

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for the September 25, 2019 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 Hernandez (Bronx)	Tiffany Daugherty (Manhattan)
Peter Kauffman (Queens)	James Hendon (Bronx)
Joe Bello (Bronx)	

Absent:

Charles Greinsky (Staten Island)	Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)
Annette Osborne (Brooklyn)	

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

Minutes

- Todd Haskins (Chair) commenced the meeting at 6:50 PM.
- All VAB members introduce themselves to the audience. Todd briefly talks about what the VAB does and thanks the Staten Island Borough President's Office for hosting the meeting.

Presentation:

Assistant Commissioner and Senior Advisor Alexis Wichowski welcomes everyone and gives regards from Commissioner Sutton, who was not able to attend the meeting. AC Wichowski talks about the Fair Fares program for student veterans and states that 743 student vets have applied for the reduced-fair metro cards. She briefly discussed the VetConnectNYC hearing the City Council held and explains what VetConnectNYC is, along with the number of providers in the network, with more coming onboard. AC Wichowski then discusses the Mayor's MMR report and talks about some of the highlights of the report, including homeless veterans and the need to find more affordable housing. AC Wichowski states that DVS has a new CIO, who used to be with the FDNY, as well as new digital outreach person. Staff numbers for DVS are now at

46 people. Finally, AC Wichowski states that DVS has been reaching out to veteran owned businesses as they are having a one-day Procurement Summit (Vet Source) at Grow with Google on October 30th.

New Business: Todd (Chair) talks about Fair Fares and how it is a unique opportunity to help student veterans. He then talks about DVS's Veterans on Campus initiative and how there are 12,000 student veterans in New York City. Todd then talks about VetConnectNYC and says it is an investment by the city and we all need to help get the word out to the community to increase veteran awareness. Finally, Todd states that there is much work to do on the Veteran Small Business front as the City offers no preference for veterans or is listed in the M/WBE.

The Chair makes a motion to accept the June VAB minutes. The board approved the minutes. There is no other official business

Public Comments: The following individual(s) gave public comments to the board:

Samuel Cottes: Mr. Cottes works for the Staten Island Vet Center. Mr. Cottes explains what the Vet Centers do and then states that there is little to no support for veterans in Staten Island. He states that homelessness is an issue in Staten Island and that many veterans don't want to leave Staten Island. Mr. Cottes says that the Borough Presidents Office is helping and were able to open a State Veterans Office on the 3rd floor where they work with veterans on a one on one basis. Finally, Mr. Cottes states that transportation is an issue for veterans in Staten Island with many elderly veterans needing help to get to the hospital for medical appointments.

Tony Tse: Mr. Tse works for the NYS Division of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Tse stated that he does disability claims for veterans but by appointment only. He endorses several things that Mr. Cottes spoke about, including little support for Staten Island. He stresses that the board and elected officials should not forget about Staten Island. He shouts out DVS's Monique Rada, who he says is the Staten Island representative.

Robert Poles: Mr. Poles is an Army veteran. Mr. Poles says he has three ideas to present to the VAB: Free or reduced transportation for Veterans, mental health and sending veterans from state operated facilities to VA hospitals and including Veterans preference for housing. He gives out handouts. John Rowan tells him that some of the laws he cited are old (including the Vet preference for housing) and that he would need a new law directing NYCHA to move on. He was also informed about a World War II veteran who is currently working and advocating on the free or reduced fair MetroCard's.

Molly Levi: Ms. Levi is the founder of the PLG Assistance Fund. She talks about Pat Gualtieri and who he was. She shared how she started the PLG Veterans Assistance Fund to provide Educational scholarships and working with disabled veterans. She also shares that she does a Valentine Outreach to veterans (cards, etc.) as well as a Clothing Drive. Finally, Ms. Levi stated she produces a newsletter for the community and that she gets news from many different sources and has a large distribution list.

Cheryl Dupris: Ms. Dupris is a 33-year Army veteran. She states that she has been in New York City since 1997. Ms. Dupris talked about suicides and that veterans are not finding employment. She also said veterans are having major issues with housing and that city workers have been unprofessional. Ms. Dupris also discussed several programs she is involved with, including looking for women to tell their stories (digital stories). She states that DVS needs to

provide training for VSO's and should set up VSO appointments in a public space that is closer to veterans that cannot come to Borough Hall. Finally, she states that DVS should help recruit more people to VSO's.

Westley Thomas: Mr. Thomas is a USMC veteran who did two (2) tours in Vietnam. He states that what he does to help his fellow veterans comes from his heart. He shares that mental health caught up with him in 1988 and that he got help in 2000 at a health fair. He now gets help at the Manhattan Vet Center in lower Manhattan. He states that a lot of veterans need help and are being shafted.

John Moss: Mr. Moss an Army veteran. He states that he wrote an article with Rep. Max Rose on how no veteran should wait more than 90 days to get a claim. He states that there should be doctors on any medical panel, not people who only read books. He says the C & P exam are a waste of time as most doctors have already diagnosed the veteran. Finally, he thanks former Rep. Charlie Rangel for all his help.

Michael Abramovich: Mr. Abramovich is representing the NYC Veterans Alliance. Mr. Abramovich states he lives in Staten Island and that he served six years in the Army. He also shares that the Alliance did a Brooklyn ruck march with 45 marchers and gives information on an upcoming town-hall meeting with the National Nurses Union.

Meeting Adjourned.

Next Meeting: November 2019

Submitted by: Joe Bello, Secretary