

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Jim Zenner
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, April 17, 2024

Present:

Commissioners

Anthony Allman
Dennis Anderson
Hugh Crooks
John Follmer
John Gutierrez
Jawana McFadden
Alfonso Noyola
Rocio Palmero
Chi Szeto

Absent:

Commissioners

Patricia Jackson-Kelley

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Jim Zenner, Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Executive Secretary

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Allman at 1:33 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Allman asked Vice Chair, John Follmer, 3rd District, to lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioner Follmer announced the Salute Armed Forces Everyday S.A.F.E. acknowledgment, requesting all active-duty service members and veterans to stand up during the flag salute. Vice Chair Follmer proceeded to lead The Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

Eight (8) Commissioners were at the meeting during roll call; a quorum was present. Commissioner Anderson later joined the meeting virtually at 1:42 p.m. Commissioner Jackson-Kelley was absent from the meeting.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Gutierrez to accept the Minutes for March 20, 2024, seconded by Commissioner Szeto. A roll call was conducted to accept the Minutes and the motion passed with unanimous votes.

Chairman Report

Chair Allman stated that the notice of meeting was sent out on April 12th at 12:00 p.m. via GovDelivery from MVA@subscriptions.lacounty.gov. To subscribe, please visit mva.lacounty.gov and click on the mail icon located on the top right of webpage.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (MVA) YouTube channel (@LACMVA) currently has 87 subscribers. All past Commission meetings are posted there and it's highly recommended to subscribe.

Chair Allman stated we have a new Vice Chair, John Follmer. The Chair and Vice Chair positions rotate on an annual basis where each supervisorial district will take turns having Chair positions. Chair Allman stated that we had one advanced registration public comment, and announced the name, but nobody responded in person or online. Chairman Allman said anyone in the public can sign up in advance on the notice of meeting link and have the option to sign up on the same day in person by filling out the public comment card. Since there are no public comments, we will move to the next agenda item.

Guest Speakers

Carla Cortez, Director, Loyola Marymount University (LMU) Extension, spoke about the Vet2Peer, Peer Specialist Training Program. Ms. Cortez explained how Access LMU, which provides adult learners and non-traditional students access to the LMU experience, is helping veterans.

Ms. Cortez explained that California is facing a behavioral health workforce shortage and since 2019 has embarked on massive investment and policy reforms to re-envision the state's mental health and substance abuse system. In response, LMU Extension's Vet2Peer program seeks to expand the peer workforce in California's Public Mental Health System by training hundreds of veterans as Peer Support Specialists. The program is a combination of workforce partners which include JVS SoCal, Mental Health Partners, Employer Partners, and Veteran Service Organizations. Ms. Cortez said that after peer support certification LMU considers the next step which are careers as substance abuse disorder counselors.

Ms. Cortez said the Vet2Peer Program is approved by CalMHSA and open to all California Veterans with lived experience at no cost. The training meets the training requirements for California Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists. LMU's Vet2Peer program includes specialized curriculum to address the unique needs of the veteran community and to ensure access and transformative impact. The Peer Specialist training is a 12–14-week course led by instructor's online and in-person, has assistance with exam fees for state certification, and, since 2019, has enrolled over 500 veterans in Vet2Peer.

Ms. Cortez explained that the Vet2Peer courses are all taught by veterans. Vet2Peer graduates are working throughout the community at Cal State University, U.S. Vets, America's Job Center, California Community Colleges, VA, VPAN and LA County, Department of Mental Health, as well as various smaller non-profits who are serving veterans.

Chair Allman thanked Ms. Cortez for the presentation and Commissioner Gutierrez for bringing this to our attention and also thanked Commissioner McFadden for introducing Carla Cortez. He mentioned this being a timely presentation due to the severe shortage of social workers to address the needs of homeless veterans. The need to adapt to the veteran workforce and training at the peer support level will be important moving forward. He asked Ms. Cortez if other Colleges or Universities did this type of training. Ms. Cortez explained that LMU Extension is the only university that is CalMHSA approved. The Vet2Peer program is unique in that it gives veterans a University experience along with Peer Support Specialist certification.

Vice Chair Follmer said he appreciates the consistency of the program through the pandemic and how the LMU program assisted VPAN. He said it was remarkable to see the caliber of veterans coming from the LMU program. He reiterated his appreciation for everything LMU's program is doing.

Chair Allman thanked Carla Cortez.

VAC Logo Discussion

Chair Allman showed slides and explained the VAC logo options. He then asked the commissioners to vote for two logos. He allowed a public comment while the votes were being tallied. Chair Allman stated logo options 1,3,5 will be the final 3 choices and we will come to a decision at the next meeting.

Public Comments

Jay Morales, Veteran, former Commissioner, spoke about a Memorial Day event on Memorial Day, Monday, May 27th. He also spoke of his history and respect he has for Patriotic Hall. He informed of a 101-year-old Veteran who is a Nagasaki bomb witness, POW, and survivor. He gave the Commission a Memorial Day agenda.

Chair Allman thanked Jay Morales for his comment.

Bylaws Review

Chair Allman said this is a good opportunity to review the bylaws and think about what is working and what could work better. He said he thinks every time we have a new commissioner, we should have another discussion about the bylaws because it gives the new commissioner and chance to learn about them and gives the other commissioners and chance to make amendments. Article 2A says "persons appointed should have been veterans." He believes it should say "should be veterans." Also, Article 2B states "Each commissioner will serve a term length a deemed appropriate by the supervisor which appointed him or her." He said when he was appointed Commissioner, he received a document saying the terms are two (2) years. He agreed with the limit and believed the 2-year limit should be stated in the bylaws.

Chair Allman talked about Article 6A regarding timing for the meeting according to the bylaws is set for 1:30 p.m. and may want to make that more flexible.

Commissioner Noyola said that the quorum is set at 6 because the total number of commissioners is 10.

Commissioner McFadden said the title Veterans Advisory Commission, on the logo, does not say Military and wondered if that was ever brought to the attention of the Commission. Chair Allman thought it was set by ordinance and Chapter 3.60 says it is created as the Veteran's Advisory Commission.

Chair Allman said anyone who wants to propose an amendment please let the executive body know at least 2 weeks prior to the next meeting and we can discuss those changes at the next meeting.

MVA Organizational Structure

Chair Allman talked about the MVA organizational structure and mentioned that we had added a category for female veterans. He asked Commissioner Palmero if she wanted to comment.

Commissioner Palmero spoke about female veterans being a growing population whose specific needs should be addressed. Since female veterans needs are different, they need to be recognized and supported.

Chair Allman said the Org Chart lays out functional areas for the department under different directorates. The Org Chart is an ongoing discussion but should be firmed up to present to the Board of Supervisors.

Commissioner Noyola asked what specific groups may be excluded by them not being listed on the Org Chart. Chair Allman said we are purely making recommendations, but it was not an exhaustive list. Commissioner Follmer commented that for oversight this org chart looks much better than what we had. He said it will help us focus attention on specific areas.

Commissioner Palmero said we are trying to capture everything we can and capture the demographics that are growing and in need. Chair Allman said this is not a conversation to be rushed and we can review the functional areas. Chair Allman asked if the directorates should be staffed by functional teams and not supervisorial districts. Commissioner Crooks stated a functional team can work much better than by supervisorial districts. Commissioner Follmer agreed that

functional teams would work better and make sense. Commissioner McFadden said consistency of efforts and application amongst all the districts is the most accurate and effective way. Commissioner Szeto and Commissioner Gutierrez said that they wanted to hear from the Director about what is working or not.

Director Zenner said that we operate by field office, so we have field offices across the county that serve veterans close to where they live. We are looking to organize ourselves as teams because sometimes when you separate by supervisorial districts you get territorial attitudes which may not be helpful. It's complex and we don't yet have a perfect balance as a county family.

Commissioner McFadden asked if we need to have a report regarding what the needs of the supervisorial district are. Director Zenner said it is supervised by District with the exception of 3. Keith Neisen supervises 5 and oversees the San Fernando Valley so everything North of Mulholland and Joaquin Enriquez supervises the South. When they meet with their teams they could discuss.

Chair Allman said we should continue to discuss the functional areas and revise until we have something we want. Director Zenner said he thinks the additional layer of deputy directors would cover the ground we need to cover to allow us to assign some of the high-level projects to deputy directors, for example, communication with the VA would fall under Deputy Director, Veterans Affairs. Also, some of the state military leadership things could be covered by the Deputy Director, Military Affairs.

Chair Allman said we will continue to have this conversation.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Director Zenner said we have a MOU with aging and disability for older adults, adults with disabilities and seniors. MVA developed a staff SOP outlining Aging Veterans Referral Program on April 5th. MVA received 5 referrals in March connecting aging veterans to veteran and community resources. We see the needs for aging veterans are going to overwhelm the system in the near future.

The Department would like to thank all the county departments and VA partners who participated in the justice involved program. Everyone at the table learned a lot. He is looking forward to working on the report back to the Board and sharing it with the Commission.

MVA Commissioned through Arts and Culture preserving the National Veterans Mural at the West LA VA. Since it has a lot of meaning to the community, we looked at the cost of preservation which would be \$300,000 with some other items that may increase the cost. If there are inquiries or comments from the community you can reach out to our Public Information Officer (PIO) at pio@mva.lacounty.gov. We are going to be keeping a record of the feedback from the community.

Chair Allman thanked Director Zenner for the update. He commented that we could get a briefing from Arts and Culture on that scope of work whenever scheduling allows.

Agenda Items for Future Meetings

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| 1. | Arts and Culture | National Veterans Mural,
preservation | John Follmer |
| 2. | Veterans Affairs (VA) | Veterans Housing in West LA | Commissioner Anderson |

Commissioner Follmer encouraged everyone to recognize that May is mental health awareness month.

Good of the Order

Commissioner Crooks, SD 1 – Nothing.

Commissioner Palmero, SD 1 – I have nothing.

Commissioner McFadden, SD2 - Thanked the Director of MVA and Supervisor Holly Mitchell for the Veteran Town Hall on April 10th and wanted to encourage them throughout the county.

Chair Allman, SD3 – Nothing to add.

Commissioner John Follmer, SD 3 – Nothing to add.

Commissioner Szeto, SD4 – Hopefully we can connect with the VA to address the thoughts and concerns for Building 306.

Commissioner Noyola, SD4 – Encourage veterans to take a walking tour of the West VA Campus.

Commissioner Gutierrez, SD5 – Commissioner Gutierrez thanked former Commissioner Morales for sharing the history and reminded everyone that on April 26th there is a women's suicide prevention event.

Commissioner Anderson, SD5 – Nothing to add.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:01 p.m.

Todd Tortorici, Management Analyst
Administrative Services Division
April 17, 2024