



Veterans' Affairs Committee

Wednesday, September 13, 2023 - 6:00 pm
Virtual Meeting via TEAMS

MEETING NOTE: Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have prompted declarations of a public health emergency at the local, state and federal levels, this meeting will be conducted using measures to protect public health. This meeting will be held remotely through technological means, as permitted under Arizona law. In-person attendance by member of the public will be prohibited.

Legal Action Report

1. Call to Order / Establish a Quorum

Virtual online meeting called to order by Rocio Kary at 6:01 p.m. Those present and absent were:

Present:

Lorraine Obregon

Terry Byron

Henry Johnson

Ann Hollis

Marlon Ruiz

Martin Belden

Rocio "Rosie" Kary

Orlando Ford

Absent:

Gary Smith

James "Tub-Bee" Louis

Georgia Wise

Melvin Morgan

Kassie Diaz

Minou De La Rosa

Staff Members Present:

Robert Hunter

Amari Leon

Representing:

Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary
Cactus Unit 2

Marine Corps League, Marana Night Hawk 72

Marine Corps League, Marana Night Hawk 72, and
Post 81 Scottish American Military Society of
Southern Arizona

Military Officers Association of America
Tucson Chapter

Military Order of the World Wars, Region XIII

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 106

Women in Military Service for America Memorial
Foundation

SAVAHCS, Non-voting Advisory

Representing:

American Legion Department of Arizona

Arizona Department of Veterans Services

VFW Post 549

Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 106

Women Marine Association

TAA, Non-voting Advisory

City Clerk's Office, Recording Secretary

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2. Invocation

The invocation was provided by Committee Member Johnson.

3. Introduction of Guests

- a. Jennifer Gutowski, Director, and Orlando Ford, Public Affairs Specialist - (SAVAHCS)

4. Approval of Legal Action Report for May 10, 2023

It was moved by Committee Member Belden, duly seconded, and passed by a roll call vote of 7 to 0, **(Committee Members Diaz, Hollis, Ruiz, Smith and Wise absent)**, to approve the Legal Action Report from the May 10, 2023, meeting.

5. Treasurer's Report

Committee Member Belden stated the beginning balance at the start of the month of August 2023 was \$2,440.44. He reported they received \$1000 from the Veterans of America Chapter 106 and \$100 from the Arizona Marine Corp League, both towards Operation Exodus. He reported no expenses, leaving a current balance of \$3,540.44.

It was moved by Committee Member Ruiz, duly seconded, and passed by a roll call vote of 7 to 0, **(Committee Members Diaz, Hollis, Ruiz, Smith, and Wise absent)**, to approve the financial report as presented.

6. Committee Reports

a. Southern Arizona Veteran's Affairs Health Care System (SAVAHCS)

Jennifer Gutowski, Director of SAVAHCS provided a report on behalf of SAVAHCS. She mentioned the new deadlines related to the PACT Act, noting veterans deployed to combat zones and active-duty personnel who served between September 11, 2001 and October 1, 2013 had until 11:59 p.m. on September 30, 2023 to directly enroll in Veterans Administration Healthcare.

Ms. Gutowski said the special enrollment period would give veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan and other combat zones an opportunity to enroll directly, without having to first apply for Veterans Administration benefits.

Ms Gutowski reported SAVAHCS in collaboration with Davis Monthan Air Force Base, would be hosting a 5K run followed by a Prisoner of War – Missing in Action (POW-MIA) recognition ceremony on Friday, September 15 on their campus. She noted the run would begin at 6:00 a.m.

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Ms. Gutowski stated they would be hosting a virtual and in-person mental health quarterly open house, beginning on Wednesday, September 20, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. She noted the purpose of the activity was to bring together stakeholders from the community with the goal of enhancing mental health services and addressing the mental healthcare needs of veterans. She further noted the point of contact for the activity was Angela Lopresti, and alternatively members could reach out to her or Orlando Ford.

Ms. Gutowski reported on the Job Fair held in July, noting as a result of that, 150 job offers were proffered and 64 new employees are being onboarded.

Lastly, Ms. Gutowski reminded members of the upcoming 95th Anniversary Celebration for SAVAHCS, scheduled for October 27th, 2023. She invited all VAC members but asked that they confirm attendance with the Public Affairs team in advance.

Ms. Gutowski introduced Orlando Ford, the interim Public Affairs Specialist for SAVAHCS. Mr. Ford provided his background and thanked the Committee for their reception.

Discussion ensued, with Ms. Gutowski and Mr. Ford responding to activity-related questions.

b. Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery

Committee Member Hollis reported the foundation supporting the cemetery held a meeting of the board on the previous evening. She noted there were currently 3540 veterans or family members interred at the Veterans' Cemetery. She stated on Saturday, October 28, there would be a Missing in America Project which would facilitate the interment of 12 veterans. She explained the Missing in America are veterans whose remains were abandoned at funeral homes across the state and the Marana Cemetery has been designated by the State of Arizona to receive them in lieu of no claims or burial preference by family members.

Committee Member Hollis noted there would be a cleanup event at the Veteran's Memorial Cemetery on the Saturdays of September 23 and October 7.

Discussion ensued amongst members related to the construction of the columbarium at the Veterans' Memorial Cemetery.

c. Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

No report was given.

7. Ordinance 12024 – Revised Quorum Requirements

City Clerk's Office staff Hunter summarized Ordinance 12024 and how this affected quorum requirements for the VAC.

Discussion ensued amongst the members related to the inclusion of quorum language in the VAC Bylaws. It was decided Committee Member and Judge Advocate Hollis, would draft a related proposed amendment and bring it to the members for discussion and action at a future meeting.

8. Amended VAC Bylaws – Discussion

City Clerk's Office staff Hunter noted this item was on the agenda as an informational item, as the Bylaws as amended at the May 10, 2023, meeting were processed, and a copy would be provided to the members.

9. Committee Finances – Discussion

a. VAC Checking Account - Update/Discussion

Committee Member Byron stated the amended Bylaws were the document Wells Fargo was waiting on and this would be provided to them.

b. 501(c)(3) Non-profit Status - Update/Discussion

The Committee discussed the pros and cons of incorporation as a non-profit organization. Committee Member Ruiz noted the Veterans of America Chapter 106 was exploring the process for incorporating as a non-profit and offered to bring to the Committee his findings to help inform further consideration of the matter.

It was moved by Committee Member Johnson, duly seconded, and passed by a roll call vote of 7 to 0, (**Committee Members Diaz, Hollis, Ruiz, Smith and Wise absent**), to table the discussion on pursuing non-profit status until sufficient information was obtained and further research carried out.

10. Consideration/Approval of Member(s)

a. Appointment of Bruce Hayes as recommended by the American Legion McCulloch-Wagner Post 109

It was moved by Committee Member Johnson, duly seconded, and passed by a roll call vote of 7 to 0, (**Committee Members Diaz, Hollis, Ruiz, Smith and Wise absent**), to approve the nomination of Bruce Hayes to the VAC.

b. Appointment of William Burks as recommended by the Disabled American Veterans Benson chapter 26.

It was moved by Committee Member Ruiz, duly seconded, and passed by a roll call vote of 7 to 0, (**Committee Members Diaz, Hollis, Ruiz, Smith and Wise absent**), to approve the nomination of William Burks to the VAC.

11. Use of City of Tucson Logo – Creation of VAC Logo – Update/Discussion

Discussion ensued on the use of parameters of the use of the City of Tucson logo with “Veterans Affairs Committee” text and whether or not the Committee should develop its own logo to use in conjunction with the City logo. Members decided to continue to use the City logo with the “Veterans Affairs Committee” text. The City Clerk’s Office staff was asked if the City could assist with the printing of a table cover and/or a banner the Committee could use for events as needed. The Committee additionally inquired as to whether or not the City could provide funding assistance to the VAC for Operation Exodus, which is an activity included in the inter-governmental agreement between the

Tucson International Airport and the City of Tucson and as an activity of the Committee in their Bylaws.

12. Military Lounge – Update/Discussion

No report was given.

13. Veteran’s Day Parade

Committee Member Byron noted an invitation was sent to Parade Chair Lissette Eckman. She stated there is work being done to create a Tucson Veterans Day Parade Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization, in order to seek funding and pursue grant opportunities. She explained this would be a standalone organization separate from the American Legion. She stated the Parade was scheduled for November 10 at 11:00 a.m. and the route would be the same pending some matters that needed to be worked out.

14. Four Chaplains Ceremony 2024

Committee Member Byron stated she would reach out to the Kino Memorial Veterans Park to secure a date and arrange for insurance for the event.

15. Taxation for Veterans – Discussion

It was moved by Committee Member Johnson, duly seconded, and passed by a roll call vote of 7 to 0, (**Committee Members Diaz, Hollis, Ruiz, Smith, and Wise were absent**), to table this item for discussion at the next meeting.

16. Outreach to Mayor and Council – Update/Discussion

Committee Member Obregon stated housing for veterans and identifying avenues for the City to see affordable housing for veterans was important. She inquired as to whether there were funding sources available federally or through the City to address this issue, noting the problem of homelessness had worsened.

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Committee Chair Kary noted there are housing projects targeting this problem, however, finding out what is currently happening in this area in Tucson would be something the Committee could reach out to the Mayor, Council and departments on.

Committee Member Johnson suggested the Committee find out what the City is doing to address this issue and then decide on a more focused area and strategy for the Committee to pursue.

Committee Member Byron stated the Committee should invite a representative from the Mayor's Office to a future meeting.

Committee Member Obregon inquired as to whether members could reach out via email or letter in the effort to collect data and information and other feedback on veteran homelessness.

17. VAC Future Events – Discussion

No discussion ensued.

18. Report on Current Events: For the Good of the Order

Reports on upcoming current events were provided by Committee Members Ruiz and Byron.

Note: Committee Member Johnson departed the meeting at 7:39 p.m. The meeting was adjourned at this time due to the lack of quorum.

19. Future Agenda Items

a. Standing Items

Military Lounge – Update/Discussion

Veteran's Day Parade – Update/Discussion

Four Chaplains Ceremony – Update/Discussion

b. Tabled Items

Taxation for Veterans - Discussion

Outreach to Mayor and Council - Update/Discussion

20. Benediction

21. Adjournment – Meeting adjourned at 7:39 p.m.

Next Meeting: October 11, 2023