – Aye
Commissioner Orr – Aye
Commissioner Perry – Aye
Commissioner George – Aye.

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 9 Ayes, 0 Nays.
Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

D. COMMISSION CHAIRMAN BRETT MARTIN:

1. Veterans Forum
2. Veterans Foundation 501(c)(3) Update

In September, the Commission will hold its quarterly Veterans Forum in Tulsa, the first such event outside the Oklahoma City area. The forum is expected to be the most robust to date, shifting from simple discussion toward on-site services,

educational vignettes, and expanded collaboration with federal agencies, non-governmental VSOs, and other partner organizations. A key rollout will be Eagle Ops' new one-stop-shop website for veterans (fedresources.eagleops.org), which maps available legal, veteran, and support services across Oklahoma and is expected to integrate closely with the ODVA foundation's long-term outreach and support efforts.

The foundation is working with nonprofit attorney Jeri Holmes to correct its IRS status from 509(a)(2) to 509(a)(3) and revise its bylaws, with a board meeting next week to approve those changes so fundraising can move forward. Early relationship-building is underway with major funders: Boeing (starting with event support before seeking six-figure grants), the Chickasaw Veterans Council (starting with smaller projects and growing over time), and the Harold Hamm Foundation (an RFP is submitted and on their September board agenda). The foundation has also received a $10,000 pledged gift from the Sharp family, likely restricted to improvements at the Sulphur Veterans Home (e.g., a new gazebo), and leadership expects additional regional donors once clear priority lists and categories of needs are provided, especially with outreach support from Sandra Shelton.

E. ODVA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JAY BYNUM:

1. ODVA Operations
2. Decision Brief: Ardmore Veterans Home
3. ODVA Lifecycle Obligations, Enterprise Management & Priorities
4. ODVA Financial Report & FY27 Budget

Director Bynum provided an update on recent progress and asked the Commission to vote on two key fiscal initiatives. He reported that three homes are now above 90% occupancy, unlocking VA "bed-hold" funding (up to 10 days of per diem when residents are temporarily hospitalized), which can generate millions in annual revenue if sustained across the enterprise. To support this, ODVA has implemented a requirements-based staffing model, new legislation allowing up to 1,599 hours for seasonal staff to function like PRN nurses without benefits, and a critical shift pay pilot (with stricter attendance requirements and restored physical time clocks) at Lawton and Claremore—where Lawton in particular is now in the mid-90% occupancy range under new leadership.

Leadership has restructured food service as a core care and morale function, not just logistics, and launched a culinary services pilot under the Chief of Staff, with higher pay for kitchen leadership, skills-based hiring, PointClickCare-integrated dietary tracking, and new "restaurant-style" dining now operating at Clinton and soon expanding to Claremore. They are also improving communication with residents (e.g., newsletters, updates about amenities like soft-serve machines), have revised smoking policy at Sallisaw to match other homes while maintaining strict safety rules, and clarified a zero-tolerance medical marijuana policy to protect federal funding. In parallel, ODVA has implemented an Employee Performance Awards program with quarterly and annual recognition (including monetary awards) and continues to pursue its goal of enrolling untethered veterans into the

VA system, currently running ahead of target while refining metrics to track outcomes and resource use.

At the recent American Legion Department convention, ODVA staff enrolled 75 "untethered" veterans—those not previously connected to VA benefits—into the state registry, which leadership praised as exactly the kind of impact ODVA should be having. Oklahoma ranks around 24th in veteran population but about 8th nationally in benefit delivery performance, reflecting strong service outcomes and significant benefit dollars flowing into the state. Building on this, ODVA plans to deepen partnerships with expert organizations and explore AI-enabled outreach tools to identify and connect more untethered veterans to benefits.

ODVA originally planned to replace the aging Ardmore Veterans Home using a VA construction grant that requires a 35% state match on roughly $100M, but the pandemic depleted the $30M set aside and Ardmore now sits 92nd on VA's national priority list, meaning a new facility is likely 10+ years away under the current grant system. In the meantime, Ardmore still houses 111 residents, yet ODVA has spent about $11–12M since 2021 just to keep the full 175-bed facility running, including a 38-bed Unit 1 that has been empty for 18 months, and the home has been operating at a loss since January. To avoid closing the facility or triggering a reduction in force, leadership recommends "right-sizing" Ardmore by decertifying up to 50 beds (down to 125), which would move the current census to nearly 90% occupancy, reduce staffing and operating costs, and free up funds to renovate and modernize the remaining units instead of continuing piecemeal repairs that haven't produced meaningful improvements.

Commissioners noted that the 50 beds proposed for decertification at Ardmore are unused, yet ODVA is still heating, cooling, and pumping water out of that area, wasting money on constant maintenance. By decertifying these beds, the home's occupancy would rise to nearly 90%, which would both reduce required staffing levels (since staffing ratios are tied to certified beds) and unlock VA bed-hold revenue—estimated at roughly $400,000 per year instead of the prior loss of over $400,000. The plan envisions demolishing the old Unit 1 structure, using that space to improve building flow and create a new corridor, thereby focusing resources on modernizing the viable portions of the facility while keeping future expansion options open.

ODVA confirmed that the Ardmore bond funds—originally a $30M bond, reduced to about $26M after purchasing 230 acres—have now grown back above $30M through interest, and by statute can be used for modifications to the existing Ardmore home or construction of a new one (but only for Ardmore). Because the state still lacks the full 35% match for a new build and Ardmore is low on VA's priority list, leadership proposes using up to $5M of the interest only (no bond principal, no new appropriations) to plan and design a 10-year "bridge" renovation—patching roofs, creating a new building envelope, and improving resident experience—while a long-term ODVA 2045 strategy is developed. This approach, combined with decertifying 50 beds, is intended to stop financial losses now, right-size staffing, and maintain Ardmore's viability until a future replacement or co-campus solution with VA can be realized.

Leadership explained that ODVA now has proper financial tools and structure to manage a multi-year balance sheet and capital plan, not just a one-year operating budget. Net operating surpluses will be treated as strategic investment funds to tackle roughly $250M in deferred maintenance and lifecycle needs (facilities, vehicles, beds, medical equipment, etc.), while keeping payroll competitive and improving veteran services statewide. In Ardmore specifically, the request is to (1) reduce the certified bed count to match the long-term census trend and (2) plan up to $5M of bond interest for demolition and re-developing parts of the building—without touching bond principal or seeking new appropriations—so ODVA can improve living conditions and operations now while staying well above the per-capita bed levels that VA would normally authorize for Oklahoma.

Commissioners raised concern about potential political backlash, recalling the reaction to closing Talihina, and asked whether legislators and local leaders had been consulted about changes at Ardmore. Director Bynum confirmed he has personally briefed key state and federal officials (House member, Senators Stanley and Rosino, Chairman Cole's staff) and prepared press and legislative talking points emphasizing that adjusting Ardmore's licensed bed capacity is meant to stabilize finances and improve care, not permanently reduce future options. He also explained that the 230+ acres in Ardmore were purchased as a long-term site for either a replacement facility or a broader medical park (VA clinic, step-down/skilled nursing, rehab, veterans home), but that any final design will require additional strategic planning and multiple conceptual options before moving forward.

Commissioner Allen made the Motion to decertify the 50 beds in the Ardmore Home.
Commissioner Ellington seconded the Motion.

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion.
There was no discussion.

Chairman Martin called for a vote on the Motion:
Commissioner Allen – Aye
Commissioner Dukes – Aye
Commissioner Ellington – Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye
Commissioner Mutchler - Aye
Commissioner Offel – Aye
Commissioner Orr – Aye
Commissioner Perry – Aye
Commissioner George – Aye.

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 9 Ayes, 0 Nays.
Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

Commissioner Orr made the Motion to authorize ODVA to expend up to $5 million from state bond interest to develop and plan demolition and renovation

options for the Ardmore facility, with future decisions to be brought before the Commission for review.
Commissioner Allen seconded the Motion.

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion. There was no discussion.

Chairman Martin called for a vote on the Motion:
Commissioner Allen – Aye
Commissioner Dukes – Aye
Commissioner Ellington – Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye
Commissioner Mutchler - Aye
Commissioner Offel – Aye
Commissioner Orr – Aye
Commissioner Perry – Aye
Commissioner George – Aye.

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 9 Ayes, 0 Nays.
Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

Director Bynum explained that ODVA does not have "excess" funds; instead, any net operating margin must support a long-range strategy out to 2045 for facilities, equipment, and staffing. Because VA's per-diem model (about $140/day basic and ~$500/day prevailing rate) must also cover all capital, logistics, and operations—and state appropriations are under 20% of total costs—ODVA is building multi-year, accrual-based budgeting and priority bands that start with life safety and a $250M+ backlog of deferred maintenance, then move to modernization and CMS (Medicare/Medicaid) certification. CMS certification is a key strategic goal because it would open additional funding streams and allow ODVA to serve spouses, parents, and Gold Star families, and to create options like husband-and-wife placements in facilities such as Sallisaw, while ODVA develops detailed recapitalization and modification plans for homes across the system.

Director Bynum noted that ODVA may reconfigure a portion of Sallisaw (e.g., about 25 of 175 beds as double-occupancy) to increase revenue and offer better living options, while using clearly defined budget categories to show how additional operating funds will be deployed and where the Commission is willing to accept risk. He acknowledged the FY27 budget briefing came to the Commission later than it should have, and committed to a new process: earlier baseline budget presentations, explicit updates when legislative changes (like the recent $3–3.5M rescission) occur, and ongoing reports on budget execution and burn rate. To support this, the same team that builds the budget will monitor in-year performance, apply efficiency "wedges" to drive savings, and reduce administrative friction with the State Treasurer while ODVA develops more fully bottom-up budgeting and internal fiscal controls.

ODVA will begin regular budget briefings to the Commission, showing planned vs. actual spending, hot spots, shortfalls, and explanations, now that new tools allow tracking of burn rate and cash flow in real time. The finance team—led by Chris Busby—has moved ODVA from paper-based, delayed payments to accrual accounting, AP workflow, and digital approvals, achieving near-full use of federal COVID-related grants and much stronger fiscal discipline. Current net operating results show most homes in positive territory, but Sallisaw's slow growth and Claremore's staffing challenges remain key operational concerns that leadership is actively addressing.

Director Bynum reported that Claremore has transformed from a crisis point to an excellent VA review (19 deficiencies down to 3 administrative only) but still struggles with census; options include converting some of its 302 beds (e.g., 50 on the top floor) to private rooms to better match staffing and costs without reducing licensed beds. Sulphur is a strong, well-run facility but burdened by very high electric costs; grant-funded work is underway to convert its system and add memory-care beds, which should quickly boost census. Talihina remains closed with minimal activity beyond insurance and potential salvage, while Lawton is performing well above 90% occupancy with improved staffing and morale. At Sallisaw, leadership has reversed the restrictive smoking policy, launched a "60 in 60" admissions push, and set targets to reach 110 residents by end of August and 90% occupancy by year-end, relying on external growth rather than shifting residents from already-full homes.

Relaxing Sallisaw's smoking policy has driven a strong increase in applications, and leadership expects to reach 100 residents quickly, targeting roughly one new admission per day, then accelerating to 10 per week, with Candice tracking progress via a detailed admissions dashboard. System-wide, ODVA is standardizing resident experience by setting minimum expectations for activities, outings, AV equipment, and dining quality, while also pursuing CMS certification and gradually raising the private-pay cap (now $6,000/month) within defined income limits. On the financial side, ODVA is cleaning up historical reconciliations, moving to more precise accrual accounting and long-range capital planning, and has addressed findings from a recent state audit—no misuse of funds, but past process weaknesses that have now been corrected—with expectations of stronger net operating results as private-pay revenue grows and VA CPI rate increases take effect.

Commissioners clarified that the $173M shown for FY26 represents actual expenditures, with an additional $16M net operating result, while the higher FY27 figure reflects an expanded budget driven by higher census, inflation, and the addition of true capital and facilities planning (sustainment, modernization, and recapitalization) that were not previously budgeted. Director Bynum expects future NOR to exceed $20M once controls are fully in place and emphasized that ODVA must still pre-fund projects from working capital and seek reimbursements from grants, as VA typically pays last. Operationally, ODVA is pressing toward consistent quality in dietary and housekeeping services, tightening inventory

control, reducing waste, and addressing major issues like Sallisaw's flawed HVAC/emergency power design, while also preparing for succession in key in-house maintenance roles and considering energy-efficiency initiatives that might leverage foundation or legislative support.

At Sallisaw, a flawed three-loop HVAC system and limited emergency power coverage caused extreme humidity (up to 100% indoors) and repeated equipment failures, so ODVA has brought in OMES, a second engineering firm, and the system manufacturer to diagnose the design-level problem and move all critical systems onto a single backup-power loop; industrial dehumidifiers and close daily monitoring are in place until a permanent fix is implemented. Separately, ODVA's fleet management has shifted to a hub-and-spoke motor pool focused on mission outcomes (e.g., avoiding canceled medical or recreation trips), and on the financial side, the agency has tightened its private-pay processes—moving to upfront payment with appropriate mid-month refunds—while continuing to work individual benefit and tax issues with VA and state partners; commissioners praised leadership for the significantly higher level of operational and fiscal professionalism now in place.

Commissioner Offel left the meeting at this point.

F. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

1. PROPOSED EXECUTIVE SESSION DISCUSSING THE EMPLOYMENT, HIRING, APPOINTMENT, PROMOTION, DEMOTION, DISCIPLINING OR RESIGNATION OF ANY INDIVIDUAL SALARIED PUBLIC OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE, UNDER TITLE 25 O.S. § 307(B)(1); A. DIRECTOR OF VETERAN SERVICES; B. DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF VETERAN SERVICES; C. LEGISLATIVE LIAISON; D. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER.

Commissioner Dukes made a motion that the OVC go into Executive Session. Commissioner Mutchler seconded the Motion.

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion. There was no discussion.

Chairman Martin called for a vote on the Motion:
Commissioner Allen – Aye
Commissioner Dukes – Aye
Commissioner Ellington – Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye
Commissioner Mutchler - Aye
Commissioner Offel – Absent
Commissioner Orr – Aye
Commissioner Perry – Aye
Commissioner George – Aye.

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 8 Ayes, 0 Nays.
Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

The board entered Executive Session at 12:01 pm.

G. RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION.

1. CONCLUSION OF EXECUTIVE SESSION AND RETURN TO OPEN SESSION.

Commissioner Dukes made a motion to resume the regular meeting at 12:45 pm.
Commissioner Allen seconded the Motion.

Commissioner Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion.

Chairman Martin called for a vote on the Motion:
Commissioner Allen – Aye
Commissioner Dukes – Aye
Commissioner Ellington – Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye
Commissioner Mutchler - Aye
Commissioner Offel – Absent
Commissioner Orr – Aye
Commissioner Perry – Absent
Commissioner George – Aye.

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 7 Ayes, 0 Nays.
Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

No motions were made following the Executive Session.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business was presented.

IX. OKLAHOMA VETERANS COMMISSION NEXT REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING.

August 21, 2026, 10:00AM
ODVA Central Office
2132 NE 36th Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73111.

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion. There was no discussion.

X. POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING ADJOURNMENT.

Commissioner Mutchler made the motion to adjourn.
Commissioner Orr seconded the Motion.

Chairman Martin called for a vote on the Motion:
Commissioner Allen – Aye
Commissioner Dukes – Aye
Commissioner Ellington – Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye
Commissioner Mutchler – Aye
Commissioner Offel – Absent
Commissioner Orr – Aye
Commissioner Perry – Absent
Commissioner George – Aye.

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 7 Ayes, 0 Nays.

Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

Chairman Martin declared the meeting adjourned at 12:46 pm.