

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Ruth A. Wong
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, June 12, 2019

Present:

Absent:

Commissioners

Thomas O'Shaughnessy
Patricia Jackson-Kelley
Jose Leal
Hector Elizalde
Thomas Lasser
Ruel Fuentesilla

Commissioners

Dennis Tucker
Michael McDowell

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Ruth Wong, Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Clerk

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes

Chair Thomas O'Shaughnessy called the meeting to order at 1:33p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Vice Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley.

Roll Call

There was a total of 6 Commissioners at the meeting – there was a quorum.

Chairman's Report

Chair stated that he would like the new Chair and Vice Chair to consider at the July meeting or August retreat that it appears that VA doctors cannot consider marijuana as a replacement of opiates as a treatment even in jurisdiction where marijuana is legal because the U.S. Senate objects and removes it. The concern is that people are not getting hired for jobs because they use medical marijuana.

Chair and General Wong met to discuss the Annual Report from July 2018 - June 2019, which will be mentioned later during the Director's Report.

Chair shared about the homelessness issue which reported the 2019 count that increased by 16%-citywide and 12%-countywide, totaling 58,000 people with 3,000 veterans.

Chair mentioned that there were two Board Deputies present, Antonio Chapa, 1st District and Roberto Alvarez, 5th District.

Chair O'Shaughnessy announced that the meeting will start with Public Comments so that everyone that would like to address the Commission has ample opportunity to do so.

Public Comments: Comments from Audience on Items Not on Agenda (three minutes each):

David Acosta, Community Veterans Justice Project, stated that their mission is to help homeless and veterans who are felons get out of prison and enter into a diversion program for drug treatment, preventing conviction and help to get criminal records expunged. The HIPAA laws require confidentiality, therefore he would like to utilize office space in the building.

Antonio Chapa, District Director for Hilda Solis, stated that he handles veteran issues for the 1st District. Last month, the Supervisor has placed a motion to regarding the parking lot issue and taking into consideration how feasible it would be to provide housing for fellow veterans. Another item is that Supervisor Solis's 3rd Annual LA Veterans Resource Expo will take place on July 26th at the Fairplex in Pomona. Last year, there was around 3,000 attendees. Please invite veterans and their families.

Jack Ochoa, U.S. Army veteran, stated that he has been an advocate for small businesses for 25 years and created the Chamber of Commerce, 501c3. Their focus is on six pillars: 1) Business 2) Jobs 3) Education 4) Resources 4) Wellness 6) Family. Currently looking at property in the San Gabriel Valley to create a Veterans Wellness Center. He emphasized that it will be a veteran owned company and veterans doing the work.

Guest Speakers

Anthony Rodriguez, CalVet, is the regional field agent for the Los Angeles and Ventura County areas. Anthony stated that he just wanted to make a few announcements and then invited everyone to the CalVet and LGBTQ Forum, which will be held tomorrow in the Hollywood area. Next, the State provides help with citizenship and cover the costs. Second, the CalTap program visits all 30 bases to share benefits and services provided, which include Veterans Resource Book, Claims, Home Loans, and College Fee Waiver, etc. Last, the Los Angeles County Department of Military and Veterans Affairs answers the bulk of the questions and provide local assistance to apply for State benefits.

Anthony Roeback, VBA on behalf of Emmett O'Meara, provided an update for the program. He stated that there is groundbreaking legislation in the Appeals and Approving Modernization Acts. There are three different ways for veterans to appeal if they disagree with the VA: 1) Supplemental Claim Lane – where additional evidence can be provided, 2) Higher-Level Review Lane – go based off of the evidence that was originally provided and can be seen locally, 3) Appeal to the Board Lane – go through the process of the Board and the veterans appeals. The VA is moving into the direction of becoming virtual, by eliminating paper and providing video counseling. This will especially benefit disabled veterans who struggle to make it to their appointments due to limited resources.

James Zenner, VPAN Department of Mental Health, stated that office space has been an issue. The VALOR program helps 150 veterans. Currently, there are 20 staff who occupy shared office space on the 6th floor. VALOR will continue to provide services, but are expanding. DMH will need similar office space for 12 new staff at Patriotic Hall.

Scott Collins, on behalf of Senator Archuleta will host a Round Table for discussion where the Senator wants to hear from Veterans Organizations. There are about 18 attending the meeting at the Downey location.

Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- By-Laws Committee Update
- Discussion on the ramification of the latest Homelessness Report

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Ruth Wong, Director, retired Air Force veteran and flight nurse shared our departments partnership with the WNBA Sparks to reach military women veterans who face difficult issues. Her staff is at each home game providing information.

SF Lane Victory Merchant Marine Ship (San Pedro), where dedicated volunteers are looking for people who need meeting space to open up and do more activity on the ship for the veteran community.

LA Air Force Retiree Expo elected General Ruth Wong to be the 2019 Retiree of the Year. It gave her the opportunity to invite Commander Anne Igle to her D-Day event at Patriotic Hall.

Attended a Community Salute – Richard Tesero and his son, Mayor in Pico Rivera, hosted a 2nd Annual High School Enlist Recognition Ceremony which held an open enlistment for 80 new recruits.

The Annual Report will be coordinated with all the Commissioners so that it will be provided at the next meeting in July.

Attended the largest Army Ball in Long Beach with over 600 attendees. The Army gave a special Public Service medal to actor, comedian, and producer Vince Vaughn, who has done a number of movies that have spotlighted the veteran community. "It was really nice to see the Hollywood piece of what we do."

Attended Board of Supervisor's Meeting where Robert Alvarez, 5th District, honored the Army's 244th Birthday with a Cake Cutting Ceremony.

Attended the LA Memorial Coliseum 75th Anniversary D-Day Ceremony where Supervisor Hahn honored veterans where she lit the torch. The day after that, there was a Breaking News story that the Coliseum will keep its name and will reflect Coliseum United Airlines Field as a compromise.

Hosted the 75th Anniversary D-Day event here at Patriotic Hall. We partnered with the VA, Tom Ruck (National Cemetery), Larry Vasquez (LA City), in addition to the French Consulate and Robert Johnson who works with WWII veterans. There were four French Legion of Honor recipients who received medals along and 20 WWII veterans in the audience that received the D-Day medals. Approximately 250 people came to the event and I received lots of positive feedback.

I would like to Commend Post 283 Ronald Regan American Legion who sponsored \$5,000 for valet parking and food for the D-Day event.

Regional Food Bank coming in July every 4th Tuesday of each month. A Flyer will be distributed.

Motion of Supervisor Solis parking study analysis, Public Works will look at number of options which include offsite, structure, and housing.

Preparation to dedicate and change name of Marine Room to Colonel Joseph Smith on November 8th.

Our department hired two Veteran Interns. It is a foundation to create a career path for those who to stay in our department to go through the accreditation training and become a Veteran Service Officer. It has worked out well and our department we will continue to provide that as an opportunity to veterans.

Follow-Up on Veteran Issues

None.

Good of the Order

Commissioner Thomas Lasser stated that there was a very successful Veterans Advisory Commission meeting, offsite in Hawthorne with 25-30 people in attendance. The Hawthorne Leadership wants to hold another meeting at the same location and will be in contact with General Wong. On Friday, June 14th is the U.S Army Birthday, also known as Flag Day. He gave a special shout out to CalVet for the Veterans Resource Book.

Vice Chair Patricia Jackson- Kelley stated that she attended Garfield High School and presented a check to two students. She attended the D-Day event at Patriotic Hall. She also attended the Army Ball and stated that it was the best one yet.

Commissioner Jose Leal stated that he is working with the VA to end suicide. LA County Fire suicide rates have gone up. He states that the Veterans Resource Books are a helpful tool.

Commissioner Ruel Fuentecilla attended the Memorial Day event at the Forest Lawn in Long Beach. Upcoming on August 9th, Adel Cruz, Consul General of Philippines will be doing a site visit at Los Alamitos Joint Forces Training Base. They are trying to strengthen the relationship between the Philippines as well as the 45 D. It will be a chance for the Consul General to tour the base and meet local veterans who are stationed there.

Commissioner Hector Elizalde stated that he appreciates all speakers and will share information. Elizalde stated that Dr. Franklin from Washington D.C came to give an overview for her plans to deal with suicide prevention. Glad to see the homelessness issue on the Agenda because change is needed.

Chair Thomas O'Shaughnessy attended the Artesia Park event on Memorial Day and the torch lighting ceremony. He was reminded of the hundreds of thousands that died in WWII.

Vice Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley thanked Chair Thomas O'Shaughnessy for his time as Chair. She regrets not making the next meeting. However, she appointed new Vice Chair Hector Elizalde to lead the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 3:34 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero
Clerk
June 12, 2019