**New York City**

**Veterans Advisory Board**

Minutes for the September 15, 2021 meeting held virtually,

representing the meeting for Queens

**Members**

**Present:**

Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn) Mercedes Elias (Queens)

Jennifer Kamrowski (Manhattan) Joe Bello (Bronx)

Todd Haskins (Manhattan) Peter Kauffmann (Queens)

John Rowan (Queens)

**Absent:**

Charles Hernandez (Bronx)

Andrew Walcott (Brooklyn)

Paul Dietrich (Staten Island)

Note: Awaiting board member to be appointed by Speaker’s Office.

**Minutes**

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* Wendy McClinton (Chair) commenced the meeting at 6:00 pm.
* Chair McClinton goes over the agenda. All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.

**Presentation**:

Start with presentation by Commissioner Hendon for updates from DVS. Wished everyone a Happy Yom Kippur for those celebrating. Wanted to first respond to issues brought up during the last meeting before providing new updates.

**Old Business**

1. Vincent Garcia, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs briefs
	1. Food vendors – A law was passed by DCWP, government organization regulating street cart vendors, to establish an advisory board to assist them with enforcing rules and regulations for the vendors, advocacy, etc. DVS has been working to identify a veteran to serve on the advisory board, one has been appointed and DVS will send information once it is finalized.
		1. Yanni Belkebir voiced concern about the veteran who has been identified and noted that he is also part of the Urban Justice (Street Project Association), therefore doesn’t represent the collective concern of the veteran street cart vendors. Asked for help setting up an organization for disabled veteran street cart vendors.
	2. Fair fares program – officially launched as of January 2020, all eligible veterans encouraged to apply, especially student veterans.
2. Amauri Espinal, Assistant Commissioner of Community Affairs briefs
	1. Transportation to the VA – VA offers transportation to and from clinic, veteran must call VA to coordinate with transportation department. Must meet eligibility requirements to qualify.
	2. Childcare at VA – pilot program for childcare at handful of sites nationally, all of which were affected by COVID. They plan on extending childcare at facilities in the future.
3. Commissioner Hendon addresses delivery of medication from St. Albans VA, notes that he responded directly to that veteran’s VVA chapter (Vietnam Veterans of America)

There is no other old business to discuss.

Commissioner continues with charter mandated areas and had his team speak on various topics:

1. Healthcare (nyc.gov/vethealth) – working with public engagement unit to make contact for veterans to enroll in Obamacare and screen them for VA eligibility. Still doing everything to promote getting the vaccine.
2. Benefits (Amauri Espinal briefs) – DVS is currently actively processing VA service-connected claims. Anyone who needs to file can email claims@veterans.nyc.gov. Wants to make note about resources for Afghanistan veterans regarding the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the 20th anniversary of September 11th. <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/93577/lets-talk-about-afghanistan-resources-veterans-families/>
3. Housing (Dana, Director of Housing/ nyc.gov/vethousing) – Veterans facing housing insecurity or homelessness, housing team can see if veterans are eligible for city funded vouchers (comparable to federally funded subsidies) to assist. Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) – funding is still available. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/connect-to-services/veteran-housing-ladder.page>
4. Employment (Jason Laughran, Executive Director of Special Projects) – encourage veterans to visit nyc.gov/vetjobs for employment, training and civil service opportunities. Vincent Garcia announced that every veteran can have unlimited fee waivers for civil service exams.
5. Education (MaryHelen Rosales) – nyc.gov/vetstudents has information for student veterans going to school in NYC, or children of veterans. CUNY School for Professional Studies has program to cover remaining tuition for active duty, reserve and National Guard students that the tuition assistance program does not cover. Veteran Tuition Award Program by the state for combat veterans.
6. Other (Commissioner) - Learning who veteran business owners in the city are will be featured on nyc.gov/vetbizmap. Actively taking histories of NYC veterans for the Veteran Voice Project nyc.gov/vetvoices. Still taking input from the veterans survey at nyc.gov/vetsurvey. Planning an event for October 19th to celebrate 20 years since we arrived in Afghanistan.

Chair introduces Mark Otto, Executive Director of United War Veterans Council to discuss the upcoming Veteran’s Day Parade on November 11th. Mr. Otto announced that WABC will be broadcasting the parade and it will be from 12 pm – 3 pm. The featured service branch is the Air Force, the commemorations are the 20th anniversary of the Global War on Terrorism and the 30th anniversary of Desert Storm. Anticipate smaller crowds, at 75% capacity for the number of units who have signed up to march. There will be a modified opening ceremony that will be announced shortly. Grand Marshall is a hometown hero with 9/11 tie in, will be announced soon. Joe Bello asked when they are looking to have the first volunteers meeting, Mr. Otto replied that the volunteer meeting schedule would be published at the end of the week. Jason Loughran asked if there was any indication that the President was going to join. Mr. Otto said he was sent invitation but has not received confirmation. Another question was posed if there were going to be provisions to have handicap people driven in the parade. Mr. Otto stated there were always provisions and buses identified to help. All details can be found on Uwvc.org.

Mr. Otto then discusses the event on October 19th to commemorate the day Task Force Dagger first stepped in Afghanistan and officially started the Global War on Terrorism. The 20th anniversary commemoration of post 9/11 service taking place at the Vietnam Veterans Plaza. Will have traditional wreath laying ceremony, full military honors, and approximately 12 guest speakers going over the timeline of the war. Will begin the day with a ruck march starting at Cadman Plaza, across the Brooklyn Bridge and will take a moment at the World Trade Center. For those that can’t do the entire three miles, can meet at World Trade Center to do the final mile. Wendy McClinton asked how to participate in the march. Mr. Otto responded that participants can sign up at the end of the week when they launch on the UWVC website.

Chair McClinton introduces Sebastian Shaw with the VA. Mr. Shaw works at the NY Harbor VA in Manhattan and serves as the Community Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator for Suicide Prevention. Allison Lemar covers the VA in Brooklyn. Contact information for Sebastian is Sebastian.Shaw@va.gov or (347) 420-4743. Mr. Shaw stated they added his role as a community-based intervention. Wants to get connected to anything with mental health, suicide prevention, agencies supporting these initiatives, etc. Mr. Shaw wanted to note that they want to get connected with veterans needing mental health assistance. Steven Colon (attendee) asked if they also provide a PTSD support group. Mr. Shaw stated he is in a non-clinical role but if Mr. Colon emails him that he can get him information on support groups within the VA. Wendy discussed providing a bulletin board with information on which support groups are starting back up at each of the VA facilities.

Chair McClinton introduces Chad Royer, Chairman of the Veterans Subcommittee for Bronx Community Board 7. Mr. Royer shared that they hold their meetings every fourth Wednesday of the month and the next Bronx Community Board 7 Veterans Committee meeting for the year is Wed Sept 22, 2021 at 6:30pm via zoom. Meetings are open to the public. Mr. Royer’s contact information is chadyroyer@ymail.com. Link to next meeting is: Join Meeting Online: https://zoom.us/j/84000873813 | Join Meeting by Phone: (646) 558-8656 | Meeting ID: 840 0087 3813 Wednesday, 22nd...Veterans Affairs – 6:30 PM.

Mercedes turns floor to Cleopatra Brown to brief on an upcoming event. Ms. Brown is Chairperson of Community Board 16 Veterans Affairs Committee. On behalf of CB3 and CB16, they will be hosting Veterans Appreciation Day Parade on Saturday November 6th, stepping off at Robert Fulton street park, located at Fulton and Schenectady Avenue, at 12 pm, which will finish with a resource fair. Looking for organizations to be at the fair. Can contact her at 917-445-2274.

John Rowan announced passing of an active community member. Joe Bello acknowledged Mr. Meyer’s passing and stated it was a significant loss for the LGBTQ community.

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

**Yaroslav Mudryy :** Will there be a recap or recording of this meeting? You are presenting a lot of great information, I wouldn't want to miss any of it. Thank you!

**Ellen E:** It would be great if you could post the agenda here in comments so we can download and follow along, as well as having list of VAB members. Is there information for transferring a vaccine received at VA to the Excelsior Pass?

* Joe Hunt responded: If you want to know how to get your vaccination record online from the VA go to: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/vaccine-record/>

**Susan Wallace** : Jason how can I voly with you re employment. I am a 30 L&E lawyer, ret 25 yr Army JAG did tons person USERRAsit on the NYCBA L&E Cmte etc

* Jason Loughran responded: Susan I’d love to meet or chat over the phone
* Susan Wallace : anyone can call me 860-655-6024 BayRdg I was one of the Ft Hamilton Res leg asst JAGS. I am very impressed at what the team has done with the office I spent years complaining about prior uselessness its now more than I could have expected
* Jack McKeown: Thank you Susan Wallace for your contact info - Jack McKeown here with a restorative justice issue I will follow up with you. I'm Dyker Heights, btw... Thanks!

**Rob**: Curious to know what, if any, financial aid is available to a veteran owned business from the DVS directly either as a loan or, preferably, as a grant?

* Maryhelen Rosales : Hi Rob, DVS is available to connect you to partners that have resources such as loan and grant assistance. Please take a look at our website, and feel free to reach out to us for additional assistance. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/connect-to-services/resources-for-veteran-business-owners-and-entrepreneurs.page>

**Yanni Belkebir**: asked to speak with the Commissioner concerning the issues with the veteran street cart vendors. Seconded by Beezer Pitegir (sp?), fellow disabled veteran and vendor, sits on board with state department of labor.

**Commander D’Agistino**: wanted to thank Amauri Espinal for getting a stair lift installed for one of his members.

**Margaret Gambaro**, Intrepid Museum : Intrepid Museum is open 7 days a week, 10am-5:00pm. All veterans and current service members are eligible for free admission. For more information and information about our free programs for current and former service members and their loved ones go to [www.intrepidmuseum.org/vets](http://www.intrepidmuseum.org/vets)

**Christopher Moore**: Great meeting and an excellent form for veterans to receive information. I recently retired from Fort Bragg, NC after 30-years in the US Army. I now work as the Director of DVS, New York Film Academy. Thank you

**Coco Culhane**: is there any info on a memorial or service?

**Cleopatra Brown**: USPS is hiring and priority has been giving to veterans

* Susan Wallace : USPS has been the single largest employer of Vets since 1960s

**Steven Colon**: As a combat Marine of Beirut Lebanon of 1983, are there any support groups dedicated to that era? We seem to be forgotten

**Darryl K Taylor Sr.**: Con Edison is looking for Veterans with a CLASS A license and an M endorsement please feel free to reach out to me.

**NIGEL CASANOVA/VITAL**: Yvette Branson, PhD

VITAL Initiative Coordinator

(Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership)

VA New York Harbor

646.772.6087

www.nyharbor.va.gov/services/VITAL.asp

<https://www.instagram.com/vitalstudentvets/>

**Michael Matos**: Current preference for Mitchell Llama housing, is there a possibility to establish preference for housing connect? Those with housing vouchers may be able to have them bumped up during selection.

* Commissioner answered to contact his office for assistance in securing affordable housing. Stated city only looking at five standards for selection to affordable housing. Dana added that they post Mitchell Llama openings in weekly newsletter.

End of public comments.

**Meeting adjourned.**

Next meeting: 6 pm November 18, 2021

Submitted by: Mercedes Elias, Secretary