



VERONA MUNICIPAL ALLIANCE COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

7:00 P.M.

JANUARY 21, 2026

CALL TO ORDER: meeting called to order at 7:06 pm by Chairwoman Manis via zoom call.

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT STATEMENT/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Chairwoman Manis read Open Public Meeting Act statement, and attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL/APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Prior to Roll Call it was announced that effective December 31, 2026, Jim Day resigned from his appointment to the Committee. He was thanked for his service to VMAC and his attention to detail during his tenure. Also, Laura Palmerezzi is no longer with the Verona Public Schools and therefore has been removed as the official designee for Diane DiGiuseppe. We also thank her for her support, especially with the organization of the Chris Herren speaking engagement and follow-up last spring.

Mayor Christopher Tamburro has been designated at the Township of Verona Municipal Government's Committee Representative. We welcome him and take the opportunity to thank Councilwoman Cynthia Holland for her years of service to VMAC and wish her well on her new committee assignments.

Members in Attendance: Colin Boyle (Community), Katie Cuartas (Laning), Ann Jocelyn (Coordinator), Officer Kirby-Pinto (as VPD designate for Chief Kiernan), Rachel Klansky (Community Member), Kimberly Manis (Chair – Community Member), Verena Mikhael (Community Member), Dr. Charles Miller, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment (VPS alternate designee), Carol Lynn Moy (Secretary - VHS), Staci Puleo (Brookdale), Regina Tully (FNBrown).

Members Not in Attendance: Mayor Christopher Tamburro (Township of Verona Municipal Government), Kevin O'Sullivan (Town Manager-or designee), Tim Schmidt (Forest)

Members were reminded of the VMAC vision, mandate, and the mission to celebrate and cultivate the compassion, character, and confidence it takes to make good choices.

With a quorum of members in attendance, Chairwoman Manis proceeded with the business of the meeting. Ms. Manis called for approval of the minutes from the October 15, 2025 meeting as circulated to members prior to the meeting. Members Cuartas, DiGiuseppe, Kirby-Pinto, and Tully abstained as they were not in attendance at the October meeting. The minutes were unanimously approved by the remaining members in attendance.

FINANCIAL & PROGRAM REVIEW

An overview of the Committee finances and program initiatives was provided, confirming that funding, allocation of funds, and program initiatives are all proceeding according to the fiscal year 2026 plan.

FY2026 (July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026)

FY26 grant totals \$22,625 (\$18,100 from the State through GCSUD and a 25% match of \$4,525 from the Township) plus in-kind match of \$13,575. Through the 2nd quarter of the fiscal year, a total of \$6,418.22 has been expended with an additional \$5,500 encumbered for Heroes & Cool Kids. Funding and programming are progressing according to the plan.

2nd quarter Activities (October – December) & Planned 3rd quarter Activities (January-March)

2nd quarter expenditures totaled \$3,918.22: \$2,502.75 for Grant Coordination & Club Advisors, \$1,200 for library Art & Meditation program, \$199.50 for Red Ribbon Week activities, \$15.97 Fair in the Square.

- Art & Meditation at Verona Public Library completed 8 of 12 classes.
- Successful events included Fall-o-ween outreach on opioids, DEA TakeBack Day & Fair in the Square with great volunteer support from OLL, HBW& VHS and enthusiasm from visitors.
- School-based clubs continue outreach through Red Ribbon Week “Life is a Puzzle, Solve it Drug Free” and other events for HBW Peers and training and sessions with the 5th graders for Heroes & Cool Kids. Overwhelming number of applications and acceptance of Heroes this year (approx. 90 students accepted) will be limited to 60 Heroes in FY27 and highlights the need for Peer Leadership at VHS. Visits to be scheduled with HBW for February and April.
- Family Night: 16 Restaurants, 2 stores offered discounts. Future Dates are March 12, 2026, October 8, 2026 and March 1, 2027(Klansky/Manis/Mikhael). New posters, coupons and activity sheets will be distributed for March event.
- BABES confirming the schedule for program in early 2026, usually between President’s Day and Spring Break (Tully/Mr. Freund at Laning). Schedule being confirmed for distribution to reps.
- Ann Jocelyn continues to work with Success Street to develop a webinar/workshop on risk-taking, acceptance, rejection. VPS guidance office and social work professionals are not involved in the creation of this session, we will work with them to share the information with families.
- SAFE Homes list was updated with approximately 500 families. This participation remains consistent as families age off or move, but new families join. PDF will circulate to families soon.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2027-2031 & FY2027 FUNDING ALLOCATION

Needs Assessment

Focus group sessions, interviews and surveys were conducted to determine the current situation in Verona around the issue of substance use disorder and contributing factors. Most parties agreed that alcohol was the most commonly misused substance and placed the highest level of concern on that use, versus other controlled substances, prescriptions, marijuana, and nicotine/tobacco. When asked what contributes to that situation, most adult participants sited a desire to fit in with the group or be popular on the part of youth, and their parents. Ironically, most youth focused on a desire to escape as the driving force behind substance use. All agreed that mental health was an important component of the equation. This opinion was supported by Rescue Squad data which recorded 24 substance related calls in 2024, but 35 mental health crisis calls.

Fiscal Year 2027 Funding Allocation

On behalf of the Committee Members, Ann Jocelyn requested that the Verona Township Council consider a Resolution to approve a FY27 matching grant in the amount of \$4,525 (25% of the state allocation of \$18,100) at their meeting on January 19, 2026. This resolution was unanimously approved.

A draft of the Allocation Plan was circulated to the Council, Administration, and the Committee Members prior to the meetings. While the total funding amounts remain constant, the allocation of those funds will change slightly YOY (as seen below) as a result of the Verona High School administration committing to reinstate a Peer Leadership program at VHS. Verena Mikhael shared positive experience had by Peers and those they mentored during her time as a VHS Peer. Committee members are happy the program will return. Ann Jocelyn to confirm with VHS administration on the progress on reinstating the program.

A draft of the plan was also submitted to the County Alliance Coordinator in December for review. At the date of this meeting there had been no feedback. If approved by a quorum of the Committee Members, the Council Resolution and final plan will be submitted to the County as soon as possible. The VMAC Chair, Verona CFO, and Mayor will be required to sign-off on the final detailed grant submission. Chairwoman Manis called for a vote, so moved by Verena Mikhael and 2nd by Regina Tully. The plan passed unanimously.

TOTAL GRANT	FY26(25-26) \$22,625.00 total funding \$18,100 (GCSUD), \$4,525 (TOV) w/ \$13,575.00 (in-kind)	FY27(26-27) \$22,625.00 total funding \$18,100 (GCSUD), \$4,525 (TOV) w/\$13,575.00 (in-kind)
Alliance Coordination	\$2,715.00 (15%)	\$2,715.00 (15%)
Schools	\$15,775.50 (70%)	\$17,6280075.50 (78%)
Community Activities	\$4,134.50 (18%)	\$2,234.50 (10%)

OTHER BUSINESS

The Essex County Alliance Coordinator has been reassigned within the Essex County Division of Community Health Services. A new County Coordinator has been assigned but this has delayed the processing on the site visit (for FY2025) and review of some documents. The previous Coordinator is still with the County and available for support if needed.

It was noted that no member of the Committee reported a conflict of interest with any vendor or other issue put to a vote before the Committee for Fiscal Year 2026. Form to be sent to Mayor Tamburro and Dr. Miller.

Quarterly meetings take place on the third Wednesday following quarter-end: April 15, 2026 is the final meeting of the year. This meeting is the Annual Meeting for the Committee at which we will confirm officers, review by-laws, and set the meeting schedule for FY2027. Reallocation of unused funding from the original plan will be reviewed if necessary. Regina Tully will be moving from FNBrown to HBW. Ann to reach out to FNBrown SCA regarding appointing a new representative for 2026-2027.

There being no members of the public in attendance and thus no public comments, the meeting was adjourned by Chairwoman Manis at 7:59.

Submitted by: Ann Jocelyn & Carol Lynn Moy

ROLL CALL VOTE: taken at 4/15/26 meeting

AYES: Boyle, Cuartas, Kirby-Pinto, Klansky, Manis, Mikhael, Moy, Puleo, Tully

NAYS: none

ABSENT: DiGiuseppe, O’Sullivan, Schmidt

ABSTAIN: Tamburro