

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Jim Zenner
Director

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, November 16, 2022

Present:

Commissioners

Anthony Allman
Joe Leal
Patricia Jackson-Kelley
Chi Szeto
John Gutierrez
Dennis Anderson

Absent:

Commissioners

Jawana McFadden

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Jim Zenner, Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Executive Secretary

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Allman called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Joe Leal, 1st District.

Roll Call

There was a total of five Commissioners at the meeting during roll call; no quorum present.

Newly appointed Commissioner Alfonso Noyola attended the meeting as a citizen until Human Resources clears. Commissioners were unable to vote on the approval of the minutes due to no quorum.

Chairman's Report

The notice of the Commission meeting was sent out on November 10, 2022 at 11:37am via gov Delivery from MVA@subscriptions.lacounty.gov. MVA is working on a request to update the website so that the public can subscribe to the mailing list through either a pop-up icon or a static icon. If anyone is interested to subscribe to the Gov Delivery

mailing list, please email info@mva.lacounty.gov. Each meeting recording can be found on MVA's YouTube channel by searching "LA County Military and Veterans Affairs." There are currently 46 subscribers.

Supervisor Holly Mitchell attended the VetDayLA 2022 event at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall on November 5th. The Supervisor's father is and Air Force veteran.

Director Zenner reached out on November 1st regarding the PACT Act Information Sessions and asked for potential venues to be submitted by the end of year.

Last, Chairman Anthony Allman made an announcement that Commissioner Dennis Anderson, 5th District will be filling as the Vice Chair of the Commission for the time being.

Public Comments

Dan Hall is an Army veteran who lives in Santa Monica, 3rd district. He stated that he supports item number 10, recommendation number one to the Board of Supervisors (BOS) because it aligns the County with national and state policies for access to recreational parks and facilities; this is critical for the mental health of our veteran community. He believes that this initiative would give veterans the incentive to register with the County, which will provide the self-identification data necessary for the Commission and Department to provide data-driven recommendations to the BOS. He hopes that this recommendation will receive support.

Steven Machuga is and Army veteran who lives in Los Angeles, 3rd District. He offered his support item number 10, recommendation number one that is being considered today. He believes it's a great idea because he received veteran on his CA ID and stated that it has done nothing for him, so he like the idea of it actually being able to do something for him.

Dan Ortiz is a Desert Storm Army veteran and former Commissioner for District 1. He stated that he is glad to see Patriotic Hall open up to the public again because it was built for veterans. He thanked Director Zenner and stated that he looks forward to watching the Department grow and succeed. He attended to speak on agenda item number 10, stating that the national government has an access pass for national parks and the state has a pass as well for state parks. He went on to ask, "Why doesn't the County offer the same?" This would be a great way to bring attention to the parks by showing their support for veterans and their families. He has been a part of and watched this Commission for many years and was shocked to learn that there were no bylaws. Mr. Ortiz thanked the Commissioners for their hard work and dedication to rectifying that oversight. The recommendation on item 10 is a great way to start off officially with bylaws in order. Parks and Recreation will argue that it's a decrease in revenue. However, Dan believes it's a step toward bringing people back to the parks, but parking costs add up.

Kevin Varga has recently separated from the Marine Corps and is a student at USC. He is new to the Los Angeles veteran community and would like to offer his support for the recommendation during item 10 on the agenda. He believes it would be great if veterans could access County public lands free of charge.

Tom Lasser is a Vietnam veteran who lives in the 2nd District. He too offers his support for the recommendation being considered for item 10. During the time he served as Commissioner, they were not able to put anything together like this. He believes that the Commission should be encouraged to do this, especially with regards to the Board bringing the County close to the existing federal and local government programs gaining free access to public land. He stated that Supervisor Mitchell was a guest speaker at a Veterans' Day even in Redondo Beach, where he briefly conversed with her and her staff on this subject; therefore, the topic is circulating.

Chairman Anthony Allman provided a reminder that the Bylaws that were adopted in October states that members of the public must register at least 24 hours in advance in order to have sufficient time on the agenda to hear everyone's comment. If you have not received the notice of meeting, please be sure to get on the distribution list, by emailing info@mva.lacounty.gov and then you'll be added and able to receive the notice which will include instructions on how to register for public comment.

Second Roll Call

Chairman Allman confirmed that Commissioner Patricia Jackson-Kelley later joined the meeting and asked for another roll call. There was a total six Commissioners at the meeting during roll call; quorum present.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Commissioner Dennis Anderson to accept the Minutes for October 12, 2022 and seconded by Commissioner John Gutierrez; a roll call with six yes votes, the motion passed.

Guest Speaker(s)

Andrew Strain, Care, Treatment, and Reliability Services (CTRS) program, stated that he is open to return back and provide a brief on implementation of permanent supportive housing at the West LA VA and some of the other planning and homeless programs efforts. Mr. Strain went on to address the CTRS fire that occurred at the West LA VA Tiny Homes in the early morning on Friday, September 9th. The CTRS site was a pilot program that began on the West LA VA campus during COVID as an emergency shelter initiative meanwhile veterans continue their search for permanent housing. The fire destroyed 12 units and damaged 10 additional units. In November 2022, the 22 units were removed and replaced with new shelters. The cause of the fire was traced back to the charging lithium battery, so all electrical has been relocated. Resident meetings, fire drills, and site inspections have been conducted in this effort for everyone's safety. Most importantly, it was reported that no veterans or staff were injured; 20 veterans and one partner were impacted, rehoused, received donated goods to replace their belongings, and assistance from VSO's with benefits and important documents that were lost. After careful thought and consideration, it was determined that proper fire hydrants must be installed within proximity to the site. Again, the goal and focus are always to help veterans find more permanent indoor environments, whether it's transitional or permanent housing to move into.

David Morfin, Department of Human Resources (DHR), thanked the Commission for inviting him and Lauren Robinson to provide a briefing on the important topic of Veterans Credit Policy. A key focus of DHR and the County in general is to provide career pipelines into public service. The County's leadership is passionate and interested in working with the veteran community, particularly to assist veterans with gaining employment with the County after they return to civilian life and the Veterans Credit Policy is a tool available to give service members a boost when applying for County jobs. The Veterans Credit program and the County's hiring process is governed by a merit system. All candidates are afforded the same opportunity to compete for a role through a competitive examination and by action of the Board of Supervisors where veterans are afforded a unique benefit when applying to open competitive examinations for county positions. The county charter provides the authority to grant military veterans and their spouses (in certain circumstances) with the credit of 10% of the total exam points for their total score, essentially meaning that 10 points are added to their score which helps them become more easily reachable for an examination appointment. In many cases, the veteran's credit score does not guarantee employment, but because of how the accounting rules are set up, it assists with veterans having a better opportunity to be interviewed and selected. The chartered language is very specific when it comes to the application of the credit, it grants the points only to veterans who served in the armed forces in a time of war or international police action and who are honorably discharged. There are some challenges in that language for veterans who may not have served in the time of war. They may have served in a time of police action. Again, DHR has been searching for opportunities to expand the credit to more veterans by potentially changing some of the language to allow for more credited veterans to serve. To address that shortfall, the Board clarified in a 2003 motion that the credit would also extend to veterans who were awarded a Campaign or Expeditionary Medal for service during a combat operation, and that credit aligns with the criteria set by the Federal Office of Personnel Management and serves as a foundation for veterans credit.

Lauren Robinson, DHR addressed the potential revisions to this policy that her team has been working on with MVA. As David explained, the County is limited in the current authority on where veterans credit can be applied. The Charter provision only grants credit to veterans in time of war or international police actions. This is a challenge for recent veterans since it is no longer a formal practice to declare war, which is a defined concept and has set time periods and dates. Through conversations with MVA and the examination unit, it is evident that the current practice limits the veteran's credit to combat veterans rather than veterans as a blanket statement. This means that some service members who served stateside or non-combat missions, or those that got injured during training were never deployed, would be denied veterans credit under the current veteran's credit policy.

Lauren stated that Supervisor Barger put out a motion on November 1st asking DHR to go even further and explore the feasibility of including other populations as recipients of veterans credit, which include members of the National Guard and also veterans who received other than honorable discharges for reasons that have nothing to do with their service, such as discharge under the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy. To be candid, any revisions for the

veterans credit policy is going to be a very large task that's going to require a lot of conversations with legal counsel to determine what authority DHR has at this moment under the existing Charter and Civil Service Rules, as well as engage in discussions the County's military experts MVA ensure that the information put out to the public is accurate. This is not going to be a quick fix because DHR is bound by their Charter and currently looking into both a short term and long-term solution.

The short term solution is to explore whether DHR can move away from reliance on campaign and Expeditionary Medals and simply acknowledge all recent military veterans since 2001, were not enlisted during peace time as the concept was that they went in knowing they could be called to active combat.

The long-term solution would require a change to the County Charter, which is a lengthy process. This requires voter approval, which means it needs to get on the ballot. Funding will need to be dedicated to communication around this issue. However, by amending the Charter, outdated language can be removed which can make the credit easier to understand and apply with potentially uncoupling the credit from wartime and simply provide credit.

DHR is committed to providing accurate information to help applicants and our exam analysts understand our definition of veteran and clearly explain which documentation they need to get the credit, as well as to provide exam analysts with direct resources to MVA so they can easily consult on complicated cases before they turn determine that someone doesn't qualify under a policy.

Gen Escobosa, Veteran System Coordinator, Los Angeles Housing Services Authority (LAHSA) stated that the homeless count is required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and as lead agency in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care, LAHSA is in charge of coordinating the count for most of LA County. She went on to say most because there's a couple of cities throughout LA County that conduct their own counts, such as Long Beach and Glendale, for example. The pandemic has a profound impact on homelessness investments from their government partners at the state and a federal level by making the homeless system work better at the beginning. All of the local governments, came together under the shared goal of placing as many COVID vulnerable unhoused individuals into hotel rooms as part as of the Project Room Key program and in the veteran systems as part of a ramp up of emergency housing assistance through their SSVF partners. As a result of these efforts, 40% of participants were placed into permanent housing. The pandemic was proof of what we could be done through coordinated efforts, but it prevented LAHSA from completing the count in 2021, which explains why there is a two-year gap in the numbers. Overall, homelessness grew in the County, but there was a 6.1% decline in the veteran community. LAHSA has and always will aim to reduce homelessness out in the communities.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Jim Zenner, Director, provided the following updates:

Patriotic Hall is currently open Tuesday through Thursday 8am - 4pm to the public and 1st and 3rd Wednesday until 8pm. Currently working with DMH to get a share of cost from them at 32% of \$1.5 million building budget. Engaged in discussions with Auditor-Controller to develop a solicitation for security and cleaning services to reduce costs as we ramp up to open the building Monday through Friday 8am - 5pm and remain open until 9p every Wednesday.

MVA has been working on creating a fee schedule for renting out Patriotic Hall to non-veteran County employees and outside, non-veteran serving organizations and revising the building guidelines to accommodate these new services. Veteran/military and other organizations that serve our target population to include family members and caregivers will not be charged.

There are currently 12 staff vacancies; actively interviewing for three (3) positions and the remaining nine (9) are in the HR process.

November 1st Board Agenda highlighted three (3) Board Motions mentioning MVA:

- Agenda item 12 - MVA began to explore an MOU with the Department of Aging and Disability around two-way referrals for veterans identified through Adult Protective Services and their food delivery services for veterans that are isolated and at high risk. MVA is actively working to enter into an affiliate agreement with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation to make LA County, a Hidden Heroes County in support of its 122k veteran caregivers. MVA reached

out to the Director of VISN 22 and Greater Los Angeles VA Medical Center to consider a partnership to extend services out to the Antelope and San Gabriel Valley areas.

- Agenda item 13 - MVA reached out to DHR for a consultation to the process of exploring partnerships necessary with stakeholders outlined in Motion, DOL, P3, ICMA, and Office of Deputy Assistant of the Secretary of Defense. MVA flagged several legislative opportunities for the County to pursue expanding eligibility to serve OTH and the active reserve component as well.
- Agenda item 16 – Director Zenner thanked all the following County Departments that participated in Operation Greenlight: Public Defender, Beaches and Harbor, Public Health, Probation, Human Resources, Public Works, Public Library, and ISD. Exploring funding opportunities for training of first responders regarding military culture.

SD townhalls will be delayed as MVA coordinates with VA to look at February/March timeframes. Requested that each SD commission working with the Board office to propose a venue, date, and time to MVA by end of 2022. MVA will coordinate logistics and will work with each SD to get help getting the word out to maximize participation.

Supervisor Barger will be holding the Annual Tribute to Veterans event on May 27th, 2023. Save the date is in progress.

Supervisor Hahn was in attendance for the grand opening of the Pico Rivera Library Veteran Resource Center available every Monday.

Supervisor Kuehl was recognized and thanked for her work on behalf of veterans, specifically around housing and suicide.

Board Chair Holly Mitchell attended VetDayLA and reaffirmed her support for the veteran community.

Supervisor Solis hosted a 2nd Annual Veteran Day event at PFC Obregon Park.

Battleship Iowa will be hosting Fleet Week on May 23rd-May 29th, 2023.

50th Anniversary of the end of Vietnam War “Welcome Home event” at Patriotic Hall on March 29th, 2023.

MVA is in the process of standing up a working group specific to transitioning service members to support the Board's latest directive specific to Skillbridge, the ETS-Sponsorship program.

Currently there are extensive efforts locally, state, and federal levels to explore: (1) excluding non-taxable veteran benefits from calculating income for AMI (2) examining the use of tax credits as it specifically relates to veteran housing.

MVA is currently working closely with CEO Legislative Affairs on several different bills aimed at increasing access and eligibility to OTH. The reserve component particularly along with expanding funding to the department from the VA through state contracts (up to 5 million for state of California).

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Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- LA Metro – Patricia Jackson-Kelley
- Commission Services; Commission structure, process upon entrance, and multiple Commissions working together to make a formal recommendation – Chi Szeto
- US Department of Labor (DOL), Women's Bureau – John Gutierrez
- Animal Care and Control; discounted registration fee for disabled veterans – Anthony Allman
- CALVET, Pathway to Citizenship – Joe Leal
- Community Colleges; veteran/student homelessness – Anthony Allman
- VA Uber Medical expanding – Joe Leal
- In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) – Joe Leal
- Homeless Initiative; benefits advocacy strategy – Anthony Allman

Good of the Order

Commissioner Joe Leal stated that he attended the Veterans Thanksgiving Appreciation Dinner yesterday at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall. It was very nice to see Director Zenner, Chief Deputy Stone, Commissioner Gutierrez, and other staff members of MVA. He will be heavily involved in volunteering where help is needed.

Commissioner Patricia Jackson-Kelley attended the USS Iowa Battleship on Veteran's Day for the special film screening for "Causeway." She also attended Marino Valley College and was a guest speaker for their Veteran's Day program. and I've never seen such reception long reception as a speaker. Ms. Jackson-Kelley attended the Board Meeting special concession for veterans. She served on the Committee for the Veterans Advocacy Group of America (VAGA) Thanksgiving Appreciation Dinner held at Patriotic Hall on November 15th; she was grateful to see all the hard work that came to fruition.

Chairman Anthony Allman stated that he woke up to some interesting news with regard to a new federal lawsuit at West Los Angeles VA, with reports from the LA Times, KCRW and NPR Morning Edition. He recommended to Google VA West LA and LA Times and the article should pop up there. Chair Allman added that he appreciated everyone's support with regard to the recommendation and he is excited by what the Commission is doing and he hopes to continue to do good work.

Commissioner John Gutierrez stated that he too attended the VAGA Thanksgiving Appreciation Dinner. Please join SD5 in December, for a Veteran and Family Appreciation Day at Pasadena City College; food will be provided. Thank you.

Commissioner Anderson stated that Supervisor Barger will be the honoree of the Homes for Families which give veterans an opportunity for affordable housing. There is a large development in Palmdale of 56 homes and a similar project will soon be approved in North Hollywood. The annual Military Ball was well attended with about 300 guests to include the Secretary, California Department of Veterans Affairs, Dr. Vito Imbasciani. Last, the mobile Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Antelope Valley, showcased 58,000 names of the fallen from Vietnam, which attracted thousands of visitors over the course of five days.

Chairman Allman adjourned the meeting at 3:42 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero
Executive Secretary
November 16, 2022