

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for the February 9, 2022 meeting held virtually,
representing the meeting for Bronx

Members

Present:

Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)

Mercedes Elias (Queens)

John Rowan (Queens)

Joe Bello (Bronx)

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)

Jennifer Kamrowski (Manhattan)

Absent:

Charles Hernandez (Bronx)

Peter Kauffmann (Queens)

Andrew Walcott (Brooklyn)

Paul Dietrich (Staten Island)

Note: Awaiting board member to be appointed by Speaker's Office.

Minutes

- Wendy McClinton (Chair) commenced the meeting at 6:00 pm.

Thanked everyone for attending, started meeting by introducing the new chair of the veteran's committee on the New York City Council, Councilmember Robert Holden. Councilmember Holden provided opening remarks. Turns it over to Craig Caruana from his office to discuss legislation to protect VFW's, American Legions or any veteran service organization owned property from facing fines from the Department of Buildings, giving them 120 days grace period to correct the problem. Additionally, legislation will be re-introduced for small business owners applying for a city contract to be able to designate themselves as a veteran-owned business on the application. Link to the bill Chair Holden will be reintroducing in the new Council <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/Legislation.aspx>

Advisory board introduced themselves on the call.

Old business: There is no old business to discuss.

Presentation:

Chair Wendy McClinton introduces Commissioner Hendon to share Department of Veteran Services (DVS) updates.

Commissioner Hendon recognizes new Veteran's Commission Chair Holden. Before briefing wanted to provide contact information for DVS: phone: 212-416-5250, email: connect@veterans.nyc.gov, social media: @nycveterans, website: nyc.gov/vets.

Three primary goals of DVS for 2022:

- (1) Expanding benefit access
- (2) Increasing entrepreneurship and employment opportunities
- (3) Increasing the number of transitioning service members that live, learn and work in New York City

Commissioner noted that mental health for veterans is an enduring task for the year.

The below questions are issues the Veteran's Advisory Board asked for an update:

- (1) Status of VA claims processed by DVS: Amauri Espinal, Director of Community Services briefed. Resource to apply: nyc.gov/vetclaims.
 - a. *How many have been processed?* 226 claims have been submitted by DVS
 - b. *How many have been approved?* 117 claims have been processed by the VA
 - c. Additionally, New York State Department of Veterans Services provides Quality Assurance for claims submitted by NYC DVS
 - d. *What is the average duration for processing?* Presently approximately 160 days give or take five to six months for VA to make final decision on the claim but can vary based on how long it takes to gather evidence.
 - e. *How many staff members are processing claims?* NYC DVS has three full time staff members who are submitting claims in addition to one full time staff member who supervises the claims team.
 - f. *What is the average disability percentage received and how much funding for approved claims has been recognized by the city?* DVS has not received outcomes data from state division of veteran's service. Once the data is received it will be published on nyc.gov/vetreports.
- (2) Employment efforts: Jason Loughran briefed. Resource: nyc.gov/vetjobs.
 - a. *What is DVS doing to ensure gainful employment for veterans in New York City?* nyc.gov/vetjobs has a number of resources, Service to Service to help veterans receive mentorship for roles in city government, and Empire Vets which is a new employment tool through VetConnect Pro (nyc.gov/vetconnectpro). 55-a program helps veterans with certified disabilities to enter NYC government bypassing the civil service exam.
- (3) Housing: Dana Rock, Director of Housing and Support Services briefed. Resource: nyc.gov/vethousing.
 - a. *Status of housing vouchers administered through the HUD-VASH program?* Since piloting the Continuum program in 2017, have successfully housed 259 veterans.

- b. *Is there a possibility to establish preference for Housing Connect in Mitchell Llama housing for veterans?* There is a preference for qualifying veterans, Mitchell Lama Veteran Preference eligibility- <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/services/section-85-definition-of-veteran.pdf>.
- c. *For veterans currently in homeless shelters, what is the plan to move them to permanent housing?* Veteran peer coordinators at DVS are at shelters working alongside other agencies and providers to get veterans connected to eligible programs.

(4) Veterans on Campus program: Commissioner Hendon briefed. Resource:

nyc.gov/vetstudents.

- a. *What are you doing to recruit more student veterans to NYC?* Working to attract active-duty personnel to start going to school in NYC remotely utilizing Tuition Assistance at CUNY. Working with MEPS at Fort Hamilton to make personnel enlisting aware of the benefits in NYC. For current students, there are a number of offerings available.
 - i. NY state has the Veteran Tuition Award Program – state’s version of the Post 9-11 GI Bill.
 - ii. Veteran Re-training Assistance Program – if GI benefits have been exhausted and veteran is in between jobs it will cover up to 12 months of vocational training.

Wendy opens the floor for questions.

Public Comments: The following comments were submitted to the board during the virtual meeting and were addressed throughout the course of the meeting. Both questions and responses are provided.

Kevin Meggett: Director of Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program at BVSJ - would NYC entertain erecting buildings specifically for veteran housing the same way they do for affordable housing?

- **Response**: Commissioner responded that if it is project-based VASH with the federal government, it would be in coordination with HUD and the VA. If the question is directed at the city directing funds to it, the Commissioner will flag this concern to the new housing commissioner to get feedback. The new regional director has recently been appointed and is a military spouse and has significant involvement with project-based VASH.

Melissa Delort: Has a case with a Vietnam veteran in Gowanus housing who needs respite for services – will follow up with Dana separately. Within NYCHA wants military families are recognized. Many do not know their rights to the units once family member who entered the military returns home. Discussed program called Single Stop – do we know if there is a question on the application designating person applying as a veteran? This would enable the veteran to access resources.

- Response: Commissioner responded that Single Stop is not directly city related so will look into it. All city agencies must ask some sort of veteran identifier question. As far as NYCHA, Commissioner Hendon just met with Danny Barber to get stronger outreach to veterans through tenant leadership. Monique Porter from DVS also responded that DVS will make home visits to make sure veterans are taken care of.

Nadinea: Daughter of a Vietnam veteran with Agent Orange disability. Self and daughter have been tested and registered with Spina Bifida, there is no help for children of veterans with these health issues. What kind of help is being considered for children over the age of 26? In addition, what about children in foster care for parents who are combat veterans and deemed incompetent?

- Response: Commissioner responds that as a city agency, we can only do our part to close the gap on government resources. From the city, Dependent Indemnity Compensation is available if veteran passes away due to Agent Orange. Working with Department of Health and the VA if Agent Orange wasn't listed as contributing factor of death to still allow dependents to get benefits from the VA. Paul Vallone responded there is new effort to fund relief for caregivers. Jason Loughran responded him an Amauri will reach out to her to assist with claim.

Wendy paused questions to introduce Council Representative Vickie Paladino from District 19 who sits on the Veterans Committee, who introduces herself and gives remarks. Questions from the public resume.

Steven Merced: Suggests employment for veterans through Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC), who currently isn't issuing any new TLC plates. Looking to see if veterans can get an exemption to get a TLC license plate for additional employment opportunity.

- Response: Commissioner Hendon acknowledged they have been working on this as it was previously brought up. Will speak with TLC Commissioner and has brought it up to the new administration.

Marleen "Molly" Levi: (*submitted via chat*) What are the current stats on veteran suicide and what role does DVS play in helping prevent suicide?

- Response: Commissioner Hendon responded they need updated information for accurate numbers. For previous data covering 2013 – 2018, 2-2.5% of veterans committed suicide nationally, in NYC it is 0.3-0.8%. Rate is lower in NYC, working with Substance And Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to ensure it stays lower.

Lisa Millsaps Muhammad Graham: (*submitted via chat*) Are there any services for meals on wheels? Or for veterans with dementia?

- Response: Commissioner Hendon responded, unsure of specific meals on wheels program but nyc.gov/vetfood is where any veterans in need can access food programs. Black Veterans for Social Justice also distribute Hello Fresh meals weekly. Partner with Dept of Probation for additional food resources. Dept for the Aging has Meals on Wheels for those with special needs. Cassandra Alvarez included information for God's Love We Deliver in the chat.

Monique Porter: Know that DVS has training for claims, wants to know what training BVSJ has for filing claims?

- Response: Wendy responded through HVRP program counselors are certified through NY state to process claims.

Michael: Veterans in NYC are not able to claim tax exemption unless they are combat veterans. Would like update on COLA for city workers who do not qualify for the tax exemption.

- Response: Paul Vallone responded that the Commissioner is fighting for the exemption at Albany. The new administration will be informed about the exemption to address and bring back to the forefront. Joe Bello added the state passed the bill and the city had to buy in on it. Asked the finance council to see how many veterans were using the exemption and this can be addressed with new council for veterans on the council.

Jason Cooper: Housing disenfranchisement, needs help getting decent housing. Makes too much money to qualify for Mitchell Llama.

- Response: Commissioner Hendon responded they are actively monitoring the price of the 421a housing to help veterans get a unit outside of the housing application process. However, would not be eligible to be rent stabilized. Nyc.gov/vetladder has resources to help based on various position within the housing process.

Kathy Dean: wants to stay in NYC.

Doug Williams: Councilmember's voted unanimously on Cold War property tax exemption in Brooklyn and were looking to get other boards to vote as well.

John Rowan mentioned getting veterans on all community boards.

Wendy stated that the next meeting we will follow up on any questions that were emailed in.

Meeting adjourned.

Next meeting: 6 pm April 13, 2021

Submitted by: Mercedes Elias, Secretary