



## **REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - FINAL**

Tuesday, December 12, 2023 – 6:00 pm

### CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME / Vice-President Jason Chittavong

Meeting called to order at 6:08PM.

### ROLL CALL

#### PRESENT:

Vice-President Jason Chittavong, Commissioners William Barnickel, Douglas Bullard, Hanley Chan, Deborah Dacumos, Stephen Martin-Pinto, Courtney Miller, Nicholas Rusanoff

ABSENT: President Mansori (excused), Commissioners Baba (excused), Ellington (excused)

Quorum present.

#### PRESENTERS:

Maria Benjamin, Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD)  
Maurice Delmer, County Veterans Service Office, City and County of San Francisco

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice-President Chittavong led attendees in reciting Pledge of Allegiance.

### SET AGENDA

Vice-President Chittavong called for motion to set agenda.

Motion – Rusanoff/ Second – Dacumos

All in Favor – Aye: 8, No: 0

Motion passed. Agenda set.

Absent: Baba, Ellington, Mansori



## PRESENTATIONS

Vice-President Chittavong introduced the presentation from MOHCD. He noted it would be a ten-minute presentation and public comment would be called after the Q&A with commissioners.

Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD) provided an update on status of the implementation of a veterans priority into the four existing preference categories of BMR housing lottery.

- Maria Benjamin with MOHCD updated the commission on the status of the veterans priority in the housing lottery. She reviewed how housing applicants apply for the lottery through DAHLIA, which is San Francisco's affordable housing portal. When city sponsored affordable housing units are available for lottery they are listed on DAHLIA. People can login and see what's available, see the income limits, see other eligibility criteria, and see the lottery preferences. Maria noted in the past two years about 600 veterans applied through the DAHLIA system. Only a small number of veterans were either eligible for housing or were successful in the lottery. However, with the new veterans priority, veterans will be raised to the top of the four category preference lists. Ms. Benjamin reviewed the four categories – The Certificate of Preference Program, Displaced Tenant Housing Preference, The Neighborhood Preference, and Work or Live in San Francisco. Ms. Benjamin displayed a sample of how the veterans priority will look on DAHLIA. She said the Digital Services team has been working hard on implementing a veterans priority into the DAHLIA system. Due to pandemic taking some priorities, it has taken longer than anticipated. However, Ms. Benjamin was very happy to share the veteran priority will go live in January 2024. At conclusion of MOHCD's update there was a Q&A session with commissioners, which included the following comments:
- Commissioner Rusanoff noted many veterans in San Francisco that are most needy do not identify as veterans. He said they may have a bad conduct discharge or other such paperwork. He asked how veterans are defined for housing lottery. Ms. Benjamin replied that MOHCD follows the definition given in the veterans priority legislation. The legislation defines veterans as being in good standing. She then briefly explained there are units available for homeless families through HSH, which is a different system for identifying veterans and homeless families.
- Commissioner Rusanoff asked if participating non-profit organizations are aware of priority. Ms. Benjamin replied that MOHCD will meet next week with coordinating agencies for mental counseling agencies and home ownership counseling agencies to raise awareness about the veteran priority.
- Commissioner Chan said he was happy priority is finally going live. He asked about data for veterans applications from previous years. Ms. Benjamin responded that from February 2022 to December 2023, 1,139 veteran households applied for affordable housing. Only a small number received housing – 9 for rental units and 2 for home ownership. The new priority will be a



definite help. She noted the high demand for affordable housing in San Francisco and stressed this is the purpose of priority legislation – to give veterans more of a chance. Within next two years, after priority is implemented, MOHCD hopes to see a bigger number of veterans housed through the affordable housing lottery.

- Commissioner Bullard asked if a serving reservist is eligible. MOHCD stated they ask for DD214 as primary proof of service. The office will also review military papers with applicant.
- Commissioner Barnickel thanked MOHCD. He noted a lot of building going on in District 4 and asked how to know if there's a veteran slot available for affordable housing. Ms. Benjamin replied that by the second week of January, any project that comes to DAHLIA will have the veterans priority for the four established categories.
- Commissioner Dacumos asked how income is calculated. Is it just the veteran's income or every member of the household? Ms. Benjamin replied that every adult on an application is included in household income and assets.
- Commissioner Rusanoff commented he is beyond grateful to MOHCD. He shared that he is a grateful recipient of the program, and he is very grateful this will be extended and prioritized to fellow combat veterans and fellow veterans who have also served our country.
- VP Chittavong called for public comments. Public comments included:
- Speaker Jenny Perez thanked MOHCD for the update on veteran housing priority and for their attendance at the commission meeting. Noted it has been 504 days since the BOS passed an ordinance that should have been a beacon of hope for veterans seeking affordable housing. Noted legislation was unanimously approved and she is unclear as to why this has taken so long. Sadly a year has passed, and veterans have not received this service that was awarded to them by the city. She reviewed past deadlines that were not met and said she hopes with the new process adjustment to the system, which has yet to be activated, there are no more delays after January 2024. Concluded comments by asking MOHCD to be sure that January 2024 is end of delays and the veterans housing priority will finally be activated and available to veterans.

Public Comment Concluded.

The second presentation on the agenda was from San Francisco VA Healthcare Staff.

- Presenters absent. Presentation cancelled.



## COMMUNICATIONS

### **Officers' Report:**

President (update provided by VP Chittavong):

- Reminded commissioners that the VAC functions as an advisory body to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors. If commissioners want to include a topic on a meeting agenda, please email topic details to the commission secretary at least one week in advance of a meeting. Any supporting documents related to the topic that you would like the commission to review should be included in this email. Further reminded about the 72-hour agenda posting rule. He concluded by requesting commissioners read through agendas and any documents attached to agendas before meetings.

Vice-President:

- Commented during the President's report.

Staff Secretary:

- Meeting Procedures

Reminded commissioners that SF City & County commissions are required to follow meeting procedure rules of The San Francisco City Attorney Good Government Guide. The guide is a public document available online and a link to the guide has previously been shared with commissioners. If anyone has questions about rules, please contact VAC commission secretary.

- Commission Applications / Re-applications - Update

Several BOS appointed seats on the VAC have termed out. The BOS Rules Committee is reviewing applications and tentatively plans to make appointments during a meeting in February 2024. The commission secretary will notify commissioners when appointments are added to a Rules Committee meeting agenda.

### **CVSO Report:**

- Report presented by Maurice Delmer, Veterans Claims Representative, SF CVSO.

[CVSO October and November reports are available on VAC website.]

Mr. Delmer introduced himself and said he would be filling in while CVSO Director Elena Kim is away on family leave. He reviewed CVSO report statistics for October and November. He noted that benefits claim numbers were down in October and November and attributed this to his leaving his work as a claims processor to temporarily fill in for the CVSO director. He further noted he expects January and February numbers for benefits awarded and claims filed to also be reduced because another staff member will be out on extended leave. That means two full-time claims representatives will be out until late January. Mr. Delmer said CVSO staff will do their best, but there may be longer



wait times for clients during this temporary staff shortage. He concluded his presentation with a summary of the CVSO Report's "Success Story," and briefly reviewed upcoming events. He particularly noted an upcoming community forum being organized by veteran Omar Masry with MOHCD. Mr. Delmer then asked for questions or comments from commissioners.

Commissioner Rusanoff asked Mr. Delmer if he's noticed more of a pushback on claims from the federal government. Mr. Delmer answered he has not seen a pushback so to speak, but noted responses to mental health claims are variable. He stressed he was only speaking for himself as a claims representative, and not speaking to broader issues with mental health and PTSD. Commissioner Rusanoff further asked if CVSO needs more staff and more funding and can VAC advocate for this. Mr. Delmer said he would absolutely appreciate VAC advocating for increased CVSO staff. He further noted a new claims representative will most likely start in January once accreditation is completed. Before the discussion concluded Mr. Delmer added one update not on the report. He said City employees are now eligible to buy back military time. City employees may bring their DD214s and government identification to the CVSO office and a claims rep will fill out forms and send them to SFERS. This process must be done in-person at the CVSO office. Commissioner Barnickel mentioned a deadline of January 1. Mr. Delmer was not aware of a deadline but said he would look into it. As there were no further comments, the CVSO report was concluded.

### **Supervisor Liaison Reports**

The commission secretary called for updates from commissioners' meetings with their assigned district supervisor:

District 7: Sup. Melgar – Commissioner Chan: City Administrator is reviewing LBE legislation. Commissioner Chan is looking forward to continuing to work with Supervisor Melgar's office on legislation for local businesses for veterans.

District 6: Sup. Dorsey – Commissioner Rusanoff: Legislative aide for Supervisor Dorsey provided certificates. Hopefully the supervisor will visit the Veterans Justice Court and give a presentation honoring the court staff.

District 5: Sup. Preston – Commissioner Chittavong: Supervisor Preston introduced a resolution to rename a block of Shannon Street in the Tenderloin to "Veteran's Alley." This mural-filled alley was founded by two disabled U.S. veterans.

District 11: Sup. Safai – Commissioner Bullard: Most recently the supervisor has offered to help with internship programs for JROTC students and help find funding for students to attend summer programs.



## **APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

- Call for motion to approve September 12, 2023 regular meeting minutes.
- Motion - Rusanoff/Second - Miller
- All in Favor – Aye: 8, No: 0.
- Motion passed. September 12, 2023 Meeting Minutes approved.

Absent: Baba, Ellington, Mansori

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Response from Public Defenders Office regarding Veterans Justice Court (VJC). [Discussion]

- Following the presentation during VAC meeting on September 12, Commissioner Chan contacted the Public Defender's Office about the possibility of establishing a more consistent public defender role at VJC. He updated the commission that the contact he spoke with at Public Defenders Office will work to keep the same public defender at VJC for a year and a half to two years.
- Commissioner Rusanoff asked about the public defender currently working at VJC. How long will she be in her role? Commissioner Chan responded it should be a year and half to two years. He said if anything happens to let him know.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

CA Assembly Bill 46: Personal Income Taxes Exclusion: Military Services Retirement and Surviving Spouse Benefit Payment Act. Commissioner Chan to lead discussion. Link to legislative summary sent to commissioners prior to meeting. [Discussion]

- Commissioner Chan noted AB 46 is on the governor's desk and is in suspension until next session. He recommended an action VAC can take is to write a letter to BOS requesting their support of AB 46. It was noted VAC previously approved a resolution in support of the bill. Another recommended action was to forward VAC resolution to BOS.
- Commission agreed to add this as an actionable item to a future meeting. Action will be for VAC to approve forwarding resolution to BOS and request their support of AB 46.

Revision to VAC Bylaws. Commissioner Chan discussed his recommendation to change the vote approval requirement from majority of full commission to majority of members present at meeting. [Discussion] (Note: According to VAC bylaws procedure, revisions to bylaws must follow a two-step process. First step, revision is introduced in writing to commission as a discussion item, second step, at



a future meeting, revision is listed as an action item for commission's approval by vote. "VAC Bylaws: Article V. Amendment to Bylaws") [Discussion / Possible Action]

- Commissioner Chan reviewed voting procedures of other commissions, he particularly noted BOS voting process. He recommended vote majority be of members present and not the majority of full commission. Brief discussion followed.
- Vote to finalize this change to VAC Bylaws will be added as an action item to January 9 meeting agenda.

Review VAC meeting date and time. [Discussion]

- VP Chittavong asked commissioners if there are recommendations for a different date or time to VAC regular meetings.
- Several commented that the current date and time work fine. Commissioner Rusanoff agreed time is fine but noted remote access is preferred. Commission Secretary responded that VAC agendas include instructions for members of the public who are disabled to request remote access. Commissioner Rusanoff asked about remote access for commissioners. Commission secretary replied that reasonable accommodations for qualifying disabilities are available for commissioners through SF City & County Department of Human Resources. Forms were sent to commissioners in February. Commission secretary can re-send forms if needed.
- Discussion concluded with agreement that commission continue to meet on 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month at 6:00pm, with exception of July when commission is in recess.

## **EXECUTIVE TEAM ELECTIONS FOR 2024 TERM**

Commission President and Vice-President Nominations and Election [Action /Vote]

- Nominations for President:

Nick Rusanoff – self-nominated

Commissioner Rusanoff shared his reasons for seeking to become commission president. His comments included: He would like to use the next year to convert VAC into a chartered commission. The objective being to get VAC on the ballot before the voters and to stop being an advisory committee but instead a committee with a goal of being responsible for our veterans by taking control of the finances by oversight and by having the city answerable to us.

Jason Chittavong accepted nominated by Commissioner Barnickel.



○ Nominations for Vice-President:

Courtney Miller declined nominated by Commissioner Martin-Pinto.

Deborah Dacumos declined nomination by VP Chittavong.

Courtney Miller nominated either Jason Chittavong or Nick Rusanoff. It was determined that VP nominees would be revisited after roll call vote for president.

○ President Nominees: Jason Chittavong, Nick Rusanoff. Roll Call Vote:

Chan: Rusanoff  
Barnickel: Chittavong  
Dacumos: Chittavong  
Martin-Pinto: Chittavong  
Rusanoff: Rusanoff  
Chittavong: Chittavong  
Miller: Chittavong  
Bullard: Chittavong

President: Jason Chittavong

Absent: Baba, Ellington, Mansori

○ Nomination for Vice-President:

Nick Rusanoff accepted nomination by Commissioner Martin-Pinto.

Roll Call Vote:  
Bullard: Rusanoff  
Miller: Rusanoff  
Chittavong: Rusanoff  
Rusanoff: Rusanoff  
Martin-Pinto: Rusanoff  
Dacumos: Rusanoff  
Barnickel: Rusanoff  
Chan: Rusanoff

Vice-President: Nick Rusanoff.

Absent: Baba, Ellington, Mansori





## **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.

Good Welfare Comments included:

- Commissioner Bullard recognized Admiral Jonathan Yuen, a graduate of Lowell High School, especially cited his committed participation in the San Francisco Veterans Day parade.
- Commissioner Courtney Miller remembered the great work former commissioner George Ishikata did on VAC Bylaws.
- Commissioner Chittavong acknowledged the dedicated work of Commissioner Bullard on behalf of JROTC.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

An opportunity for commission members to share information on veterans activities or briefly comment on San Francisco veterans related news.

- Wreaths Across America Ceremony will be held at Golden Gate National Cemetery on Saturday, December 16 at 11:00am. Link to event details is on VAC website.
- Commissioner Dacumos recently visited the Westside Clinic. Encouraged other commissioners to also visit the clinic. The commission secretary will re-send clinic contact information to commissioners to schedule a tour.
- Commissioner Bullard briefly spoke about a study being conducted on veteran reintegration back into the workforce. Veteran participation in study is needed. Commissioner Bullard will send details to the commission secretary to share with commissioners.

## **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

- No public comment.

## **HONORS 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.



## ADJOURNMENT

VP Chittavong adjourned the meeting at 7:41pm.

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, January 9, 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**



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.



24/7 Confidential  
Support

Text [MYLIFE](#) to [741741](#)  
Crisis Line:  
(415) 781-0500