

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Stephanie Stone
Acting Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, May 11, 2022

Present:

Commissioners

Anthony Allman
Joe Leal
Patricia Jackson-Kelley
Jawana McFadden
Jennifer Campbell
John Gutierrez
Dennis Anderson

Absent:

Commissioners

Brittanie Moore
Marcel Rodarte

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Stephanie Stone, Acting Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Executive Secretary

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Anthony Allman called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Jennifer Campbell, 3rd District.

Roll Call

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

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Commissioner Dennis Anderson to accept the Minutes for April 13, 2022 and seconded by Commissioner Jawana McFadden; a roll call with no objections, the motion passed.

Chairman's Report

Chair Allman noted that the Board of Supervisors appointed Chi Szeto on May 3, 2022 as the new Commissioner for the 4th Supervisorial District. He welcomed Mr. Szeto and stated that he will not be seated until the onboarding paperwork is completed.

The notice of the Commission meeting was sent out on May 4, 2022 at 1:02 PM to about 28,000 recipients. If anyone is not on the mailing list, please reach out to the department to express your interest and Kathleen Piche, Public Information Officer (PIO) should be able to add you to the mailing list. It will be on the new website.

The bigger item discussed at the last meeting was about approving the Strategic Plan. After some investigation, he learned that there is no requirement for a Strategic Plan. Instead, there is a bigger issue, in which the Commission does not have any operating bylaws. There was a draft set of bylaws put forward in October 2020 and there is no evidence of the Commission taking action on them. This is concerning with regard to changeover in leadership, those things would be outlined in the bylaws, which this Commission apparently does not have. Chair Allman recommended that the Strategic Plan be tabled in order for the Commission to focus on the bylaws. In addition, a Nominating Committee is necessary for the changeover in leadership next year. His second recommendation would be to create two different Ad Hoc Committees; Nominating Committee for next year's leadership, as well as a Bylaws Committee where two or three Commissioners could review the draft document and offer some suggestions and then bring it to the body for consideration and amendments. The Commission should have operating bylaws. He asked if any Commissioners had any thoughts/recommendations/suggestions.

Commissioner McFadden agreed with the Chair with regards to the Bylaws because it's an important aspect to have. She asked for clarification, if there would be two different votes, one for the Bylaws Committee and another vote for the Nominating Committee.

Chair Allman stated that is correct, as there was evidence of a Policy Number One from November 2013. Moving forward, the Commission should incorporate whatever implementation for leadership changeover into the Bylaws to be discussed before adopting the new Bylaws. If there are no Bylaws, then it will default on this preexisting Policy Number One. Ultimately, the Bylaws issue needs to be addressed because that is in the Commissions Charter.

Commissioner Anderson agreed that the Bylaws are appropriate because it holds currency and can be used by groups who come onboard in the future.

The strategic plan is useful when trying to prioritize limited resources. The Commission is not a County Department and does not have a budget or resources. Therefore, a strategic plan makes sense when a Department is trying to prioritize its budget. He asked, "If any Commissioners have any other thoughts about formalizing the strategic plan?"

Commissioner Jackson-Kelley stated that former Commissioner Tom Lasser had a working set of Bylaws that was presented before the body and reviewed but not voted on. She also stated that the strategic plan was developed to calendar and track different events and hold each Commissioner accountable.

Commissioner Campbell stated that according to Commissioner Jackson-Kelley, there are a working set of bylaws drafted. "Would it be appropriate to form an Ad Hoc Committee to review the working document?"

Chair Allman agreed that there is a draft of the bylaws, however, the document was never adopted. He suggested to use the draft as a starting point, and then offer amendments and put that forward for a vote. The Chair recommended that Commissioners Campbell and Jackson-Kelley be a part of the Bylaws Committee.

Commissioner Campbell accepted as she has experience with bylaws and is happy to work on that Ad Hoc Committee with Commissioner Jackson-Kelley.

Chair Allman asked if any Commissioner want to lead the Nominating Ad Hoc Committee?

Commissioner Leal volunteered to Chair and work with the Nominating Committee for the next leadership and stated that he is available to help as part of the Bylaws Committee as well.

Chair Allman summarized a recap stating that there will be two Ad Hoc Committees; 1) Bylaws Committee that will include himself, Commissioner Campbell, and Commissioner Jackson-Kelley, and 2) Nominating Committee that will be Chaired

by Commissioner Leal and two appointees at his discretion. Lastly, the Chair added that the YouTube channel continues to grow with five more subscribers since the previous month.

Public Comments

John Bowman and his sister Judy Bowman represent a veterans theater therapy group. Our cooperative ensemble is called the Drama Stage. It was founded by Vietnam veteran, Melvin Ishmael Johnson who was one of the original Tuskegee Airmen. Mr. Bowman invited the Commission to a free play called the 101 Club for Memorial Day on May 30th, via Zoom. The 101 Club unpacks the story of a young Lieutenant in 1925, who had been trained and was ready to be shipped out to the warzone in the South Pacific as part of the Bombardment Group. Please tell a friend to help spread the word and donations are always welcome.

Rocio Romero is the recruitment and admissions manager at NPower Los Angeles. She thanked the Commission for the opportunity to share important stats on the program and for the support received. NPower is a program that serves military veterans, spouses, and young adults ages 18 to 26. NPower offers free technology training certification program to give veterans an opportunity to launch a lucrative career in the technology field. The Spring 2022 cohort accepted 86 students into the program and 44 veterans and/or spouses. NPower is receiving referrals through West Los Angeles VA, Long Beach Healthcare VA, Rancho Cucamonga VA, JVS SoCal, Wounded Warrior Project, and U.S.VETS. Lastly, she thanked Commissioner Gutierrez for his collaboration with their tech program.

Guest Speaker(s)

Larry Vasquez, Office of Mayor Garcetti, stated that in October 2018, the City of Los Angeles collaborated with Microsoft to launch a veterans training program which evolved into the Los Angeles Veterans Technology Training Academy (LAVTTA). This technology training program is available to post 911 veterans and is also a transition program that focuses on resumes and teaches about the value of networking under the DoD and Department of Labor Skill Bridge program with a graduation rate of 94%. Under employment and placement rate, Microsoft employs about 60% to 70% of their graduates. Silicon Beach began less than 10 years ago and is now booming in the tech field. The City of Los Angeles is a tech hub that the Mayor speaks highly of. The tech world brings a lot of resources and value to the area from major companies such as Google, Amazon, Netflix, Hulu, Snapchat, Facebook, Blizzard Ent., and SpaceX. It is exciting to see what is happening in the LA area; during the pandemic in 2020, his venture capital firms poured \$9 billion into LA companies. Job openings and salaries have experienced an increase and employers are seeking qualified employees to come back to work and help grow companies; including the City of Los Angeles which has thousands of openings. Veterans are a huge part of the State, County, and City (88,000 alone). The City founded the LAVTTA program that is a 16-week course. The first cohort was funded by the LA County Innovation Fund with an 83% graduation rate and an average of \$60,000 salary. The next step is to push out the flyer of session information to all veteran networks to get the word out of the next cohort in June. Please encourage veterans who are interested in a tech career.

Commissioner Gutierrez echoed the importance of this program, as it highlights how LA City and LA County came together to improve the lives of veterans. He is looking forward to the next cohort and how well that does. Commissioner McFadden and I were involved at the beginning of this program and brainstorming about how to get it off the ground. He thanked Commissioner McFadden for playing an instrumental role in that. It is exciting to see how far the program has come and how it continues to grow.

Commissioner Anderson asked, "Is the LAVTTA training program free and how the veterans are supporting themselves while they are attending full time?" It appears to be a terrific program. He also stated that it would be optimal if there is any way to organize a stipend for veterans who are enrolled into the course fulltime.

Larry Vasquez assumes that some are living with family or working on weekends. One of the aspects that was considered was trying to get stipends for veterans to help them along. Initially, the LAVTTA program was going to be held in the evenings and weekend, however, it was decided to conduct the program during the week. There are prerequisites to ensure that veterans are committed because there is very little commitment when training classes are offered for free. He will get back to Commissioner Anderson after coordinating with JVS, on what can be done to improve the program before the next cohort.

Juan Hernandez, Director of Veterans Affairs Relations, gave an overview of the services UCLA offers for veterans. The first one is the Veterans Legal Clinic helps veterans with benefits such as service connection, compensation, and traffic violations. The clinics were held remotely throughout the pandemic and are now starting to pick up on campus at the GLA VA. Second, is the Veteran's Family Wellbeing Center, which offers individual counseling, counseling specializing with services for women veterans and combat veterans, parents, caregivers, and grief due to loss. The program is slowly transitioning back at the GLA VA campus in person instead of remote sessions. Third, involves outdoor activities and additional support for different programs to include summer camp scholarships for basketball, baseball, swimming, and soccer. It is a great program and many folks are already taking advantage of it. Lastly, UCLA is hiring for a Communication Specialist and is almost done with the interview process.

Aimee Bravo, Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative (LAVC) gave a presentation on the following upcoming events in LA County for the veteran community facilitated by LAVC and VPAN:

- May 12th, 10A-1P – Job Fair & Veteran Wellness Day at American Legion Post 261
- May 14th, 10A-1P – Military, Veterans, and Family Appreciation Day at La Puente County Library
- May 15th, 10A-2P – Veteran Wellness Day at VA West LA Japanese Garden
- May 16th, 10A-1P – VA Annual Baby Shower at West LA VA
- May 21st, 9A-1P – Veterans & Military Families Wellness Day at Laidlaw's Harley Davidson
- May 26th, 11A-1P – Suicide Prevention Operation S.A.V.E. at Patriotic Hall
- May 27th-30th – LA Fleet Week held on Memorial Day weekend
- May 28th, 10A-1P – 24th Annual Tribute to Veterans & Military Families at Arcadia County Park
- May 30th, 10AM – Memorial Day Event at LA National Cemetery
- June 3rd, 10A-1P – Welcome Home Troops Veterans Resource Fair at Patriotic Hall

Aimee stated that the events taking place are located on the UCLA DMH online learning community calendar. She instructed anyone interested to send her their email and she can send them instructions on how to access it.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Stephanie Stone, Acting Director, stated that May is a very busy time for the Department and veteran community with a number of events for Memorial Day weekend to honor the men and women who lost their lives while serving in the U.S. Military. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs participated in the Carry the Load event which recognizes first responders in the military. It was especially important for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to have Fire Chief Daryl Osby onboard, as we appreciate his dedication and service to our country. Next week, Paramount Studio's has extended an invitation for veterans to attend the screening of Top Gun Maverick at the Pike in Long Beach on May 29th at 10:00am and 10:30am; the first 25 veterans to sign up will be given tickets to enjoy the film. The following Memorial Day events will be happening in LA County to honor our fallen troops:

- May 14th, 10A-1P – Military, Veterans, and Family Appreciation Day at La Puente County Library
- May 27th-30th – LA Fleet Week held on Memorial Day weekend
- May 28th, 10A-1P – 24th Annual Tribute to Veterans & Military Families at Arcadia County Park
- May 30th, 11A – 2nd Annual Memorial Day Observance at Woodlawn Celestial Gardens

Acting Director Stone introduced George Dixon, Veterans Services Supervisor accompanied by two MVA staff members.

George Dixon recognized that the Department's Veterans representatives will be attending multiple events over Memorial Day weekend, and accredited County Veterans Service Officers who will help veterans, dependents, and survivors apply for benefits. The Department participates with each rally point in each Supervisorial District. All communication is being done through Wait While with the ability to text and get responses from veterans. There are 22 field office locations and on average, each veteran representative receives about 40 to 60 calls per day. There were over 8,500 appointments, both in person and virtual to interview and gather information from clients to assist with claims and benefits. Recently, over 10,325 compensation, pension, vocational rehabilitation, and education claims have been filed. The College Tuition Fee Waiver Program is in high demand over the summer months leading up to the 2022 Fall Semester with over 1,300 applications already filed. To date, VPAN and Unite Us referrals are totaling about 10 percent, some of which may be

duplicate referrals in the system. Amazon Connect is coming soon so the Department will have the capability to develop a monthly report.

Alex Figueroa is a Veteran Intern, MVA. She started working in South El Monte for Supervisorial District One as the test pilot for Rally Point One. She is an accredited Veterans Service Officer who assists veterans with various benefits such as disability claims, appeals, education, burials, and much more.

Reymundo Borjon is a Veteran Service Officer who works at the ELA Outpatient Clinic in Downtown LA on Temple, Twin Towers, Men Central Jail Detention Center, and Lynwood Jails. Mr. Borjon assists chartered veterans with their VA benefits once they are released; discharge upgrades, reinstatement of benefits, and housing through HUD VASH, despite them having a bad discharge of Other than Honorable (OTH) for bad conduct. At each field office location, he assists clients with this monetary compensation, pension claims, college fee waivers, Chapter 33, and vocational rehab. If anyone has any questions, feel free to contact him.

Acting Director Stephanie Stone stated at last month's Commission meeting, there was a request for information on the veteran employment process within LA County. She introduced Dimitri De Silva to the Commission.

Lauren Robinson, Department of Human Resources (DHR) Policy Unit, had questions about the current veterans credit policy on the authority that's included in the PPG. DHR has been in regular conversations with MVA about potentially expanding that PPG further than the current veterans credit policy; the County Charter Section 36 ½ is the authority that establishes veteran credit standards for the County. Therefore, this charter section allows for a credit of 10 points to anybody who has served in the Armed Forces of the United States in time of war, armed insurrection, or international police action, and is honorably discharged. It also provides these same service point opportunities to the spouse of a veteran who is permanently disabled or killed while in such military service. Furthermore, this authority is used as the framework for the policy. The challenge in interpreting this Charter is that the military has not been engaged in an official war since World War II. In the current practice, the ability to expand the credit points to account for recent veterans through a 2003 motion by Supervisor Knabe, which allowed to add this credit for individuals who were awarded a campaign or expeditionary medal while in service; these would be veterans who saw combat on behalf of the United States. This is the framework used for current policy referenced in the OPM guidance for federal employment. DHR is still working with MVA to potentially expand this policy for recent veterans, the credit primarily is given to those who saw combat, although there are some folks who are considered veterans, who would not get a campaign or expeditionary medal. Again, the challenge is that time of war definition. By this time, DHR, MVA and County Counsel are looking at ways to expand that authority and decide if they should go in that direction. Lauren concluded her description of the policy and is happy to answer any questions.

Dimitri De Silva stated that this issue included a fire candidate who was not given her veteran exam points which led to the research of PPG 115. MVA and the HR Policy unit formed a partnership that is rooted to an authority that is within their Charter to ensure all veterans who earned this credit are receiving it. Concurrently, both Departments are working together to understand how a veteran is defined and how to work with reservists and different members of the military as it shifts and evolves.

Chair Allman asked Lauren, "At what point does this require a public vote? As he recalls, there was some discussion about an amendment to the County Charter. Is that correct?"

Lauren agreed that there are some avenues to expand and that this policy and service credit within our current Charter language. DHR is working to make their policies easy to understand for the department exam analysts and for candidates who should receive the credit they deserve. There should not be any misconceptions about what is considered a veteran or their spouse. There are some inroads to take within the current Charter language which would not require a public vote.

Chair Allman believes that one of his duties is to respond to public comment. There was a public comment on this particular topic and he decided to put this issue on the Commission's radar. It is deserving of a little more exploration, perhaps in the next couple of months. The Chair asked, "Would you be willing to come back and share the current language?" At that point, the Commissioners can then discuss what these two options look like. If it goes in the direction of a public vote, the Commission could potentially bring this to the Board of Supervisors attention. Lauren answered, "Absolutely, we would love to engage with you on that".

Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
- NPower Technology Training
- TELACU Veterans Upward Bound
- LA Metro
- Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)
- Human Resources - Veterans Intern Program (VIP)
- Veterans Peer Access Network (VPAN)

Good of the Order

Commissioner Leal stated that a lot of upcoming Memorial Day events were already covered. Supervisor Solis hosted the Heroes Corner at the LA Fairplex with lots of providers and veteran resources. This year, the Fair was held in May, as opposed to September.

Commissioner Jackson-Kelley announced that Supervisor Holly Mitchell is having an event at the A C Bilbrew Library in El Segundo at 5pm on the policies and priorities on race through the nations. She attended a County luncheon event yesterday for the Commission of Women Awards and was the speaker at the Women's Veteran Series for women veteran clients.

Commissioner McFadden wished everybody a happy Military Appreciation Month as many agencies and companies are recognizing it and celebrating Armed Forces week.

Chair Allman attended the Veterans Transition Research Initiative (VTR) event at Duke University. The Duke School of Business is attempting to create a new scientific field of study oriented around veteran employment to determine how talent acquisition, talent managers, and human resources view veterans. The workforce is attempting to identify certain biases primarily ran by social psychologists. He encouraged people to check it out by searching Duke University VTR. He believes it is significant due to LA's veterans homelessness issue as workforce development ensures that veterans have access to employment so that they can afford to live in areas like Los Angeles. This can help identify what issues there are within the hiring pipeline to include culture and various companies and then we can work together to overcome those challenges, hopefully by getting veterans secure jobs and housing. It was a great experience and the next event is going to be at UC Santa Barbara.

Commissioner Gutierrez gave a shout out to Aimee Bravo who did an outstanding job of covering all the different events going on this month in the County. The 24th Annual Tribute to Veterans and Military Families will be held at Arcadia County Park on Saturday, May 28th from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. Please come out to support the event and bring your families too.

Commissioner Anderson applauded Aimee Bravo for her presentation. He will be joining Supervisor Barger for her 24th Annual Tribute to Veterans and Military Families at Arcadia Park on May 28, 2022. On a personal note, he will be leaving for Normandy, France tomorrow to make a parachute jump exit. He is looking forward to jumping from a D-Day vintage C47 with about 30 troops total.

Chair Allman thanked everyone for their time today. He will follow up with Commissioners on all handout materials discussed during the meeting. "Thank you very much and we will see everyone next month."

Chair Allman adjourned the meeting at 3:21 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero
Executive Secretary
May 11, 2022