

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for the June 7, 2023, meeting held hybrid (virtually and in person at Sgt Michael Labetti VFW Post 2159) representing the meeting for Staten Island

Members

Present:

Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)	Linda Ollis (Staten Island)
Mercedes Elias (Queens)	John Rowan (Queens)
Paul Dietrich (Staten Island)	Todd Haskins (Manhattan)

Absent:

Charles Hernandez (Bronx)	Andrew Walcott (Brooklyn)
Jennifer Kamrowski (Manhattan)	Peter Kauffmann (Queens)

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 both in person and on the call. Began meeting by having Veterans Advisory Board members introduce themselves and turned it over elected officials or their representatives. Present was Elena Brady representing council member David Carr from Staten Island, Umamah Masum from Senator Scarcella-Spanton's office (Chair of Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee), and Craig Caruana from council member Robert Holden's office (Chair of NYC Veterans Committee).

Old business: Mr. Caruana stated that council member Holden has asked for a member designated budget for veterans since it is likely DVS budget will be cut. Council members have submitted individuals to fill open VAB board positions and they are currently undergoing a background check. To follow up on the last meeting, a meeting was held with CUNY and DVS to see how student veterans can be assisted, largest concern was cost of living and council is looking for possible solutions to it.

Question from in person attendees:

Q: Housing allowance for veterans being lower than other boroughs.

A: Commissioner Hendon explained how Staten Island is considered Perth Amboy and not considered as a New York City location, but this is decided on a Dept of Defense level. If they try to adjust the Staten Island rate, it will reduce the amount given to the other boroughs. Paul

Dietrich mentioned how this restricts student veterans from going to school in the area, even though the largest Coast Guard base is located here.

Presentation:

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

Dr. Lauren D’Mello - Executive Director for Care Coordination and Mental Health discusses new hire for burials care coordinator, opening on claims team as Manager of Clinical Services.

Elen Greeley – Assistant Commissioner for Partnerships and Strategic Engagements discusses previous and upcoming events, gave update on RFP process for the Dwyer fund applications.

Commissioner Hendon – Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services briefed that DVS now has approval to process discretionary contracts (\$20,000 or less) based on veterans’ initiatives.

Paul Vallone – Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs, discussed efforts to get veterans to sit on local community boards and increase funding to allocate to veteran causes.

The Commissioner opens the floor for questions.

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

Submitted virtually: If an organization submits for a discretionary contract for less than \$20,000, are they able to get multiple contracts approved?

- Response: Commissioner responded that since they are beginning the process, they want to ensure that they are able to grant as many as possible.

Wendy McClinton: How can non-profit organizations better help the veteran population?

- Response: Commissioner stated to connect through VetConnect, volunteer, and ask if someone has served. Elen Greeley stated they are looking for volunteers for the Veteran Voices project and the Hello Fresh food deliveries.

Joe Bello: Can Commissioner given update if Dwyer funds have been issued?

- Response: Elen Greeley stated she has drafted RFP for review then forwarding it to Mayor’s Office of Contracts. They are rolling it out in a limited way – one with VFW in Staten Island with Veterans Yoga Project and Columbia University in their equine therapy program.

Second question: How long until we find out how many veterans have gotten involved in their community boards?

- Response: Commissioner stated there is not a timeline yet, they have been focused on strengthening relationships with the boards first. Paul Vallone stated there is no existing regulation mandating anyone to get the data and that their goal is to increase awareness and possibilities for veterans to get engaged in the civic process. John Rowan suggested engaging with veteran organizations at local universities to help with outreach.

Chair McClinton then introduces presenters for the evening. Ashton Stewart from MJHS briefed about medical nexus letters. Paul Dietrich mentioned the need for non-profits to renew their tax exempt status and the Commissioner explained why the process is in place.

The NYC Department of Veterans' Services can be reached at www.nyc.gov/vets, 212-416-5250, connect@veterans.nyc.gov, and / or [@nycveterans](#) on social media.

Meeting adjourned.

Next meeting: 6 pm August 9, 2023 in the Bronx.

Submitted by: Mercedes Elias, Secretary