

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for the October 19, 2022 meeting held hybrid, virtually and in person at
1 Centre St (1 Centre St, New York, NY 10007); Room 2208
representing the meeting for Manhattan

Members

Present:

Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)
John Rowan (Queens)
Linda Ollis (Staten Island)
Joe Bello (Bronx)

Mercedes Elias (in person - Queens)
Todd Haskins (Manhattan)
Paul Dietrich (Staten Island)

Absent:

Charles Hernandez (Bronx)
Andrew Walcott (Brooklyn)

Peter Kauffmann (Queens)
Jennifer Kamrowski (Manhattan)

Note: Newly appointed board member Linda Ollis attends, Mayoral appointee and Gold Star family member.

Still awaiting board appointment from council.

Minutes

- Wendy McClinton (Chair) commenced the meeting at 6:00 pm.
- Chair McClinton goes over the agenda. All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience. Wendy has members of DVS introduce themselves as well.

Presentation:

Chair turns meeting over to Commissioner Hendon to introduce Bruce Tucker, Interim Medical Center Director for NY Harbor. Mr. Tucker provides following updates:

- (1) New Executive Director for Harbor Healthcare has been appointed -Tim Graham coming from Washington DC Medical Center where he currently serves as Deputy Director.
- (2) Elevators in Manhattan facility are almost all complete.
- (3) Opening face to face services for primary care and specialty care, with the goal of achieving pre pandemic levels.
- (4) Picking up on outreach events, reach out to Lyn Johnson if you would like attendance from VA staff.
- (5) Increasing hiring to improve service – nurses, etc.
- (6) Plan to improve phone call response in clinics. Bringing on 25 assistants to help.

Dr. Balavenkatesh Kanna presents – he is the new Director for the Bronx VA. Echoed many of the same sentiments as Mr. Tucker. The Bronx VA is opening up an extension to the spinal cord injury unit. Looking to continue to modernize the facilities and hoping to hire additional nursing staff.

Chair opens the floor for any questions for the VA Directors (included below in public comments).

Chair thanks both Mr. Tucker and Dr. Kanna for their briefing and turns the floor to Elizabeth Artz from the NYC Council Veterans Committee to brief oversight hearing on December 13th on Veteran Treatment Courts. Chair then turns it over to Commissioner James Hendon.

Commissioner thanked Mr. Tucker and Dr. Kanna for their brief. Commissioner has new DVS members introduce themselves then briefs events for Veterans Day throughout the city, food resources, housing assistance and open positions at DVS. Opens floor for questions (included below in public comments). Cleopatra Brown briefs local veteran's day events. James Fitzgerald briefs information regarding Community Boards. Ashton Stewart briefs resources provided by MJHS. Martin Krongold briefed resources provided by Black Veterans for Social Justice. Staff from the Intrepid Museum briefed events and resources available. Vietnam Veterans of America briefs mental health resources.

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

Ashton Stewart: Commented about a patient that was received at Bronx VA requiring palliative care and he was not able to gain access to his benefits and commended Bronx VA staff for assisting in process.

Tim Pena: Is there anything we can do to help veterans at Borden Ave expedite approval for them to receive their benefits?

- **Response:** Bruce Tucker responded there is staff at Borden Ave who will work with veterans to help them apply for benefits. In addition, with approval of the PACT ACT, veterans who were previously denied benefits would be eligible for certain benefits.

Wendy McClinton: Why is there a push to move veterans to telehealth?

- **Response:** Bruce Tucker responded that it will be offered but they are also offering face to face as much as possible and whatever the veteran is comfortable with. Is in favor of in person visits over telehealth. Dr. Kanna said face to face is preferable.

Paul Dietrich: Question about the Dwyer program, what is the timeline for the rollout of the funding?

- **Response:** Commissioner Hendon responded that all Dwyer money has just come in and they have until end of calendar year 2023 to distribute. DVS is creating a process for requests for those who would like to apply to submit a proposal.

Kevin Meggett: Issue with housing and doesn't feel enough has been improved in 10 months. Would like half priced Metrocards for veterans and city housing for veterans in addition to a city shelter.

- Response: Commissioner Hendon responded that they are trying to fill the gap at the city and state level to the federal level.

End of public comments.

Meeting adjourned.

Next meeting: TBD

Submitted by: Mercedes Elias, Secretary