

2016 NEW YORK CITY VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD ANNUAL REPORT



**NEW YORK CITY VETERANS ACHIEVEMENTS
AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

*“With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, **to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan**, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”*
– **Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, March, 4, 1865**

Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255, press 1)

The Crisis Line, mandated by the Joshua Omvig Veteran Suicide Prevention Act of 2007, provides immediate support to veterans, service members and their families.

December 31, 2016

Mayor de Blasio and Council Speaker Mark-Viverito:

2016 was an incredible year for veterans in New York City. **The Department of Veteran Services (DVS) was the first new agency established in nearly a quarter of a century!** This was more than a symbolic gesture given the rapid expansion of resources provided by the Administration and City Council. Staffing was expanded from 4 to 34 with a successful effort to hire the leadership team and procuring the inaugural budget of nearly \$4 million. These resources have been used effectively. For example, veteran homelessness has been reduced by another 64% in 2016 bringing the total decline to over 90% since the Mission Home campaign to end veteran homelessness in New York City was launched in 2011.

The Veterans Advisory Board's vision is for New York City to have the most effective local veteran policies in the United States. These policies benefit all New Yorkers by attracting state and federal resources to the City, supporting commerce and most importantly attracting veterans and their families to add to New York City's melting pot. We have worked with DVS this past year to establish a guiding principle for our policies and programs: **To support veterans' continued service as citizens.**

We thank each of you for your leadership over the past year - we could not have achieved this success without your steadfast support. We are excited about the prospects for 2017 and look forward to our continued partnership.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd Haskins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Todd" being more prominent than the last name "Haskins".

Todd Haskins
Chairman

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RATIONALE FOR LOCAL VETERAN POLICIES AND RESOURCES

We believe there is a strong rationale for local governments to invest in veteran policies and programs. Our conviction in this is reinforced by the success of the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) in its first year of existence and in the value that it has delivered not only for veterans, but also for all New Yorkers. For example, Mission Home, New York City's fight to end veteran homelessness, has been highly successful. New York City has led the nation in its response to homelessness by connecting 1,600 homeless veterans with permanent, affordable housing this past year alone. This creates capacity in the overall city shelter system, connects veterans with resources needed to become self-sufficient, and encourages the dignity and productivity of those who would otherwise be homeless.

Why Should the City Support its Veterans?

Some have suggested that the burden of caring for our veterans should be born only by the Federal Government. We do not agree and believe that New York City as well as the non-profit and private sectors have both moral and economic imperatives to support our veterans. New York City benefits from these investments and they pay great dividends to our citizens over time:

- **Freedom and Security – the Moral Imperative:** First and foremost all citizens of New York benefit from the freedom and security provided by our armed forces and New York City, as the economic capital of the world, benefits from this more than any other city. The Federal Hall National Memorial reminds us of the contributions of our first President, George Washington who noted that *“the willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by our nation.”* In our order to ensure our continued success as a nation it is critical that we ALL support those who have served.
- **Federal Spending and Tourism – the Short-term Economic Imperative:** New York City also benefits disproportionately from federal spending and tourism. Activities and venues such as Fleet Week, New York's July Fourth Celebration, New York City Veterans' Day Parade (*“America's Parade”*), the Intrepid Sea Air and Space Museum, and the Canyon of Heroes all are connected to our nation's military veterans and produce significant commerce. Additionally, many of New York City's programs qualify for federal funding which makes them more effective and economically efficient for the City. For example, housing subsidies financed by U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have helped enable New York City to house homeless veterans for a third of the cost of placing them in shelters. Additionally, recently transitioned veterans often have Federal Benefits such as the GI Bill, which adds to the economic resources of the City and educational systems such as CUNY. Lastly, as the economic capital of the world, many Veteran Service Organizations (VSO's) and veteran-focused non-profits have either chosen to call New York City their home or host significant operations and events here, which also adds to the commerce and culture of the city. These activities and venues provide a compelling rationale to support strong veteran policies.

- **Veterans Make Great Citizens – the Long-Term Economic Imperative:** Veterans are truly this country’s greatest renewable resources and attracting them to New York City supports our continued success. Veterans tend to have higher earnings and lower unemployment than non-veterans once their transition is complete.¹ Veterans also tend to be more civically active and have lower incarceration rates than non-veterans. Increasing our veteran population will continue to add to the vibrant fabric of culture in the city.

These moral and economic imperatives provide a sound rationale for investment in local veteran policies and programs particularly since many of these provide a direct and measurable positive economic return for New York City.

¹ Overall unemployment among veterans is lower than the population as a whole while unemployment among post 9/11 veterans remains higher than average. This highlights that veterans transitioning back to the civilian world are a critical constituency for policy investment.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE: SUPPORT VETERANS CONTINUED SERVICE AS CITIZENS

In order to provide discipline in prioritizing resources, the VAB has worked with DVS to establish a guiding principle through which all potential investments should be considered and prioritized. All programs should be viewed through the lens of how they **support veterans continued service as citizens**. This aligns with the long-term economic imperative that veterans make good citizens and that the City benefits by attracting them in greater numbers.

Some veterans will face challenges, perhaps related directly or indirectly to their service. However, particularly in the era of the all-volunteer force, veterans are not victims. They actively chose to serve, and providing support to allow them to continue their service as citizens is an important investment. Prioritizing based upon this principle has the added benefit of reinforcing the fact that all New Yorkers benefit from these programs, regardless of veteran status.

Wherever possible we should seek programming that reinforces and supports this principle. For example, we should partner non-profits and VSOs where this is a central tenet of their mission. Further, we should invest in programs and resources which help veterans improve such as education, employment support and programs which support personal self improvement.

SUMMARY OF VAB ACTIONS OF IN 2016 AND PLANS FOR 2017

Below is a summary of the key activities for 2016:

- **Revised our By-Laws:** We revised and updated our by-laws, which were approved by unanimous vote on June 16, 2016.
- **Met or Exceeded all Legislative Requirements:** The VAB met or exceeded all local legislative requirements.
- **Advised the Commissioner on the Development and Staffing of DVS:** The VAB was actively involved in discussions around key legislative, organizational, and policy initiatives. We also advised on hiring strategy and policy priorities.
- **Conducted 5 Meetings, one in each Borough:** This past year we continued to host meetings in every Borough, and awareness of our meetings has grown as measured by attendance. Our last meeting of 2016 boasted the largest attendance, with over 50 people.
- **Drive Engagement on Topics Raised by Members of the Community:** In 2016, the VAB has started to engage on topics raised by the community. For example, student veterans from the City University of New York (CUNY) highlighted challenges that they are facing on their campuses. The VAB brought this issue to the attention of the Chancellor of CUNY who is working to address these concerns and provide more consistency of programs across the campuses.

In 2017 the VAB plans the following initiatives:

- **Drive DVS Strategy and Prioritize Programming:** The VAB will continue to work actively with DVS to drive strategy and programming and specifically help to prioritize our resources.
- **Use Meetings to Convene Leaders and Connect Veterans with Services:** In order to increase community engagement and improve effectiveness, we plan to streamline our future meetings to make them more efficient. Further, in response to suggestions by members of the community, we will use the meetings as a forum to convene leaders of relevant service providers so that veterans in need can connect to services on-site. We also plan to coordinate with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) newly formed MyVA Community program, which seeks to create more community engagement with leaders of relevant VA services. Through its Community Veterans Engagement Board (VA-CVEB), we will convene senior leaders of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and National Cemetery Administration (NCA) within New York City in order to make them available to members of the community that have either specific or policy-related questions from these groups. Lastly, we will continue our tradition of open forums for the community to express their views and provide feedback to the VAB, DVS, and other leaders in the community.

Highlight New York City's Successes: New York City has clearly proven to be able to pilot innovative programs and serves as thoughtful stewards of the resources that have been provided to us by the federal and state levels of government, non-profits, and philanthropic organizations, as well as private industry. The VAB will seek to highlight these successes to attract further resources and bring to scale effective programs that will benefit all.

HIGHLIGHTS OF EVENTS AND MILESTONES IMPACTING VETERANS IN NEW YORK CITY IN 2016

2016 continued to be an important building year for veterans in New York City. The below timeline highlights a number of the key initiatives and accomplishments throughout the year:

- **January – VAB Hearing:** The beginning of the year saw the New York City Council hold an oversight hearing on the New York City Veterans Advisory Board regarding the impact of 2015's reforms. The Chairman of the VAB testified and highlighted a number of areas of development for DVS, as well as the City veterans' policy.
- **February – Reduced Fees for Park and Recreation Centers:** Mayor Bill de Blasio signed into law Intro. 856-A (Local Law 18), which reduced fees at least 75% off of the highest annual membership fee charged at Department of Parks and Recreation centers. This reduction is available to seniors, young adults, veterans, and persons with disabilities.
- **April – Mayor de Blasio Announces the New Department of Veterans' Services:** While the legislation (Local Law 113) that created DVS was signed in December of 2015, the official name changing from the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA) to DVS took place 120 days after the Mayor signed the bill into law.
- **May:**
 - **First Executive Budget Hearing for DVS.** The City Council held its first Executive Budget hearing for the Department of Veterans' Services.
 - **Fleet Week:** New York City successfully hosted another Fleet Week, and DVS supported a number of ceremonial activities throughout this period designed to honor our service members and veterans.
- **June – NYC Parks reduce annual recreation center members fee for veterans and people with disabilities:** The de Blasio Administration announced, effective June 1st, veterans and people with disabilities would be offered a \$25 discounted recreation center membership rate at all 36 NYC Parks recreation centers across the five boroughs.
- **July: Significant Budget Increase and Investment in Human Capital:** In its first budget ever, DVS was allocated approximately \$3.952 million, of which \$3.517 million was funded by New York City. This supports 33 full-time positions plus one additional position funded through a public private partnership grant for a total of 34 full-time employees.
- **October:** DVS announces that New York City is the 50th city in the United States to become a "caregiver supportive city," formally recognizing military and veteran caregivers. Also in October, Mayor de Blasio announced a revised affordable housing lottery rules that ensure that landlords rent to veterans as they would any other New Yorker, including those using the Post 9/11 GI Bill.
- **November:**
 - **Veterans Court:** As highlighted last year, Veterans Treatment Courts have been proven to be effective in a variety of jurisdictions, including New York City. This year the last two courts, Manhattan (in April) and Staten Island (in November)

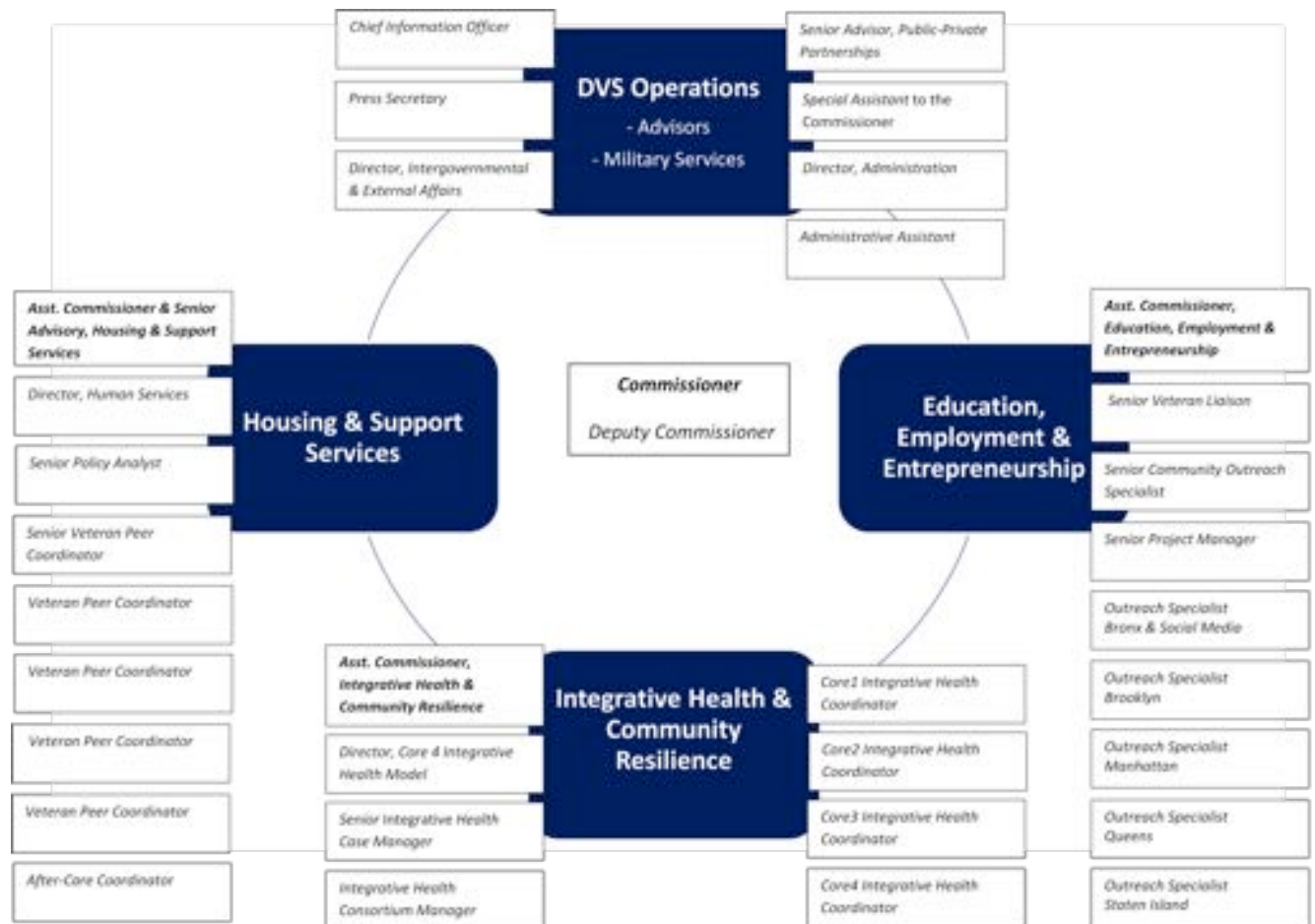
came on-line, making the program operational in all five boroughs, an objective cited in the 2015 report.

- **Veterans Week:** The city hosted another successful Veterans Week. In addition to significant participation in “America’s Parade” by elected officials and other city leaders, New York City also once again witnessed the symbolic Flag Ceremony at City Hall. In recognition of those who have served the flags of all five services joined the National, State, City and POW-MIA flags flew throughout the period designated as Veterans Week. This visible symbol of respect for our military, veterans and their families highlights the City-wide support. Lastly, the Mayor continued the tradition of hosting the Mayor’s Veterans’ Day breakfast in honor of service, which included approximately 250 civic, military, veteran and VSO advocacy leaders shortly before many of these same leaders participated in America’s Parade, the largest Veterans’ Day parade in the nation.
- **America’s Parade:** Though hosted by the United War Veterans Council, the administration has a strong hand in the success of America’s Parade. This is also an example where New York benefits from its veteran programs through both commerce and communications (the prior years’ estimates have suggested that the economic impact of the parade was approximately \$7.2 million). **This year, according to the United War Veterans Council, almost 300 organizations from 30 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and several international allies participated in the parade. The NYPD estimates there were ~40,000 participants with ~500,000 spectators.** The parade was televised live locally on WPIX and worldwide through the American Forces Network. A follow-on highlights show was broadcast in a number of cities throughout the country through the Tribune Network. It was also streamed through Military.com and Weather.com, creating positive branding for the city. New York serves as the hub for an ongoing national expansion of America's Parade, with Los Angeles and Philadelphia already in the network through their own veteran events in 2016. The culmination of this effort will be a major international veteran event in New York in 2019, the Veterans Day Centennial.
- **December:** President Obama signed the Defense of Veterans Act into law. New York City had held hearings on the topic and the Council had introduced Resolution 1196 calling on Congress and the President to act in support of the act. **To our knowledge, New York City was the only major city that held such a hearing.**

STAFFING OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERAN SERVICES

As stated in our 2015 annual report, the most important objective of 2016 was to build the DVS team so that they can effectively design and implement innovative programs that directly benefit veterans and their families. We seek (where possible) to ensure that the programs can be adapted to benefit all New Yorkers regardless of their military experience. We are very pleased with the success achieved in this area.

Below is the latest organizational chart for DVS. More information and individual biographies can be found at their website: www.nyc.gov/veterans.



SATELLITE OFFICES AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH SPECIALISTS

One of DVS's key objectives was to establish Veteran Community Outreach Specialists who are trained and certified as Veteran Benefits Counselors and assign them to each borough in order to push them into the community. The specialists have been hired and the majority of satellite sites have been identified. Office hours have been published so veterans and family members in need can obtain help identifying and coordinating relevant services.

The current satellite site locations and office hours are included below:

The Bronx

Bronx County Courthouse
851 Grand Concourse, Rm. 209, Bronx, NY 10451
Tues, Wed, Thurs, 10:00am to 2:00pm

Brooklyn

Pending staff hire and site selection

Manhattan

Pending site selection

Queens

Queens Borough Hall
120-55 Queens Blvd Rm.222, Kew Gardens, NY 11415
Tues, Wed, Thurs, 10:00am to 2:00pm

Staten Island

Staten Island Borough Hall
10 Richmond Terrace, Staten Island, NY 10301
Mon, Tues, Fri, 10:0am to 2:00pm

College of Staten Island (CUNY)
2800 Victory Blvd, Staten Island, NY 10314
Thurs, 10:00am to 2:00pm

RECOMMENDATIONS

In last year's report we highlighted 13 broad strategic recommendations. This year our recommendations are more specific and we have organized them in two parts: (1) Policy and Legislative Recommendations for the Mayor and/or the City Council to take action and (2) Strategy and Program Recommendations for DVS.

Recommendations for the Mayor and/or City Council

Fund a Campaign to Encourage Transitioning Veterans to Study at New York City's World-Class Colleges and Universities: We call upon the Administration and the City Council through the budget process to fund a campaign to encourage transitioning veterans nationwide to pursue their college degrees in New York City (more details in the Strategy and Programs Recommendations section). We believe the benefits of such a campaign would far outweigh the costs. Most transitioning veterans possess GI Bill benefits, and many of them will choose to stay in New York City once they complete their education. This program will have the added benefit of branding New York City as a "veteran-friendly city" in the veterans' community.

Invest in Resources to Evaluate and Document the Impact of Our Programs: Our vision statement includes reference to the *most effective* local veteran policies. These words were chosen carefully and we are committed to recommending policies and programs focused on veterans that benefit all New Yorkers. In order to accomplish this, DVS must be provided with the appropriate resources.

We call upon the Administration and the City Council to provide additional funding specifically dedicated to evaluating and documenting our programs including:

- Document benefits and efficiency: We believe that New York City has created extremely effective veteran programs and that these are a model for the country. Documentation will allow us to prove that we have been good stewards of resources and attract additional State and Federal resources. Further, the documentation hereof will highlight the value that these programs provide to all New Yorkers.
- Document lessons learned: The veteran population in New York City is a relatively small one compared to many other constituencies. Documenting the lessons learned from our programs could allow us to scale them to larger populations, thereby benefiting all New Yorkers. This model is already being applied to our veteran homeless and treatment court programs and we are encouraged by the opportunity to share our successes with other populations in the City.
- Conduct a Veteran Census: In order to create thoughtful policy we must understand our veteran population. Towards that end, we recommend that a Veteran Census or other form of population study be conducted in the near-intermediate future. This is in addition to resources focused on evaluating our programs.

Add Resources for Contracting Capability for DVS: One of the most fundamental aspects of a department is having direct control over contracting resources. DVS is not

currently funded or staffed to allow for this capability and contracts are currently executed through the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS). This should be rectified in the budget process this year. In addition to prioritization, there are unique contracting attributes that VSOs often carry, such as not being a 501(c)(3), which confuse and slow down the completion of contracts and disbursement of funds when centralized through DCAS.

Intro 1304-A: The Alternative Exemption for Veterans: The City Council should pass Intro 1304-A and treat veterans in New York City consistent with how veterans in the rest of the state are treated with respect to school taxation and real property tax. If this is not passed, the funds should be redirected for veteran-related programs and support our veterans continued service as citizens.

Extend the Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) Program to Veteran-Owned Businesses: The MWBE program should be extended to veteran-owned businesses. This could be easily and efficiently accomplished by extending the definition of “Minority” to include veterans.

Advocate for the Consistent Application of Policies for Veteran Treatment Courts: Work with the five District Attorney’s Offices and the Office of Courts Administration to create consistency throughout the boroughs for the use of Veterans Treatment Courts. This would provide both equal treatment for veterans in all five boroughs, reduce costs to the criminal justice system, and also reduce crime given the favorable recidivism statistics experienced through these programs.

Intro. 1303: Veteran Street Vending: Veterans have a long history of street vending in New York City dating back to the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. It provides a unique entrepreneurial opportunity for those interested in building their own business. Intro. 1303 calls for 4,445 new vending permits to be created over 7 years (635 per year), with 245 (35 per year) designated for veterans and the disabled. We estimate that veterans and the disabled make up approximately 13% of New York City residents over the age of 18² and we believe the permits designated for veterans and the disabled should be slightly higher than their proportion of the population. As such, we recommend that the designated permits be adjusted to 800 of the 4,445 (100 of the 635 per year), or 15.7% of the new permits. We also recommend that all disabled / veteran permits be classified as Citywide permits.

² The Mayors Office of People with Disabilities estimates there are 800,000 New Yorkers with disabilities and DVS estimates that 210,000 veterans reside in the city. According to the Department of Health and Human Services the disability prevalence rate for veterans in New York State is 17.0% for those below 65 and 37.8% for those over 65. New York has approximately 8.5 million residents of which 6.6 million are of over the age of 18 (all veterans are over 18). The disability rare for people under 18 is approximately 4.1%. This implies that veterans and people with disabilities make up 12.9-13.5% of New York City residents.

DVS Strategy and Program Recommendations

Establish and Publish a Three to Five Year Strategic Plan: We recommend that DVS establish and publish a three to five-year strategic plan in order to ensure that New York City has the most effective local veteran policies of any major city in the United States. Key attributes would include a time-phased plan to achieve various milestones, including the Department's city-wide campaign to connect veterans and their families with employment opportunities, educational resources, financial services, and business opportunities.

Develop a Comprehensive Communications Plan: While there has been success in many areas, the most notable area for growth is in DVS' communications and outreach capabilities. Investment in this area is already underway as evidenced by the redesign of the website, but more action should be taken and this should be a priority.

We recommend that a communication plan should be drafted no later than June 2017 so that identified resource needs can be included in the budget and that it include at least the following:

- Veteran Email List: Establish and maintain the broadest possible list of veterans in New York City so that information can be directly disseminated to the group and make summary information available to the VAB for review (no personal data to be shared). Multiple channels should be used to establish this list including the DVS website, VAB meetings, university onboarding procedures (veterans can choose to opt-out), municipal ID card programs, when providing direct services, working with local VSOs and other organizations to allow their members to be included else they opt-out. Targets should also be set for the number of veterans on the list.
- Social Media: Develop a comprehensive social media plan.
- Key Influencers: Collaborate with the VAB to maintain a list of key influencers both within the city and throughout the nation so that we can highlight the success New York City achieves and brand the City as veteran-friendly.
- Awareness of Satellite Sites and Scheduled Office Hours: Develop a plan to make veterans aware of the existence and availability of the regional veteran outreach coordinators in each borough including their locations and office hours.
- Community Calendar: Establishing an on-line community calendar where all local veteran events can be published. The intent is to allow for maximum awareness of events and not to supplant the efforts of our VSOs towards this same end.

Establish a Program to Encourage Transitioning Veterans to Study at New York City's World-class Colleges and Universities: New York City is the nation's largest importer of college students, with 110 colleges and nearly 600,000 students. CUNY/City College was recognized in December by Victory Media as the number one Military-Friendly School among public institutions with more than 10,000 students. We should work with these institutions to support the Vets on Campus initiative create efficient pathways to attract veterans to our city. This supports both the positive migration of educated citizens to the city and has the added benefit of attracting Federal to the City as the majority of transitioning veterans have access to the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

Specific attributes of these programs should include:

- Joint Marketing Campaign: Work with all post-secondary educational institutions to establish a joint marketing campaign targeted at transitioning veterans nationwide inviting them to study in New York. Elements of the ad campaign should include the city's guiding principle of supporting veterans continued service as citizens and also to tap into the spirit of adventure that inspired many veterans to join the military in the first place. We should also consider a competition among advertising firms as a central tenet of the program.
- Support for Veterans Applying to New York Colleges: To maximize the benefit of this investment, it will be important to support veterans applying for college in New York City. We recommend the following three actions:
 - Partner with a non-profit such as Service to School, which provides full-scale application assistance to help veterans apply to college
 - Establish a common set of recommended "veteran friendly" actions for schools to take, such as waiving application fees for both veterans and spouses, offering in-state tuition rates for qualified veterans, and encourage local colleges and universities that will benefit from the campaign to implement these policies (many New York City based schools already have such policies in place)
 - Provide training for college administrators who review veterans' applications on items such as understanding a veteran's experience, etc.
- Resources for Local Public Colleges and Universities: Many local colleges and universities (CUNY/SUNY/Private) have support systems in place for veteran students; however, these programs are not consistent across campuses. In order to support an increase in veterans from this effort, it will be critical to ensure infrastructure is in place to support student veterans and that it is consistent across all of the public institutions that are funded by New York City tax dollars. This will ensure that we maximize the benefit of this program.
- Housing Support: Consider appropriating a housing voucher for student veterans who attend college in New York City and receive GI Bill benefits. This would require modest funding, but we believe that the added commerce would more than offset the cost of such a voucher program over time.
- Consider Extending Benefits to Spouses of Veterans: Veteran spouses and family members are critical members of the veteran team. Where possible, encourage the institutions to extend these same benefits to spouses of veterans.

Build upon the Success of Mission Home, New York City's Fight against Veteran Homelessness: New York City is the clear leader throughout all large cities in the United States in its fight against veteran homelessness. We must seize the opportunity to champion this success to both garner more resources for New York City in its continued fight against veteran homelessness as well as help other populations and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) in the broader war against homelessness.

Specific recommendations include:

- Achieve Functional Zero: We commend the DVS, HRA and all New York City agencies and partners involved in the fight against veteran homelessness and call

upon them to achieve their bold objective of reaching functional zero. As of December 27, 2016 there were 487 veterans in shelter, a drop of over 90% since the fight began, but it is 487 too high. We call upon all stakeholders to renew their commitment and achieve this historic milestone.

- Build a Comprehensive Prevention Plan: Activities to prevent veterans from becoming homeless are already underway, but these should be expanded and the lessons-learned captured and tracked in order to share best-practices. Prevention is almost always less expensive than the cost of someone becoming homeless.
- Document our Success: DVS should spearhead an inter-agency effort to document the success of Mission Home. The report would include existing and innovative strategies that were used, details on how city and private resources were used to leverage federal dollars, and what strategies are being used to maintain this success in the long term. DVS should also work with the Mayor's Office of Budget and Management, New York City Independent Budget Office, or other relevant independent econometrists to conduct an economic impact study of the programs and include this in the report. It will also be critical to highlight the aggregate state and federal dollars we have attracted to our city so that the public better understands the benefits that our veteran programs bring to New York City. It will also be important to demonstrate to state and federal authorities that we have used these resources wisely.
- Share our Success Across the City: As a relatively small population in the City with access to federal and state resources, we have been able to find new pathways to success in our fight to eliminate veteran homelessness. For example, on average an individual in the New York City shelter system is homeless for 355 days. Among the veteran population, we have been able to reduce this to a median of 79 days and we can use our lessons learned to help the broader system.
- Share our Success with other Cities throughout the Nation: Meet with federal and state officials to highlight the successes New York City has had and ask for more resources to advance this worthy cause. Highlight that we have been good stewards of their resources where possible. Since New York City began its fight against veteran homelessness in 2011, we have realized an approximately 90% drop in homelessness, which compares very favorably to the 47% drop nationwide since 2010, according to HUD.

Successfully Launch VetConnectNYC: New York City is on the verge of launching its VetConnectNYC, which is intended to link New York City veterans and their families to a range of City, State, Federal and non-profit service-providers. The City has been piloting the program for the past two years where over 2,000 veterans have used the service. It is a public-private partnership run by UniteUS, a for-profit veteran-owned company, and Syracuse University's Institute for Military and Veteran Families (IVMF), which manages a physical coordination center with trained case workers. Critical to the success of the program will be to ensure that the communication is integrated in the overall communication plan, and we ask the administration and City Council to ensure that the program includes enough resources to educate the veteran population on the availability of the program.

Build-Out VetsThriveNYC: Last year's landmark legislation created funding and support to provide for specific mental health initiatives in support of veterans in need. DVS has developed a 'Core 4' Integrative Health model, which is a non-linear dynamic model featuring four domains: Cultural Engagement (C1); Connection via Peer Social Support (C2); Community Holistic Services (C3); and Clinical Treatment (C4). Last year, a steering committee was established and the foundation has been laid. We look forward to the build-out of the program in 2017. Critical to its success will be community engagement to raise awareness for the program in order to encourage use of the services, as well as the holistic grant aspect worked on by both DVS and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. DVS continue engage with partners such as ProVetus which is a trained peer-mentoring program focused on five critical domains: Employment, Housing, Family and Legal, Social/Physical Community and Medical, which provides leverage to City resources. We should also support community originated awareness efforts such as the VEThack march to end veteran suicide, which takes place in New York City annually and we believe to be the largest such event in the nation.

Develop a Plan to Celebrate the History of Veterans throughout History: A critical part of the mission of the DVS is celebrating veterans and what they have brought to our nation and to New York City. The next five years will mark a series of landmark anniversaries including the centennial of both the end of World War I and the first Veterans Day Parade (now dubbed "*America's Parade*") and the fifty-year anniversary of various milestones of the Vietnam War.

We recommend the following:

- Provide More Direct Support for the Centennial of the Veterans' Day Parade: We should assess the feasibility of investing more in the 2019 event so as to showcase the rich and proud history that New York has in celebrating its veterans and increase the economic impact of the parade; this would include attracting international attendance. We recommend a committee be formed to investigate with representation from the hospitality and media industries, local non-profits, state and federal representatives and other interested parties.
- Utilize Fleet Week to Convene Other Leaders and Showcase the City: Fleet Week is a time-honored New York tradition and should be utilized as an opportunity to convene leaders from across the nation to discuss veteran policy. This will allow New York City to continue to showcase leadership and aid in the veteran friendly branding of the city. Specific funding should be provided to support this convening.

Employment and Entrepreneurship: Stable employment is a critical element of supporting veterans continued service as citizens. Whether something as simple as paying taxes or more significant such as volunteering actively or engaging in the political process, stable employment is required.

Towards the end of ensuring that our veterans remain employed in well-paid jobs, we recommend the following:

- **City Employment:** The government is the largest employer in the city and it simply must lead by example. Additionally, there are many City and State agencies that face potentially acute labor shortages, such as the MTA, where a large proportion of its skilled labor is eligible for retirement over the next five years. Transitioning service members could be a cost-effective pipeline for talent. We must develop citywide veteran employment programs. These include classifying veterans as a protected class where appropriate so that they can be provided with a hiring preference, supporting agencies creation of veteran employee support networks, and recruiting initiatives for attracting transitioning veterans to various city employment opportunities. We should seek collaborative commercial and non-profit leaders to develop programs to such as those run by the Home Builders Institute which trains transitioning veterans for careers in the homebuilding industry.
- **Private Employment:** Critical to supporting veterans continued service as citizens is supporting their stable employment. New York City does not control private employers; however, it can act as a facilitator to private companies who want to hire veterans. These programs can potentially be revenue-neutral through Federal government employment programs for veterans, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTC) program, which can provide businesses up to \$9,600 in tax credits per eligible veteran hired if those tax credits are then redeployed in the city.
 - Create a Private Employment Support Program: Create a comprehensive private employment support program to educate and support private employers in New York City in establishing veteran hiring initiatives. This could include actions such as creating a veteran employment program handbook highlighting the benefits of a veteran hiring program, as well as actions required and resources available to execute such a program, hosting periodic training sessions on this topic and promoting the benefits of hiring veterans, and having a specific program around veterans. Many of the country's leading experts on veteran employment programs are active in New York City, such as the Arcadia Group and Miligistix and we should seek to collaborate with them and others.
 - Track Outcomes: Establish policies to track outcomes for long-term unemployed veterans who have obtained employment, WOTC credits for employers, and other key performance indicators.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Entrepreneurship is the lifeblood of the America. According to the Small Business Administration, veterans own 9% of small businesses, while only comprising 6.7% of the population. State and Federal government provide a great deal of support to small businesses in the forms of training, contract support, financing and other benefits. As such, New York City should support its veterans who seek to become entrepreneurs through a comprehensive program. The program should include, among other attributes, the following three specific items:
 - Create an Outreach Program to Educate Veteran Business Owners of the Inclusion in the MWBE Program: Once the Administration or City Council act to include veteran-owned businesses under the MWBE Program, execute an outreach plan to ensure that veteran entrepreneurs are aware of the welcomed change.

- Connect Veteran Entrepreneurs to Resources: In order to support and encourage entrepreneurship, programs should be created to connect veteran entrepreneurs to resources.
- Support the Tradition of Veteran Venders: New York City has a tradition of supporting veterans interested in operating as street vendors going back to the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. With the City Council considering an overhaul of the current vendor rules and regulations it is important that they honor the tradition of supporting veteran vending (see proposal in the legislative section). In order to ensure that veterans who choose to vend excel, the DVS should develop a training program to ensure that veterans are educated on the regulations and can ply their craft with professionalism. DVS should also partner with private industry to create programs for veterans to finance and acquire equipment which will support their success.

Veteran Treatment Courts: We are proud that Veteran Treatment Courts (VTCs) have now been established in each of the five Boroughs and we believe that these are tremendous programs for both veterans and taxpayers. According to the Vera Institute of Justice the average cost to incarcerate a prisoner in the State of New York is \$60,076, the most expensive state in the country nearly twice the national average of \$31,286. Further, as of the first three years of existence, the Buffalo Veteran Treatment court has a 0% recidivism rate. While we would not expect that to be sustained, it has clearly been more successful than other such courts.

Regarding VTCs, we recommend the following three actions:

- Consistent Application across the Boroughs: In order for the City to benefit most from the program, we ask that the policies be applied consistently throughout New York City. Veterans should have equal protection and application of the law throughout all of New York City's Criminal Courts. We urge the five NYC District Attorney's Offices work with the Office of Courts Administration to create guidelines for which offenses should be referred to treatment courts.
- Measure Outcomes: In order to ensure that the City gets the maximum benefit from these programs, we recommend that outcomes be measured and that each of the VTCs have a standard set of reporting data, which should be provided at least to DVS in its coordinating function and the New York City Council Committee on Veterans in its oversight capacity. A working group should be convened to determine which data should be collected, but it should include at least number of cases referred, outcomes, recidivism rates, costs, and key lessons learned in the application of the program so we can ensure that it continually improves.
- Share Lessons Learned: Anecdotal evidence suggests that VTCs have had more favorable outcomes as measured by recidivism rates than the other treatment courts, potentially due to the peer support model employed. If true, lessons learned in the success of the VTCs should be shared with the other treatment courts so that all New Yorkers benefit from these investments in programs for veterans.

Create Innovative Funding Strategies: While the majority of the resources and funding for the services that DVS provides will be provided by various government

sources, there are times that the most innovative public policy will require other sources. New York City as the financial capital of the world should be at the forefront of innovation in funding and establishing public / private partnerships.

DSV should actively investigate the following potential funding strategies:

- 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19) Funding: New York City has been at the forefront of establishing opportunities for government collaboration with private citizens via 501(c)(3) non-profit funding mechanisms. DVS may also qualify for the establishment of a Veteran Service Organization under 501(c)(19) which could allow it to access different pockets of funding for veteran focused programs. All should be considered and evaluated.
- Social Impact Funding: Social Impact funding is at the forefront of finance innovation and could have many applications for veterans given the opportunity for clear observable outcomes. DVS should evaluate opportunities to apply this technology to create innovative funding solutions for the veteran space.
- Real Estate: The availability of long-term affordable housing is a clear choke-point in the fight to end veteran homelessness. New York City is home to many of the most powerful real estate firms in the world, and we should seek opportunities to collaborate with the real estate community to create long-term housing solutions.

MINUTES FROM 2016 VETERAN ADVISORY BOARD MEETINGS

The minutes for each of the meetings hosted by the NYC Veterans Advisory Board:

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for February 23, 2016 meeting held at:

Queens Borough President's Office
120-55 Queens Blvd
Kew Gardens, NY 11415

Members

Present:

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)	Samuel Innocent (Bronx)
Joe Bello (Bronx)	Charles Greinsky (Staten Island)
John Rowan (Queens)	Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)
Charles Hernandez (Bronx)	Mariel Juarez (Brooklyn)
Jules Martin (Manhattan)	

Absent:

Pat Devine (Bronx)	Anthony "Tony" Odierno (Manhattan)
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Minutes

- Todd Haskins (Chair) commenced the meeting. (6:15 PM)
- All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.

Old Business: The chair stated the minutes from the December meeting in Staten Island were approved by the board prior to the end of the year so they could be included in the board's Annual Report. The chair also gave a brief overview of the Annual report sent to the Mayor, Speaker and Commissioner as well as his testimony before the Council in January. It was noted that the Vice Chair also testified.

New Business: None.

Presentations:

Prosper. Dan McSweeney, President of the UWVC talked about *Prosper*, an integrated platform for New York City's veteran's business community. He talked about their mission, which is to accelerate veteran entrepreneurship throughout the city. He talked about how prosper looks to

incubate veteran led start-ups and also provide training and partnerships with other organizations. Mr. McSweeney also talked about the 6% for NYS contracts for small businesses that are owned by disabled veterans. The website for *Propser* is: <http://prosper.vet/>

CM Eric Ulrich. Chair of the City Council's Veterans Committee, Councilman Ulrich discussed his and the Council's rationale for creating the Department of Veteran Services. He talked about how historically the office has always been at the mercy of each particular administration. With the new department, the City Council is now on the hook to make sure there is proper funding and staffing. CM Ulrich stated that NYC is going to lead the nation in services to veterans and their family members. CM Ulrich also discussed the City Council Veterans Initiative, what it is and how it has grown from 400K to 940K over the last two city budgets. He named some of the recipients of the initiative (NYLAG, Jericho Project, etc.) and explained how they are helping veterans and their family members throughout New York City. He named the council members currently serving on the Veterans Committee. CM Ulrich then talked about the Veterans Advisory Board. He talked about it has been reformed, revamped and the important role the board will play in helping the Council regarding the initiative, how they advise and add expertise in hearings and how many of the members come to the hearings. He also talked about how the new Department and the board will work together to make sure that future generations of veterans will have access to needed services, including housing and jobs. Lastly, he gave each member of the board a City Council Citation.

MOVA. Commissioner Sutton spoke about what she is doing to get the new Department up and running by July 1st. She stated that she is working with the board in this regard and has been reviewing testimony over the past 18 months to gather thoughts and ideas, particularly in regards to contract oversight, ombudsman and communication strategy. Commissioner Sutton also talked about outreach personnel in all the boroughs and also briefly discussed her thoughts on creating a public/private partnership which will set the National standard for local veteran policy.

The VAB Chair stated that to help in this, the board has created an e-mail account which veterans, family members and supporters could write to give input regarding what resources and services they would like to see the new department have. The e-mail address is: NYCDVSFeedback@gmail.com

Public Comments: Board member John Rowan (Queens) hosted this part of the meeting. The following individuals gave public comments to the board:

Craig Caruana: Mr. Caruana is the Director of Veteran Services for America Works. He talked about what they do and how veterans with unemployment can get help from them with resume writing, and jobs.

Ryan Graham: Mr. Graham is the Queens County Commander for the VFW. He stated that Queens has the highest number of veterans in New York City. He introduced Ray Ramos from the VFW, who is the county's service officer. Mr. Graham stated that the VFW will be holding its Testimonial Dinner/Dance on April 23rd and that tickets were \$60 dollars. Mr. Graham discussed the core values of the VFW – Camaraderie, Advocacy and Community.

Ray Ramos: Mr. Ramos stated that he didn't know the board existed and talked about how many veterans need legal services. He also discussed a Water Project that he is coordinating to help the people of Flint, Michigan. He stated that they have a Go Fund me page.

Andrew Tullefsen: Mr. Tullefsen is from the American Legion (Post 423). He stated that many cities are looking into starting legal services/veterans courts for veterans.

Cindy Katz: Ms. Katz is from Queens Legal Services. She explained what she and Queens Legal Services do for veterans and gave out her number (917) 661-4500 if any veteran needed help.

Albert Noble: Mr. Noble is a member of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV). He stated that he works helping veterans with their claims at Queens Borough Hall. He stated that we need to take better care of those veterans returning home and in this regard, there is a lot of work to be done. He stated that the office hours for the Veterans office at Borough Hall are 10 AM – 2 PM and that they are located in Room 326. They can be reached at (718) 263-2508.

Kristen Rouse: Ms. Rouse stated she leads the NYC Veterans Alliance. She stated she was happy to see the board operating the way it's doing now and looks forward to seeing robust attendance in the future. She stated she fully supports success for the board. Ms. Rouse then talked about what the Alliance does and that a series of surveys will be coming out in a few weeks. Ms. Rouse stated they have 150 members and how they are looking to help train veterans to run for Congress. She also stated that they are not a Veterans Service Organization but a Social Welfare organization.

Michael William: Mr. William is the Bronx VA Medical Center Minority Veterans Coordinator. He stated he travels all over the community helping veterans and that if anyone wanted to speak to him, he would be available.

Stanley Scriven: Mr. Scriven work for Easter Seals. He spoke about the HVRP program and what it is. He stated that veterans need better reintegration into society. He spoke about the need to help female veterans and seniors with community services.

Boots Whitlock: Mr. Whitlock stated that he a vendor who is with a veterans vending group called Vets 4 Vets. They are looking for a lawyer. He spoke about food carts and a company called Move Systems. He spoke about NYS law 35A and how it affects veteran vendors.

Board member John Rowan talked about HR 1769 – the Toxic Exposure Act. This bill will study the effects of toxic exposure (such as Agent Orange) to children of veterans. John talked about the need to get it out of the Federal House and Senate.

Sherry Dupree spoke up and stated that she is a Native American and veteran from Brooklyn who has PTSD. She stated that the 29th Street Clinic has Indian (Native American) services. She stated that the individual must be enrolled and be a Native American. She also shared that a friend of hers has been missing in Iraq/Afghanistan while working for an NGO since 2010 and no one will help.

Meeting Adjourned.

Next Meeting: Brooklyn, April 13, 2016

Submitted by: Joe Bello, Secretary

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for April 13, 2016 meeting held at:

Brooklyn Borough President's Office
209 Joralemon Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Members

Present:

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)
John Rowan (Queens)
Charles Hernandez (Bronx)
Jules Martin (Manhattan)

Samuel Innocent (Bronx)
Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)
Mariel Juarez (Brooklyn)

Absent:

Pat Devine (Bronx)
Joe Bello (Bronx)

Anthony "Tony" Odierno (Manhattan)
Charles Greinsky (Staten Island)

Minutes

- Todd Haskins (Chair) commenced the meeting. (6:15 PM)
- All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.

Public Session

Approved Feb. 2016 minutes without objection.

Chair Haskins announced that the draft of the VAB By-laws will be made public for comment.

Deputy Brooklyn Borough President Diana Reyna greeted everyone to Borough Hall. They are planning an open house for VSDVOB.

Commissioner Sutton reported on the transition to the NYC Dept. of Veterans Services, including future hiring and budget resources. She announced the formation of a new Veterans Court in Manhattan.

Representatives from SAGE did a presentation on their programs for LGBT veterans (SAGEUSA.Org) (212-741-2247).

Lt. Stroup, USN reported on the upcoming Fleet Week festivities.

A report was given by Martin Collins, a Veterans Business Assistance Counselor. They provide counseling and loans in the Bronx and Manhattan (212-795-1600)

SSGT David Winkler told us about Wings for Warriors a NFP that assists the families of the wounded (wingsforwarriors.org, 657-243-5406).

Meeting Adjourned.

Next Meeting: Staten Island, June 16, 2016

Submitted by VAB Member John Rowan for Secretary Bello.

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for June 16, 2016 meeting held at:

Staten Island Borough President's Office
10 Richmond Terrace, #120
Staten Island, NY 10301

Members

Present:

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)	John Rowan (Queens)
Charles Greinsky (Staten Island)	Joe Bello (Bronx)
Charles Hernandez (Bronx)	Mariel Juarez (Brooklyn)
Jules Martin (Manhattan)	

Absent:

Pat Devine (Bronx)	Anthony "Tony" Odierno (Manhattan)
Samuel Innocent (Bronx)	Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)

Minutes

- Todd Haskins (Chair) commenced the meeting. (5:40 PM)
- All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.

Public Session

Staten Island Borough President James Oddo gave greetings to the board and the audience.

NYC Deputy Mayor Richard Buery gave greetings and talked about how DVS is growing and the changes DVS is and will be going through. The Deputy Mayor also discussed Mental Health and the city's ThriveNYC plan, which is key priority to improve the health of New York City.

The Deputy Mayor discussed HUD's certification ending chronic veteran homelessness in NYC. He stressed there is still more work but that great process has been made. The DM made a point of saying that DVS continues leadership with other city agencies in this area.

The Deputy Mayor talked about how DVS is in the process of creating satellite offices in each of the five boroughs. In Staten Island, the satellite office will be at the College of Staten Island. No time frame when it will officially open as they are still discussing. The Deputy Mayor also talked about the new Staten Island Ferry that will be named for the late Staff Sgt. Michael Ollis, who died after stepping in front of a wounded Polish soldier to shield him from an insurgent's suicide vest. Lastly the Deputy Mayor shared that both his nephew and cousin are veterans.

The Deputy Mayor took questions from the audience. There was a discussion on housing for specialized populations and the need for both long and short term housing in Staten Island. It was stated by someone in the audience that there is no Section 8 housing for veterans in Staten Island.

The board approved the April 2016 minutes and the new VAB By-laws without objection.

Commissioner Sutton reported on the continuing transition to the NYC Dept. of Veterans Services, including future hiring and budget resources. The Commissioner introduced Jamal Othman as the new Assistant Commissioner. Mr. Othman was the Deputy Director for the State Division of Veterans Affairs. She also introduced Matt Basile, who is the new outreach coordinator for Staten Island. The Commissioner introduced the New York Film Academy, student-veterans who are filming the meeting for DVS to post online. Lastly, the Commissioner discussed DVS' Artist in waiting program and the new positions that are available at DVS, and how to apply.

Public Comments: Board member Charles Greinsky (Staten Island) hosted this part of the meeting. The following individuals gave public comments to the board:

Paul Capofari: Mr. Capofari is an ADA with the Staten Island District Attorney's Office. He stated that the Staten Island Veterans Court is moving forward and they have identified a Judge for the court. The court is tentatively scheduled to open sometime in November.

Dan McSweeney: Mr. McSweeney shared his observation regarding the number of boards currently in existence, and how we can collate to create critical mass for younger veterans. He also discussed legal marijuana for veterans, how it can possibly help those with mental health issues, how we should be talking about it and that more information is needed.

Tony Davis: Mr. Davis is the Relationship Manager; North Atlantic District for the Department of Veterans Affairs. He talked about creation of the CVEB Metropolitan NYC Veterans Community Engagement Board and what its mission is and how it enables veterans and other stakeholders to identify and work to resolve issues at the local level to improve VA service delivery for veterans and their families.

Michael Williams: Mr. Williams is the Bronx VA Medical Center Minority Veterans Coordinator. He stated that he travels all over the community helping veterans and that if anyone wanted to speak with him, he would be available. (Note: He was at our Queens Meeting as well).

Jim Haynes: Mr. Haynes talked about the problems getting the word out to the community regarding these types of meetings. He stated that the Staten Island Advance no longer does local announcements. He also stated the paper no longer puts flags next to the names of veterans when they pass away, which helped identify them.

Meeting Adjourned.

Next Meeting: Bronx, September 21, 2016

Submitted by VAB Secretary Joe Bello.

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for September 21, 2016 meeting held at:

Lincoln Hospital
234 East 149th Street
Bronx, New York, 10451

Members

Present:

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)	Pat Devine (Bronx)
Charles Hernandez (Bronx)	Jules Martin (Manhattan)
Joe Bello (Bronx)	Samuel Innocent (Bronx)
John Rowan (Queens)	Mariel Juarez (Brooklyn)

Absent:

Charles Greinsky (Staten Island) Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)
Anthony "Tony" Odierno (Manhattan)

Minutes

- Todd Haskins (Chair) commenced the meeting at 6:15 PM.
- All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience and the chair recognized Police and First Responders.

Welcomes:

- Tracy McDermott gave greetings on behalf of Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.
- James Carr, Director of MIS & Network Security Officer (Marine Corps) gave greetings on behalf of Lincoln Hospital. Stated that Lincoln Hospital is always welcoming to veterans.
- Joe Mondello, Chair of the Bronx Borough President Veterans Advisory Council gave greetings, welcomed us back to the Bronx, talked about some of the items the council has worked on and thanked the board for its work. Mr. Mondello gave the chair a Bronx Veterans Resource Guide.

Old Business: The board approved June 2016 minutes (SI)

New Business: **Elections** were held and the following individuals were re-elected to one (1) year terms:

- Todd Haskins - Chair
- Samuel Innocent – Vice Chair
- Joe Bello – Secretary

- Todd Haskins resumed chair duties.

Presentations:

DVS. Commissioner Sutton greeted the board members and congratulated the newly re-elected officers. She briefly overviewed what has been happening at DVS and stated that DVS will have 25 personnel by the end of October and 34 by the end of FY17. She introduced and gave background on several new personnel who were in attendance, including the new Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner. The Commissioner talked about a recent incident regarding a veteran who passed away and stated that DVS will be looking into regulations and working with other agencies to make the process smoother. The Commissioner also announced that there will be another flag ceremony at City Hall for Veteran week. The Commissioner also talked about veteran homelessness and that it has been reduced by 90% and that many units have been lined up for veterans.

Public Comments: Board member Charles Hernandez hosted this part of the meeting. The following individuals gave public comments to the board:

Michael Williams: Mr. Williams is the Bronx VA Medical Center Minority Veterans Coordinator. He stated that he has been to every VAB meeting this year and travels all over the community helping veterans. He announced that if anyone wanted to speak with him, he would be available.

Wayne Malone: Mr. Malone brought up the issues going on at St. Albans. Mr. Malone stated that two veterans died from Heart attacks in March of 2016 and how they could have been saved but St. Albans took away the crash cart and replaced them with only heart defibrillators. He wondered how the VA can spend 9 million dollars for a columbarium but cannot put the money in for a crash cart. He also talked about how the response time at St. Albans is slow with in once case there was no Doctor on duty.

Paola Munoz: Ms. Munoz stated she was representing NYS Senator Gustavo Rivera (33 District, Bronx). She talked about Senator Rivera’s bill in the State Senate (S775-A) which would enable veterans (when they identify themselves) to receive benefit information when they apply for or renew their driver’s license. She stated that the Assembly bill (A122-A) sponsored by Assemblyman Dinowitz has not been brought to a vote in the NYS Assembly’s Transportation Committee and that veterans should reach out to their elected officials in both the Senate and the Assembly to support these bills. She handed out legislation information.

Dan McSweeney: Talked about the Parade season coming, with Veterans Week and Veterans Day. He also talked about the need to coordinate. Mr. McSweeney talked about the MyVA Metropolitan Veterans Community Engagement Board and the need to coordinate with the VAB.

Sonia Villamil: From the NYC Department of Finance. Ms. Villamil talked about the Department’s forgiveness program (Amnesty) and the ability to collect a debt while giving a

break on the violations. Ms. Villamil also talked about Rent and the homeowner's exemption. She warned of scams going on in Queens and for everyone to be vigilant.

Jacqueline Rodriguez: Ms. Rodriguez represented NYC's Human Resource Administration (HRA) and talked about the need for public engagement to help find stable housing/units for veterans and others. She also talked about homeless prevention and the "homebase" program.

Loretta Humphrey/Andrea Scarsboro: (Both we're not on the sign-up sheet). Ms. Humphrey and Ms. Scarsboro followed up on Mr. Malone's conversation regarding St. Albans. They stated that Ms. Martina Pruda, the Director of the NYC VA Harbor Healthcare system responded to the situation at St. Albans. They read Ms. Pruda's statement. They stated that in 2011/2012 there were crash carts but there are none now. They asked the VAB to assist getting crash carts back to St. Alban's. Mr. McSweeney stated that the next MyVA CEB meeting is on October 20th and they should bring these complaints to that meeting.

There were no more speakers.

Board member John Rowan (Queens) talked about Bill S2921/HR4683, the Vets First Bill in the US Senate and House. He explained that if you got out on a DADT discharge, you can file to the Military Board of Corrections. However, if you got out with a bad paper discharge, you cannot get an upgrade. The Fairness to Vets would change that. Mr. Rowan asked for a motion to ask CM Eric Ulrich, chair of the NYC Council's Veterans Committee to hold a hearing on bad paper discharges. The motion passes unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned.

Next Meeting: November 30, 2016

Submitted by: Joe Bello, Secretary

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for November 30, 2016 meeting held at:

NYC Department of Veterans' Services
David N. Dinkins Municipal Building
1 Centre Street, Suite 2208
New York, NY 10007

Members

Present:

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)
Joe Bello (Bronx)
John Rowan (Queens)

Anthony "Tony" Odierno (Manhattan)
Samuel Innocent (Bronx)
Mariel Juarez (Brooklyn)

Absent:

Charles Greinsky (Staten Island)
Pat Devine (Bronx)
Jules Martin (Manhattan)

Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)
Charles Hernandez (Bronx)

Minutes

- Todd Haskins (Chair) commenced the meeting at 6:15 PM.
- All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.

Old Business: The board approved September 2016 minutes (Bronx)

Presentations:

DVS. Commissioner Sutton greeted the board members and thanked the audience for coming to the meeting. She recognized and welcomed City Council Veterans Committee Counsel Eric Bernstein. Commissioner Sutton discussed the continued build-out of DVS with personnel and shared how the DVS has gone from an office of 4 in June 2014 to 26 people today, with a projected number of 34/35 by the end of the fiscal year. Commissioner Sutton also talked about the three (3) lines of action for DVS. They are: (1) Housing, (2) Mental Health (Integrated health), and the one year anniversary of ThriveNYC and DVS's Core 4 Model; and (3) Outreach/E3. Commissioner Sutton introduced her Deputy Commissioner Jeff Roth. Lastly, Commissioner Sutton announced that she will be visiting St. Alban's in December as a follow-up to the statements made at the board's September meeting in the Bronx.

Dan McSweeney. Mr. McSweeney gave a presentation on the VA's Veterans Community Engagement Board (VCEB) and how the board was created by the VA to help collaborate and facilitate a conversation between stakeholders, advocates and others to improve outcomes and ease access for veterans while looking to improve experiences for veterans at VA facilities. Mr. McSweeney introduced Mr. Tony Davis, the Relationship Manager (NY/NJ) for the VA's North Atlantic District. Mr. McSweeney stated that he would like to see better engagement with the community.

Public Comments: Board member Anthony "Tony" Odierno hosted this part of the meeting. The following individuals gave public comments to the board:

Carrie Taft: Ms. Taft talked about housing and veteran homelessness and asked what can be expected for more housing for veterans? Board member John Rowan answers and talks about some of the problems.

Michael Nelson: Mr. Nelson stated he is a disabled veteran. He stated that he tried to get with Councilmember Richie Torres to create preference for veteran housing but that he has been getting the "run around." He also talked about Mental Health and stated that you don't have to be a combat veteran to have PTSD. He stated that he goes to the Bronx VAMC for compensated therapy and that too many civilians are saying no to veterans. He stated that many veterans are taught how to be a soldier but not a veteran/civilian. Lastly, he stated that the VA doesn't have enough money to hire doctors and said it was all talk but no action.

Samuel Mantilla: Mr. Mantilla stated he is the DAV officer at Queens Borough Hall. He invited other VSO's to come aboard and stated that he helps with claim problems. He also stated that veterans should be aware of organizations not qualified to do claims and stated that veterans need groups that do good claims because the VA is not smart when it comes to adjudicating those claims.

Monique Porter: Also with the DAV. Ms. Porter asked how many individuals at DVS are veterans. Deputy Commissioner Jeff Roth answers about 60%. Ms. Porter states there are not enough on that side of the table.

Herbert Sweat: Mr. Sweat talked about Hart Island and how NPD runs it. He talked about the number of veterans who are buried at Hart Island and how families are unable to visit. He stated he wrote to Commissioner Holliday about this issue and wanted to create a monument for veterans on the island. He also stated there is a City Council Parks Department hearing tomorrow on Harts Island and that he hoped to see people there.

Jeremy Butler: Mr. Butler stated he is from IAVA and is new to the community. He stated he has been at IAVA for a year. He explained what IAVA does and talked about their legislative advocacy, their RRRP program and Vet together.

Lynda Thomson: Ms. Thomson stated she works for the FDNY and that it was a great Veterans Day Parade this year. She talked about the upcoming exam for the FDNY and how they recruit for battle buddies. She stated that there are not a lot of connections to WWII, Korean and Vietnam veterans. Lastly, she talked about Fort Hamilton and how they are short on gifts for children for many of the families deployed.

Carlos Jimenez: Mr. Jimenez talked about homeless services and how he is a drilling reservist. He stated that he works in a paralegal unit and that if you are a drilling reservist/guard/Army

reserves, you can access an attorney who can answer any questions you may have. He gave his number (301) 944-3667.

Cheryl Dupris: Ms. Dupris stated she was tricked into going to a PTSD clinic and was treated disrespectfully. She stated she wants a complaint board set up by the VAB and that a lot of OIF/OEF veterans are dealing with fake organizations. She stated she is Native American and she wants to ensure that non-profits are treating veterans respectfully.

Steven Behnke: Mr. Behnke talked about the Patriot Bass ensemble. He explained what it is and how the ensemble has performed for veterans throughout the country.

Marc Ameruso: Mr. Ameruso stated he is a Navy veteran. He shared that the Department of Health is offering a free First Aid class. He asked why DVS doesn't have night hours.

Nathaniel Walker: Mr. Walker talked about housing. He stated he is a Peer Advocate specialist for the VA.

Aleyda Meyers: Ms. Meyers stated she works for the MTA helping veterans find work. She talked about the upcoming exam for train operator and that anyone can come see her if they were interested in more information.

There were a number of people who wanted to speak but were not on the speakers list. The chair asked those wishing to speak to sign their names. The majority of these individuals made statements regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs and issues they have had with it. The chair told the audience that the board is empowered by the city and as such, has no jurisdiction over the VA. He referred audience members to Mr. Davis from the VA.

There were no more speakers. The chair wished everyone a happy holiday.

Meeting Adjourned.

Next Meeting: TBA (2017)

Submitted by: Joe Bello, Secretary