

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY
VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION**

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



**Ruth A. Wong
Director**

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, January 12, 2022**

Present:

Commissioners

Joe Leal
Brittanie Moore
Patricia Jackson-Kelley
Jawana McFadden
Anthony Allman
Marcel Rodarte
John Gutierrez

Absent:

Commissioners

Jennifer Campbell

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Ruth Wong, Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Executive Secretary

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Anthony Allman called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Joe Leal, 1st District.

Roll Call

There was a total of seven Commissioners at the meeting; quorum present.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Commissioner Leal to accept the Minutes for December 8, 2021 and seconded by Commissioner McFadden. With no objections, motion passed.

Chairman's Report

Chair Anthony Allman stated that MVA is transitioning future notification of the Veterans Advisory Commission meetings to Gov Delivery. The last meeting notice went out on January 7, 2022 at 9:31p.m. The previous stakeholder list will be imported into Gov Delivery. If you did not receive the update, you may visit the department website at mva.lacounty.gov and subscribe. The public comment form is currently in the process of being converted from a PDF to a digital form to make it easier for members of the public to submit electronically.

As for Commissioner items, the website still needs to be updated with pictures and bios. The Strategic Plan is still pending approval as we are waiting on newly appointed Commissioners to be seated and allow them the opportunity to participate in that process.

Public Comments

Juan Hernandez, Director, UCLA Veterans Affairs Relations thanked the Commission for the opportunity to come on to provide an announcement. There will be a Golf Clinic at UCLA on March 12, 2022. All veterans are welcome to join. Please help us distribute the flyer.

Beatriz Camarena, TELACU Property Management, Inc joined today's meeting to provide information for Casa de Rosas Housing for homeless veterans and families. The campus is a smoke-free residential community located in Los Angeles, California that offer 36 units for homeless veterans and their families who qualify within the program eligibility requirements and income guidelines. The cost for the campus operates under Section 42 Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development HUD-VASH Project-Based Voucher (PBV) programs. Chronically homeless veterans can run the risk of becoming isolated, withdrawn, and under-stimulated without appropriate programs that are sensitive to their needs to maintain their physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Casa de Rosas offers a wide range of both indoor and outdoor spaces for residents to engage in social and/or physical activities safely.

Casa de Rosas is currently contacting organizations, groups, and individuals who work with veterans to ask for assistance with referrals of veterans and their families to this housing community. If you know of any veteran interested in being placed on the waiting list, please contact me for an application at 323.485.5123. Applications are also available at the corporate office TELACU Property Management, Inc. at 1248 Goodrich Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90022.

Tess Banko, West Los Angeles Veterans Collective (WLAVC) came on to give some updates for 2021. The WLAVC is a three-partner organization working to revitalize the north campus of the West Los Angeles VA that has completed community and town center plans. The Master Plan 2022 is currently in progress with the Secretary of the VA.

In terms of housing, building a vibrant community is what's really important. There are different needs for homeless veterans, families with children, as well as their caretakers. In order to serve the population living on the campus, 400 of the planned 1450 supportive housing apartments are funded with VASH on Section 8 housing vouchers and the lease has been secured and work is underway at Wadsworth Chapel. The church building will house world injury program and a non-denominational space for gathering and meditation. This program will be the first of its kind, which is fitting with the redevelopment of the campus.

Jennifer Delatte, Career Development Initiative shared that she is the workforce development coordinator with U.S.VETS, located at Patriotic Hall. Staff is still working remotely with providing services as it relates to veterans and transitioning service members find gainful employment. In 2021, we were able to place 693 veterans nationwide into gainfully employed positions - 279 of those veterans were here in Los Angeles. There is no cost for this program. Writing workshops will be offered next month. There will be a peer support and veteran service career fair happening in March and a career fair for all industries on March 15th. Last, a resume review recruiting team will help veterans find great jobs in Los Angeles.

Ms. Delatte was happy to share links and upcoming flyers if you would like any information on how to enroll into our programs. Please feel free to connect with me on LinkedIn and visit the U.S.VETS career development page for job openings and networking opportunities.

Guest Speaker(s)

Jim Zenner, VPAN was introduced by Commissioner Leal.

Mr. Zenner stated that VPAN has dozens of veterans and family members operating his peers despite the pandemic. There are three DMH staff which are allocated per Supervisorial District (SD), that partner with the CBO and with MVA, by having a VSO assigned to each of the SD teams to provide the necessary benefits to support all veterans and family members who are seeking it; approximately 2600 total clients served between January through November of 2021. Service episodes are when veterans or family members reach out for help with various needs. During the period of January through November 2021, in addition to peer support, the top three services requested were benefits, housing/shelter, and employment. Benefits navigation is at the top of the list, which is why it's so important that we have continued access to MVA navigators, CALVET, and our local regional office with VBA.

The main mission of VPAN is to work with veterans, regardless of their discharge status, as well as any family members by identifying their needs and connecting them to the right veteran organization for assistance. Last, the quality assurance piece is really an exciting step in 2022 to ensure that we achieve our mission.

Kevin Regan, LA County Department of Parks and Recreation was introduced by Commissioner Allman.

Mr. Regan stated that the California State Parks have a distinguished veteran pass from the state accepted for free vehicle entrance, camping, and boating at Castaic Lake State Recreation Area and Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area. These two State Parks offer Overnight Tent Camping and RV Camping as well as fishing and boating with no fees. Any veteran that has a veterans license plate from state of California can get into Bonelli Regional Park and Santa Fe Dam and use the Lake with no fees. The same applies at Castaic Lake with the vehicle entry fees and boating if they have the veterans license plate. For holidays such as Memorial Day and Veteran's Day, we offer all military personnel, both active duty and reservists to access our parks and programs at a reduced fee.

Chair Allman asked Mr. Regan if he was familiar with the VIP Act of veterans accessing public land at no cost and if we can make the County consistent with both federal and state benefits to the veteran community? Mr. Regan answered that LA County Parks and Recreation fees are determined by the BOS and it would require sending a report to the Board outlining the fees and charges that we are requesting to amend or introduce. He stated that this topic is worth having more dialogue in the near future.

Elizabeth Cordova, American Equine Therapy was introduced by Commission Chair Allman.

Ms. Cordova joined the Commission meeting today to introduce other healing alternatives that bring relief to veterans called American Equine Therapy. It is a nonprofit 501c3 company, who promotes and offers equine therapy for veterans who suffer PTSD, MST, and other disabilities. The goal in providing equine treatment is to promote physical occupational and emotional growth. We rescue horses to rescue people. The next level in wellness would be to offer sports medicine. The benefit is physical well-being and healing mental health for veterans and active duty members to return to normal healthy living in a pain free manner. A proposal has been submitted to the VA Long Beach Healthcare System, where the goal is to implement our health and wellness solutions. This would reduce/prevent barriers such as financial costs associated with wounded disabled status and lack of knowledge regarding the recreational opportunities available to them. The major difference is that we are willing to bring our horses to the VA; the target would be inpatient and outpatient veterans. The project proposal is underway, our 501c3 has been approved, and now waiting to meet with the VA Long Beach Chief of Voluntary Service to assess the next steps.

Ms. Cordova was joined by Dr. Vas, who gave an overview of his findings in sports medicine treatment, whereas musculoskeletal condition affects the mental state. After a patient is able to move without pain, their mental and emotional state improve also. Dr. Vas has treated professional athletes, first responders, fire, police officers, and more recently, veterans. Most patients tend to see an improvement within the first two visits of this treatment. Him and his partner Travis Mayfield, have put together a great team of professionals and they started a nonprofit company treating veterans with PTSD through Equine Therapy; the benefits are truly remarkable, as it decreases anxiety, increases self-esteem and helps reduce depression in just one visit. To summarize, they are looking for partners to work together with them to help make this happen.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Ruth Wong, Director, provided the following updates:

- Veteran Services – hiring VCA III for incarcerated population in jails, prisons and court systems. MVA has filed over 1,600 claims which is 12 percent higher than last month. As COVID evolved, we had to pivot into a completely virtual system and staff is doing very well working with technology and meeting veterans; the last 6 months brought in 16 million dollars in benefits to veterans and families that help sustain their livelihood and brought back into the community.
- Budget – submitting our FY 22-23 budget and asking for more Veterans Claims Assistant positions. Last year, the state granted CALVET additional money for veteran representatives and we will be getting a portion of that to use for those positions.
- Building Operations – the winter storms have brought in water damage, especially in the basement at the building. We are asking the CEO and Internal Services Department (ISD) for funding to get the repairs done.
- Legislation – There are two bills up at the state right now. The Senate Bill 827 is asking to repeal the requirement for veteran applicants to pay the \$5 fee for Veterans Designation on driver's license. The second bill has been brought to the attention of the Legislature, of a state senator from Orange County that is sponsor of the bill to exempt military retirement and survivor's benefit plans from each state income tax. I have asked our legislative analysts to push it to the attention of the people up in Sacramento and the board will be sponsoring in writing a letter on behalf of the County endorsing that that bill.
- Veterans Identifier – in response to a constituent public comment given last month, requesting information about a veteran identifier for the children and family court system. There is a form called Mil 100 Form that already exists at those courts and veterans are encouraged to complete the form. Once is completed and becomes an actual court document, then resources made available to that veteran that would not necessarily be available to other members of the public. That is the status update to the question that was asked last month.

Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- LA County CEO's Office – New District Boundaries
- LA County Beaches and Harbors – Ordinance on Free or Discounted Parking
- VA Veteran Experience Office – Demographic Data on LA County's Veteran Population
- Black History Program – Speaker

Good of the Order

Commissioner Leal stated that he added a link to the chat that is used within VPAN to locate which city falls within each Supervisorial District (SD). December was a busy month for SD1, from handing out gifts to support veteran villages, outreach and feeding veterans. The Supervisors office hosted a school Toy Giveaway with the special guest celebrity, Danny Trejo. Mr. Leal stated that it was an honor to attend.

Commissioner McFadden wished everyone a Happy New Year. She hopes that anyone who caught the Omicron variant is able to recover and remain healthy.

Commission Chair Allman stated that he has been working on the West Los Angeles VA redevelopment. It just concluded on December 17th, the public comment period for master plan 2022. The VA Central Office announced the new Project Director, Doctor Keith Harris to oversee the master plan and the Community Housing Initiatives for Los Angeles. Dr. Harris will be coming to Los Angeles to give special attention to the veterans homelessness issue and begin working on different reforms to improve VA operations in the area. Chair Allman is looking forward to working with Dr. Harris and hopes to get him to join the Veterans Advisory Commission and introduce himself; he has been working for the VA for awhile as the Director of Clinical Operations.

Commissioner Gutierrez stated that there is an upcoming Resource and Employment Job Fair on February 10, 2022 at the Chimbole Center, Palmdale. He will send out the flyer as so as he receives it.

A total of 38 participants were in attendance. Motion made by Commissioner Leal to adjourn the meeting at 2:57 p.m. and seconded by Commissioner McFadden. With no objections, motion carried.

Stephanie Guerrero
Executive Secretary
January 12, 2022