

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY
VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION**

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



**Ruth A. Wong
Director**

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, June 09, 2021**

Present:

Commissioners

Tom Lasser
Joe Leal
Brittanie Moore
Patricia Jackson-Kelley
Jawana McFadden
Anthony Allman
Jennifer Campbell

Absent:

Commissioners

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs
Ruth Wong, Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Secretary

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Acting Chair Tom Lasser called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Tess Banko, Project Director, U.S. Vets.

Roll Call

There was a total of 5 Commissioners at the time of roll call; no quorum present. Later, Commissioners Jawana McFadden and Jennifer Campbell joined the meeting; QUORUM PRESENT.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Commissioner Anthony Allman to accept the Minutes for April 14, 2021 and seconded by Commissioner Joe Leal. With no objections, motion passed.

Chairman's Report

Acting Chair Tom Lasser was excited to introduce Jennifer Campbell as the newest Commissioner for the 3rd District to the Veterans Advisory Commission. She is a U.S. Army veteran commandership at the Hollywood Post 43. Welcome aboard and we look forward to her contributions. He stated that there will not be a public meeting held in August due to a closed session for the retreat.

Commissioner Brittanie Moore gave a report from the Nominating Committee 2021, stated that there have been no nominations for the Chair and Vice Chair due to the recent turnovers on the commission; will add others to assist in this effort.

Acting Chair Tom Lasser reminded the commission that the Chair and Vice Chair vacancies still need to be filled.

Public Comments

None.

Guest Speaker(s)

Anthony DeFrancesco, Chief Liaison and Executive Director of UCLA Veterans Relations Affairs and Programs (VAR) was introduced by Acting Chair Tom Lasser.

All activities service veterans and families through the following three programs: 1) UCLA Veterans Legal Clinic (UCLA Law), 2) VA/UCLA Center of Excellence for Training & Research in Veterans Resilience & Recovery, and 3) UCLA/VA Veterans Family Wellness Center (VFWC). UCLA also supports different recreational activities on-campus. One of which was the Veterans Garden up until the COVID restrictions, it was maintained by the student veterans. Baseball games and other athletic events are provided with free admission for veterans. The Athletics Department organized a clothing donation during COVID called the Quarantine Clean Out. The last program that has recently been added is the Village for Vets/UCLA Meals Partnership Program that is preparing and providing meals to several other programs on-campus, such as the CTRS Program, Safe Parking Program and the Welcome Home Center. Looking to develop and strengthen relationships with the veteran community. The next steps for VAR Strategic Plan are:

- a. Meeting with community partners
- b. Contact VAR with feedback and suggestions
- c. Come back to VAC in 6-9 months to share plan

Brian D'Andrea, Senior Vice President of Century Housing Corporation was introduced by Commissioner Anthony Allman. Brian was joined by colleagues Tyler and Tess.

Brian stated that the West LA Veterans Collective is working on transforming the West Los Angeles VA Campus into a community. The development team is made up of U.S. Vets, Century, and Thomas Safran and Associates (TSA) and have many years of experience working together. It has been two and a half years in the making, since November 2017. The mission is promoting the recovery, the wellness, and a more hopeful future for veterans and their families with a thriving community. Efforts began to create housing with a holistic community that focuses on wellness and connections. A team participated in outreach to gather input and feedback from veterans. The primary goal is to take the medical campus and turn it into a supportive and vibrant housing community that will offer many services to veterans such as physical healthcare, mental healthcare, substance use treatment, etc.

Tyler covered the draft community plan that includes the housing development in four phases, contemplating a minimum of 1200 units and up to 1600 units. Construction of buildings 205, 207, 208, and 209 began in January 2021, and anticipate 880 units to be completed in the Fall 2022. To further these developments, the City of Los Angeles contributed 8.2 million dollars of HHH funds, the County of Los Angeles contributed 5.7 million dollars of No Place Like Home funds as well as 59 Project-based VASH vouchers. The VA contributed 10 million to build a new infrastructure for telecommunications, electrical, and gas service required to support the construction of the 1700 new units.

These buildings are in predevelopment, currently in the planning, design, and financing phase:

- Building 402 – 120 units
- Building 300 – 44 units; home of the Wellness Center that will support the entire campus
- Building 210 – 40 units; supported by U.S. Vets
- Building 404 – 77 units
- Building 156 and 157 – 112 units

Much advocacy has been done on federal, state and local levels. Most pertinent is the piece of legislation sponsored by Senator Feinstein and Congressman Lieu called the West LA VA Campus Improvement Act that will promote and facilitate the continuing development efforts and allow on-campus generated revenue to remain invested into housing. The bill recently passed the Senate, now onto the House, and hopefully moved onto the President and signed into law.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Ruth Wong, Director, provided the following updates:

- County Commissions memo from Board Executive Office – may return to in-person public meetings, once the Chair of the Board of Supervisors announces plans to reopen LA County. First order of business will be the retreat.
- Juneteenth event at Magic Johnson Park – Supervisor Holly Mitchell, 2nd District, hosts a justice community services outreach.
- Memorial Day activities:
 1. Tribute to Military Veterans and Families – Supervisor Kathryn Barger, 5th District, hosted virtual event. Commission Chair Hector Elizalde was honored with a special recognition award that was commissioned in his honor; veterans from each department were nominated for this award. The Veteran of the Year came from the Sheriff's Department. Two individuals from DMVA, Christopher Harris (5th District) and Reymundo Borjon (1st District) were honorees; DMVA staff provided benefits counseling.
 2. Woodlawn Cemetery in Compton – Director Ruth Wong attended and spoke at the in-person event. Assessor Jeff Prang and Glen Roosevelt (DMVA volunteer), GAR sons member, and a number of participants attended. The program included Congresswoman Nanette Barragan 44th District, State Assembly member Mike Gipson, and former Mayor of Compton, and 2nd District Deputy Robert Jackson who honored 900 veterans including 17 Civil War era veterans buried at the cemetery.
 3. USS Lane Victory – attended by Chief Deputy Stephanie Stone, French Consul General Bob Johnson (lead for French Legion of Honor WW II veterans) and ship staff.
- CVSO funding via State budget process – approved \$5.4 million ongoing but needs the Governor's signature by June 15.
- Three new DMVA employees – Manny Lopez (U.S. Marine) and Ivan Lewis (U.S. Army) are now Veteran Interns. Jorge Reynoso is the new Building Manager.
- CA CVSO Summer Conference – virtual event will be held in June.
- VA Townhall – 99 percent reduction in cases due to vaccinations. Once fully vaccinated, no need for masks and social distancing; 65 percent of veterans have received the vaccine and are now protected.
- YouTube Account – visit LA County Military and Veterans Affairs.

Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- Strategic Plan 2021-2022 will be updated and reviewed – Tom Lasser
- Retreat in August – Tom Lasser

Good of the Order

Commissioner Joe Leal is happy to hear about the efforts to address homelessness from West LA. He expressed his appreciation for the honor and dedication to his dear friend Hector Elizalde. He attended the Pico Rivera Marine Corp. Memorial Day event hosted by Senator Bob Archuleta; this reunion allowed him the opportunity to provide fallen families with information about VPAN. He has participated in many food drives providing meals to those experiencing food insecurity.

Commissioner Patricia Jackson-Kelley took the time to thank George Dixon for resolving complicated claim cases for veterans. She attended the following Memorial Day virtual events:

1. City of Baltimore – in-person events at four different locations and aired the event virtually
2. City of Inglewood – the color guard from Jackie Robinson Post presented colors

She reminded everyone that Monday is the U.S. Army's birthday as well as Pride Day. The VA will be celebrating the Army's birthday at different sites.

Commissioner Anthony Allman brought it to everyone's attention that the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board (VCOEB) meeting will be held on June 29th. He thanked General Ruth Wong for initiating the YouTube channel and stated that he was the first subscriber to the LA County Military and Veterans YouTube channel. He encouraged his fellow commissioners to subscribe as well and hopes to get the meetings online and share with respective communities.

Commissioner Jawana McFadden stated that she is just returning from her military service deployment from a COVID assignment for the past three months. She was responsible for making sure that there was full support with vaccination efforts for all of the regions throughout California, in particular Los Angeles at the CSULA campus and then relocated to the Oakland area. The Military Bases will launch new efforts pertaining to veteran homeless support for COVID victims and impacted personnel. A job fair and panel was held with 100 veteran participants and of that there are 50 veterans in the pipeline for new jobs. Very excited to help veterans to enter back into the workforce. Will share more as updates become available.

Adjournment

In memory of Colonel Richard Alan Littlestone, U.S. Army (ret).

A total of 23 participants in attendance. Meeting adjourned at 2:41 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero
Secretary
June 09, 2021