

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 *Prosper* 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