



REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 9, 2024 – 6:00 pm

CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME / President Jason Chittavong

Meeting called to order at 6:09PM.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

President Jason Chittavong, Vice-President Nicholas Rusanoff, Commissioners Joseph Baba, William Barnickel, Hanley Chan (departed at 6:50pm), Courtney Ellington, Stephen Martin-Pinto

ABSENT: Commissioners Douglas Bullard (absent), Deborah Dacumos (excused), Ikram Mansori (excused), Courtney Miller (excused)

Quorum present.

PRESENTERS:

Maurice Delmer, County Veterans Service Office (CVSO), City and County of San Francisco

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

President Chittavong led attendees in reciting Pledge of Allegiance.

SET AGENDA

President Chittavong called for motion to set agenda.

Motion – Rusanoff/ Second – Martin-Pinto

All in Favor – Aye: 7, No: 0

Motion passed. Agenda set.

Absent: Bullard, Dacumos, Mansori, Miller



COMMUNICATIONS

Officers' Report:

President:

- Thanked the previous VAC president Ikram Mansori for her good work in leading the commission in 2022 and 2023.
- Asked commissioners to think about VAC's objectives for 2024. Requested commissioners email ideas for upcoming meeting agendas.

Vice-President:

- No report. VP noted he had a separate discussion item on tonight's meeting agenda.

Staff Secretary:

- **Commission Applications**

Several commission seats will term out by end of January. Review of applications tentatively scheduled for a BOS Rules Committee meeting in February 2024. Once a date is confirmed, the commission secretary will notify commissioners.

CVSO Report:

- Report presented by Maurice Delmer, Veterans Claims Representative, SF CVSO.
[CVSO December 2023 report is available on VAC website.]

Mr. Delmer reviewed the CVSO report statistics for December 2023, including number of walk-in clients, scheduled appointments, and benefits awarded. He noted CVSO continues to operate with a temporary staff shortage due to two staff members being on leave. He further shared that CVSO, in conjunction with Swords to Plowshares, applied for grant funding for the Mental Health Services Act, Proposition 63. The application was submitted in December and is pending approval of BOS. Mr. Delmer concluded his update by reviewing the "Success Story" from CVSO report. He welcomed questions or comments from commissioners:

- Commissioner Barnickel asked if the report's number of scheduled appointments included veterans from downtown. Mr. Delmer said it did not. The number is for CVSO office at Gough Street only, not at SF VA.



- Commissioner Rusanoff asked about the effect of PACT Act on claims. Specifically, he asked if CVSO needed funding for PACT Act claims training. Secondly, he asked about bad paper discharges, and inquired about resources that would improve successful prosecution of bad paper discharge. He concluded by asking if Mr. Delmer could predict when the CVSO would be sufficiently staffed to manage the increased claims from PACT Act. Mr. Delmer replied he would need time to think about office staffing and training needs specific to PACT Act and he will follow up during next month's meeting. He added the CVSO currently processes PACT Act claims the same as all other claims. As to bad paper discharge upgrades, Mr. Delmer said that's something a legal team with an organization such as Swords to Plowshares would be more qualified than a claims representative to handle. Commissioner Rusanoff inquired if it would be practical for CVSO to have a budget to hire Swords to Plowshares legal team to perform discharge upgrades process. Mr. Delmer responded he couldn't answer that specific question, he repeated attorneys are more adept than a claims representative at processing bad paper discharge upgrades. Finally, in answer to Commissioner Rusanoff's last question about sufficient staffing, Mr. Delmer said more staffing in general is always welcomed as it would help CVSO reach more veterans.

Supervisor Liaison Reports for 2024

President Chittavong opened a discussion about best way for VAC to update the BOS on veteran issues during 2024. In previous years each district was assigned a commissioner liaison who shared reports during VAC regular meetings. President Chittavong asked if commissioners wanted to continue this practice or try something new. A brief discussion followed and included following comments:

- Commissioner Ellington noted VAC needed to engage with veterans in districts.
- Commissioner Martin-Pinto mentioned supervisors have newsletters and suggested it would be helpful to get veteran information into newsletters.
- Commissioner Barnickel recommended the commission secretary could send bullet points from VAC meetings to supervisors' staff.
- Commissioner Ellington commented commissioners need to hear from veterans and recommended opening meetings up for veterans to attend. (The commission secretary reminded that VAC meetings are always public meetings open to veterans and all members of the public.)
- Commissioner Rusanoff recommended adding an action item to a future meeting agenda to discuss outreach in 2024.

At this point in the meeting, Commissioner Chan noted he had to leave early and requested action items be addressed before he left the meeting.



To close discussion about supervisor reports, it was agreed topic would be added to next month's meeting agenda as an actionable item.

President Chittavong called for motion approve changing order of agenda items.

Motion – Rusanoff / Second – Ellington. All in favor.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Revision to VAC bylaws. During the December 12, 2023 meeting Commissioner Chan recommended adding text to the bylaws stating actionable agenda items are approved by majority vote of members present at a meeting. [Action]

Motion – Rusanoff/ Second – Chan

All in Favor – Aye: 7, No: 0

Motion passed. Revision to bylaws approved.

Absent: Bullard, Dacumos, Mansori, Miller

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Call for motion to approve December 12, 2023 regular meeting minutes.

Motion - Rusanoff/Second - Chittavong

All in Favor – Aye: 7, No: 0.

Motion passed. December 12, 2023 Meeting Minutes approved.

Absent: Bullard, Dacumos, Mansori, Miller

NEW BUSINESS

Open a discussion about the process to convert the VAC from an advisory commission to a chartered commission. Commissioners were requested to prepare talking points. [Discussion]

Commission Rusanoff placed topic on the agenda, and led discussion. Discussion points included:

- Commissioner Rusanoff commented he was looking at ways VAC could take ownership of veterans issues within San Francisco. As an example, he noted VAC could take ownership of CVSO budget. To begin the process of converting to chartered status, he said BOS asked for



clarity as to specific type of authority VAC envisioned as a chartered commission. He asked commissioners for feedback.

- Commissioner Chan noted process to move from advisory to chartered commission is a very hard task and would require a lot of time and manpower. He said there are two ways to get a chartered commission amendment on a ballot: either by BOS push or by gathering signatures.
- Commissioner Baba asked if there was a precedent for a commission converting from advisory to chartered. He further noted chartered commission members would need audit background and regulatory knowledge and experience, which current members probably do not have.
- Commissioner Ellington asked how much work everyone is willing to put in. She agreed oversight is needed but added that in the meantime VAC could look at what can be done now as an advisory commission.
- Commissioner Martin-Pinto suggested instead of changing to a chartered commission VAC can explore what can be done as an advisory commission to assist city with oversight of veterans issues. For example, what power can an advisory commission exert to start an investigation of suspected wrongdoing of a veteran non-profit.
- Commissioner Chittavong noted the most recent chartered commission is the SF Homelessness Oversight Commission (HOC). He recommended commissioners review HOC website to learn how that commission obtained chartered status.
- The commission secretary recommended a first step in this process would be for a commissioner to meet with a member of a Board of Supervisor's staff to get a better idea of the process of becoming a chartered commission and what type of authority is feasible.

At the conclusion of discussion, Commissioner Rusanoff said he would meet with Supervisor Dorsey's office and report back to the commission at next month's meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon Commissioner Chan's departure, there was no longer a quorum.

Due to lack of quorum, President Chittavong adjourned the meeting at 7:08pm.

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, February 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



1-800-273-8255
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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