

# 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

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### **Present:**

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)	Anthony "Tony" Odierno (Manhattan)
Joe Bello (Bronx)	Samuel Innocent (Bronx)
John Rowan (Queens)	Mariel Juarez (Brooklyn)

### **Absent:**

Charles Greinsky (Staten Island)	Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)
Pat Devine (Bronx)	Charles Hernandez (Bronx)
Jules Martin (Manhattan)	

## Minutes

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- 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