



REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, June 11, 2024 – 6:00 pm

CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME / Vice-President Nicholas Rusanoff

Meeting called to order at 6:02PM.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Vice-President Nicholas Rusanoff, Commissioners Bill Barnickel, James Boatman, Hanley Chan, Prince Jordan Kelly, Darya Kutovaya, Jenny Perez, John Reissenweber

ABSENT: President Jason Chittavong (excused), Commissioners: Joseph Baba (excused), Deborah Dacumos (excused), Courtney Ellington (absent), Ikram Mansori (excused)

Quorum present.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice President Rusanoff led attendees in reciting Pledge of Allegiance.

SET AGENDA

VP Rusanoff called for motion to approve agenda.

Motion / Second / All in Favor / None Opposed

Motion passed. Agenda set.

Absent: Baba, Chittavong, Dacumos, Ellington, Mansori

PRESENTATION – MAYORAL CERTIFICATE OF HONOR TO SF VETERAN

- Presentation of a Mayoral Certificate of Honor to U.S. Navy veteran William Clift, in recognition of his outstanding service to the San Francisco veteran community. This action was approved by vote at the May 14 VAC meeting. Since Mr. Clift could not



attend the meeting in person, Commissioner Rusanoff said he looked forward to presenting the certificate to him very soon. He further commented that Mr. Clift continues to do great work for veterans, and he is grateful for the Commission's help in getting this honor.

COMMUNICATIONS

CVSO Report:

CVSO acting director could not attend the meeting. The May report was posted to the VAC website.

Secretary Report:

- An inquiry was made to the IT Department about the feasibility of broadcasting VAC meetings on SFGovTV. The secretary will keep the Commission updated on progress.
- Business cards for new commissioners should be ready soon. The secretary will bring business cards to the August 13 meeting. If a commissioner would like cards before then, please email the commission secretary to schedule a pick-up time.
- The secretary reminded commissioners about usefulness of checking the VAC website. All meeting documents and presentations are posted to the website.

Supervisor Reports:

- District 4: Commissioner Barnickel provided an update about veteran articles in District 4 newsletters. Commissioner Hanley Chan was featured in the June newsletter. The July newsletter will feature an 85-year-old Marine who served in the Korean War. Commissioner Barnickel further noted that many veterans are not receiving benefits because they are not aware of their eligibility or how to apply. He said each article includes his contact information as a resource for veterans.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Call for motion to approve May 14, 2024, regular meeting minutes.

Motion / Second / All in Favor. Motion passed. Minutes approved.

Absent: Baba, Chittavong, Dacumos, Ellington, Mansori



NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Perez led a discussion about idea of VAC expanding its “powers and duties” to include the direct issuance of recognition awards to members of the San Francisco veterans community. Awards would be independent of the SF Mayor and BOS. This action requires an amendment to the City Administrative Code, which is done through an ordinance by the BOS. Commissioner Perez will meet with BOS staff to gather information about this process and will report back to the Commission.

Discussion included the following points:

- Commissioner Perez noted that currently the VAC may request certificates of honor from the Mayor and BOS. While these acknowledgements are appreciated and prestigious, they are not always timely or comprehensive. VAC issuing its own awards will ensure more veterans will receive a prompt and well-deserved acknowledgement for their service and contributions. It was further noted that including awards in the VAC administrative code will strengthen the commission’s role and relevance and empower the Commission to directly honor and celebrate veterans and enhance the Commission’s ability to support and advocate for veterans’ needs. Commissioner Perez noted that her next step is to meet with a supervisor’s staff to get their thoughts about this proposal. Following that meeting, Commissioner Perez will report back to the Commission at a future meeting. At the conclusion of Commissioner Perez’s comments, Vice-President Rusanoff asked if any commissioners had feedback to share.
- Commissioner Reissenweber said it sounded like a good change and he would like to assist in any way he can.
- Commissioner Barnickel said it is an outstanding idea and it has his full support. He recommended making certificates professional looking similar to Mayor certificates.
- Commissioner Chan agreed it is a good idea, however he asked if any other commissions have done it. Commissioner Rusanoff responded that the Arts Commission issues awards and Commissioner Perez cited City College among others on her list. Commissioner Chan noted Arts Commission and City College are chartered. He recommended asking the city attorney to look into this to see if it’s something an advisory commission can do.
- Commissioner Perez noted San Francisco did not have a housing priority for veterans when other cities did. Following that example, there are other cities with veterans commissions that provide certificates of recognition and VAC can mirror their way of doing recognition.



- Commissioner Rusanoff recalled a discussion from the Commission's January meeting about moving VAC from advisory to chartered. He commented this could be a first step in that direction.
- Commissioner Barnickel recommended that Commissioner Perez meet with Supervisor Peskin's staff. However, it was noted she can schedule a meeting with the staff of any one of the city's supervisors.

Discussion concluded with Commissioner Perez saying that she will schedule a meeting with a supervisor's staff and then bring information back to the Commission for the August meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

Follow up to last month's meeting discussion about the two legislative bills below:

- CA AB 46: Personal Income Taxes: Exclusion: Military Services Retirement and Surviving Spouse Benefit Payment Act.
- SB 1124: Deceptive practices: Service Members and Veterans. Bill was introduced by CA Senator Menjivar. The goal is to stop predatory business practices targeting veterans. Bill is still on the senate floor.
- Commissioner Chan said he and Commissioner Jordan attended the All Hands meeting of the California State Commanders Veterans Council (CSCVC) in Sacramento. Both bills were discussed during the meeting. He commented that, due to budgetary reasons, SB 1124 did not pass Appropriations. Commissioner Jordan added that senators spoke with them after the meeting and explained in more detail the budget challenges faced by the state. Commissioner Jordan recommended the VAC continue to show support for the bills and encourage that bills be passed.
- Commissioner Rusanoff volunteered to draft a support letter for SB 1124 for the Commission's August meeting. Commissioner Chan asked if draft letter would be addressed to the BOS. After discussion, that was confirmed. A letter to BOS and/or Mayor can be posted to VAC website and then shared with other organizations, which will raise awareness about the bill.
- Public Comment:
 - Speaker 1: Mitchell Weller, comments included: He mentioned both bills can be accomplished in a budget neutral or budget positive means. All CVSOs are funded through taxpayer dollars, however in many cases these benefits are provided to the veteran in cash. There may be a way to charge some very small



fee that wipes out the market for these predatory practices. He noted that he personally referred veterans to these services because CVSOs are drastically under prepared to manage the claims they are dealing with. He recommended a charge as low as \$100 to prepare those claims on a contingency basis as long as it is supported in the law. Additionally, if a veteran is getting disability benefits, especially at 100% level, that does reduce potentially the amount their pensions are taxed. Alternatively, it provides them two sources of income, full disability plus pension, so the amount of consumer spending they can engage in within the state is drastically increased.

- Speaker 2: Christopher Kline. Comments included: He spoke about deceptive practices addressed in SB 1124. He said any time you have that, it's known as voice and phone technology. A small percentage of politicians are doing the schemes and that's where you'll see pushback. He shared further comments when meeting opened to "general public comment."

GOOD WELFARE

This is the opportunity for members of the Veterans Affairs Commission to share special thanks and congratulatory remarks for the good welfare taking place in the veteran community.

- Commissioner Barnickel congratulated Commissioner Rusanoff for completing the San Francisco Escape from Alcatraz triathlon over the weekend.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- On behalf of Commissioner Dacumos, the commission secretary shared news about the art exhibit **Courage** by Elaine Antonio Bordeaux. The exhibit will be at the Philippines Consulate from July 8 to July 19, and include a sculpture of Filipina war hero Magdalena Leones, the only Asian silver star awardee for heroism during World War II. Further details will be shared with the commission by email.
- The commission secretary received an email from a staff member of the San Francisco Legion of Honor. The email advised that plans are underway for the Legion's one-hundred-year anniversary celebration on November 11, 2024. If commissioners would like to be included in planning details, please contact the commission secretary.
- Commissioner Barnickel shared an update about the WWII veteran honored during the commission's May meeting. In August the veteran will be honored with a Congressional Gold Medal. The award will be presented by a Zoom link from Washington D.C. to the



veteran's home. Once a date is confirmed, the veteran's family will send a Zoom link to the commission secretary. The secretary will share the link with all commissioners, so those that would like to may attend this important and moving award ceremony.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Speaker 1: Christopher Kline. Mr. Kline shared a handout with the commission. His comments included: He first spoke about the importance of commission members regularly attending meetings. He said if a member misses three meetings in a row, excused or unexcused, it should be reported to either the Mayor or BOS, whichever is the member's appointing authority. He added it's not fair to anyone if members aren't showing up, and said this topic came up earlier today during the Board of Supervisors meeting. He then spoke about the handout he shared with commissioners. He said it is a draft resolution and it's very important that this commission takes the draft and meets with the BOS to make it a final draft. He said document mentions an incident that happened in 1978 or 1979 which led to PTSD being officially recognized in 1980. Right now, there are veterans and non-veterans out there not acting like themselves. He said it is voice and phone technology and it is very concerning. He said when you see a veteran not acting like themselves it's because their base level is higher because of the technology, we want to lower that base level so they can get the right treatment at Swords to Plowshares or VA hospital. He said the next step is to present the draft resolution to every veteran organization and make it important that the Board of Supervisors, mayor and senators take ownership of this so there can be peace and a community again. Mr. Kline concluded his comments by saying he would be available after the meeting for questions.
- Speaker 2: Mitchell Weller. Comments included: He said San Francisco and California have massively out spent the tax base they have for almost every form of funding. And veterans' rights and veterans' issues are one of those things that self-fund through federal funding when properly handled but, also prevent a lot more community issues. He said he has talked to a lot of people that have dedicated their lives to veterans justice court diversion programs and all sorts of different things where vets encounter things that alter or permanently disrupt their lives. Things like drug addiction, things like criminal convictions. There are so many programs out there that are funded elsewhere outside of the state, not by taxpayer dollars, that are always available to address these things. He mentioned that one issue he intends to bring to the Commission soon is veterans deportation. There are many veterans that have served an entire term of service – three to five years – who did not get their certification of honorable service while they were in the service. As a result, they were discharged and believed they were citizens rather than green card holders. Then they would get convicted of non-violent crimes and deported from the United States back to a country they haven't been to in a long time, ultimately



being drafted into cartels or other criminal organizations to survive. This is an issue we can directly address. It has no budgetary cost. Please keep it in mind.

As there were no other speakers, public comment was closed.

HONOR REPORT AND MOMENT OF SILENCE

In memory of American service members in all wars and conflicts who made the ultimate sacrifice. We also remember the passing of homeless veterans, veterans who died while awaiting approval of benefits, and suicides within the veteran and armed service communities. Additionally, during the month of June of this 80th year commemoration we especially remember veterans of the June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:48pm.

Reminder: The Commission is in recess for the month of July.

The next regular meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission will be held in-person at 6:00pm in Room 416 at San Francisco City Hall on Tuesday, August 13, 2024.

Links and meeting documents can be found on the Veterans Affairs Commission website.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Murphy
Commission Secretary
Veterans Affairs Commission

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Veterans Affairs Commission Meetings:

General meetings of the SFVAC are scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on the second Tuesday of every month, with the exception for the month of July, when there is no scheduled SF VAC meeting, and are held in Room 416 in City Hall.

Meeting confirmation, and specific announcement of general meetings are made via public posting of the Meeting Agenda as required by law, at least 72 hours prior to scheduled meetings. Agendas for SFVAC meetings (and archived meeting minutes) are available on the SFVAC Pages of the City of San Francisco website, and are also available for public view and inspection at the 5th Floor Government Information Center at the San Francisco Public Library, at 100 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102. The documents librarian telephone number is (415) 554-4472.

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**Veterans
Crisis Line**



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PRESS 1

If you or a Veteran, you know is in immediate danger to themselves or others, please call 911 or visit your local emergency room.

The Veterans Crisis Line is also available by texting 838255 or by going to their website and chatting with a mental health professional.

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Veterans Affairs Commission



City and County of San Francisco

Support

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