



MEETING MINUTES
MILITARY and VETERANS LIAISON COMMITTEE
MONDAY, JUNE 10, 2019 - 6:00 P.M.
125 EAST AVENUE, ROOM 218
NORWALK, CT 06851

1. CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: the meeting was called to order by Chairperson Jeff DeWitt at 6:03 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Dan Caporale.

2. PUBLIC FORUM:

a. Repeat visit from Juliet Taylor, Disabled American Veterans Chapter 13 Chaplain, State Officer of the Day and Women's Advocate attended and addressed the Committee. She is an inspirational leader on veteran care especially as it relates to female veteran homelessness. She spoke of an incident regarding a student at University of Bridgeport who passed unexpectedly. The student was a veteran. The student wasn't using the GI Bill so there was no record of his military affiliation in his school record. Juliet was able to get his car and belongings shipped back to his family in Tennessee. She also contacted JetBlue to ship the body back to the family and coordinated with a VFW Post in Tennessee to ensure the veteran was buried with honors. Just a microcosm of all that Juliet does on behalf of veterans across the state. A focus is bringing more services to female veterans. A fishing trip is on the calendar. She also is working to connect with veterans at local universities including NCC. Unfortunately, the Disabled American Veterans vehicle that Juliet uses to transport veterans to appointments and more, is being retired due to the expiration of the funds. If anyone would like to touch base with her, she can be reached at juliet.publichealth@gmail.com.

3. ROLL CALL:

a. Present (5): Jeff DeWitt, Chair; Fred Wilms, Financial Services Chair; Leon Breault, Veteran At-large; Dan Caporale, Veteran At-large; Don Overton, Veteran At-large.

b. Absent or excused (7): Bryan Rooney, Military Outreach and Deputy Chair; Larry Cafero, Legal Services Chair; Bob King, Labor and Business Relations Chair; Howard Dixon, Veteran At-large; Irene Dixon, Mayor Rilling's Staff; Matt Seebeck, Veteran At-large.

4. CHAIRMAN COMMENTS:

a. An application was submitted to the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Fund (VVMF) to have the [Wall That Heals and Mobile Education Center](#), a ¾ scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC, return to Norwalk. In October 2000, the wall came to Norwalk and was displayed in Veterans Park. Many organizations came together to make the event work. The MVLC will team with the Norwalk Veterans Memorial Committee, American Legion Post 12, and VFW Post 603 to make this happen. E-mail with next-steps is due from VVMF this week.



Official announcements won't be until October / November 2019 for the 2020 calendar. We were informed that being a previous host weighs in our favor. There are other requirements. More to come in future meetings.

b. After action from the Memorial Day parade – members Fred Wilms and Leon Breault carried the MVLC banner. Bryan Rooney assisted with handing out the MVLC fliers in his Army dress uniform. Positive response from those who were given a pamphlet, however, only one formal e-mail from a veteran in response to the trifold. Robert Tod Bryant, US Army, 1964-1968.

c. REPEAT: A directory / registration of Norwalk businesses offering military discounts to veterans and Active / Guard / Reserve is ready to go. Bryan Rooney has agreed to formulate a plan to roll out the publicity of the tool so best to maximize publicity initially. Bob King in the business chair is also critical to the success and publicity of the list.

d. There was some good discussion about having a presence at events around town such as the pancreatic cancer walk at Calf Pasture, concerts and Calf Pasture and Town Green, DPW Open House and more. In addition, there are opportunities to place flyers in places around town such as: Norwalk Health Department, Norwalk Senior Center, Norwalk Community College, Tax Assessor's Office, etc. Need to populate the calendar through our Google account with dates of events. Having no budget, the printing of the flyers becomes a concern. The parade banner and 250 flyers were printed at the personal expense of the Chairman. Deanna D'Amore offered her budget and office to print flyers. That will need clearance from the Mayor or his designated representative such as the Comptroller.

e. Cynde Bloome Lahey from the Norwalk Library has made some solid progress to bring the Veterans History Project to Norwalk residents. The project is a joint effort between Central Connecticut State University and the Library of Congress to record (video / digital) a veteran's story about their time in the military. More to come.

5. REPORTS:

a. Brian Rooney – Military Outreach: (REPEAT) Project Evergreen's "GreenCare and SnowCare for Troops" (<https://goo.gl/gK4RdY>) is a program for military rank E-6 and below to register when deploying to have some basic needs taken care of in their absence. Program volunteers take care of lawn, landscape, and snow removal services at their cost. Publicity will be needed to establish a database of volunteers in Norwalk and education of the active, Guard, and Reserve population in Norwalk. Bryan developed a trifold style brochure about the committee to publicize the committee's efforts, goals, and services. The brochures can then be put around town, National Guard armories, handed out at events such as 5Ks, Memorial Day parade, etc.

b. Bob King – Business & Labor: (REPEAT)

-- Still a need to identify veteran owned businesses in Norwalk. A potential starting point that has worked in other cities is a Veteran Chamber of Commerce that would become a subgroup of the Norwalk Chamber of Commerce. The feeling is that there is no better resource than people that have the same experiences – veterans helping veterans. The goal is to make the list public so residents know where they can support veteran owned businesses and to provide assistance the business owners, as needed.

-- Still have a need to gather contact information related to employment for veterans. The results can be posted on the MVLC web page for veterans who are out of work or who are looking to change careers. A good starting point is the CT Dep't of Labor:

<https://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/veterans/>

-- Need to also explore federal retraining funds under the [Workforce Investment Act Title 1](#) program may be available for apprenticeship training, on-the-job training, and special job training programs funded by the government. Don Overton might be a good resource on this also.

-- Created for HR professionals, this new education program from the SHRM Foundation will focus on best practices to attract, hire, and retain veterans. Participants will earn a Certificate after completing a multi-faceted program:

<https://www.shrm.org/foundation/ourwork/initiatives/engaging-and-integrating-military-veterans/pages/veteransatworkcertificateprogram.aspx> Again, through the Chamber of Commerce and through print and digital media.

c. Fred Wilms – Financial Services: has created some solid one-page information sheets for veterans regarding

d. Deanna D'Amore – Health Chair: spoke again about upcoming positions opening on the City of Norwalk staff for Human Services and Social Services. When those positions get filled, an invitation to an MVLC meeting will be sent so they can understand what the MVLC needs are and what we can offer. Survey being conducted by Data Haven. A question being asked is whether the respondents are veterans or not. The survey results would help the city understand services need. The results will be broken out by type of city (median income, etc.). Spoke about a directory of phone numbers we can link on our web page from Southwestern Mental Health Board. In addition:

- Suicide Prevention training is being rolled out for city employees. In the future, a goal is to expand that training to anyone who wants it. The American Legion building would be a great place to host that training.

- (REPEAT) The committee chair met the Suicide Prevention Coordinator for the Connecticut VA Healthcare System. Her name is Christina Allen. She is completely dedicated to the mission and offered to help in any way she can. Her number is 203-932-5711 x2550, cell is 203-506-4081, and e-mail is christina.allen2@va.gov.

-- A great deliverable to the city is to roll out some prevention education through print and digital media and any other channels.

-- Good information here:

https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp

https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/Office-of-Mental-Health-and-Suicide-Prevention-National-Strategy-for-Preventing-Veterans-Suicide.pdf

<https://www.legion.org/sites/legion.org/files/legion/publications/61VAR0618%20White%20Paper%20on%20Veteran%20Suicide.pdf>

--- Connecticut is well below the national average for veteran suicides. Good news, but one death by suicide is one too many.

-- Another deliverable that should be easy to roll out is to contact the medical community and educate them on the process for doctors to begin to accept Tricare as a form of insurance. Good information here: <https://www.humanamilitary.com/provider/resources/become-a-tricare-provider>. Phone number is 800-444-5445. With that information, create a method of contact with the medical community to educate them.

e. Larry Cafero – Legal Chair: Received the results from the Freedom of Information Act request to Connecticut VA to identify the Norwalk residents in their system. The results were a bit incomplete as several known veterans weren't on the list.

Also received a list of Norwalk residents who are receiving the veteran tax break on property. That list seems to be more inclusive.

- (REPEAT) Larry will begin to gather names of attorneys in town who would be willing to help military and veterans with simple legal assistance such as creating an LLC, contracts for business, and anything else that would fall under acceptable legal advice at a discounted rate.

6. OLD BUSINESS:

a. Survey: (repeat; still tabled until the next meeting). Direction seems to be towards keeping it very simple and use follow on surveys. Larry Cafero recommends disclaimers regarding “list will not be sold, etc.”

Recommendations:

- Don't include month in the birth day field.
- Do you avail yourself of VA healthcare Y/N.
- Primary care doctor in Norwalk Y/N.
- Include Tricare For Life to list of insurance providers
- How is the information going to be used?
- Where are veterans utilizing services?
- Add Optional comment section for each category.
- “This survey seeks to identify the military and veteran population in Norwalk”

- Distribution method: if web based, anyone can fill out the information and we only need to capture Norwalk-based military and veterans
- No local census capability available.
- Using a mailing service would be costly but it will capture the largest audience, to include those that don't use a computer.
- Can a survey be included in the tax bill, or some other mass mailing already in place by the city?

From previous meetings

An initial deliverable was to generate a survey to capture demographic and needs data for all military and veterans in Norwalk. Jeff DeWitt sent a draft version of the survey to the City of Norwalk legal team and asked for their input on the legality of a survey as it relates to Privacy Act, Freedom of Information Act, etc. Attorney Christie Jean responded with information related to applicable law, Connecticut Personal Data Act, Connecticut Freedom of Information Act.

Leon Breault, veteran At-large, spoke with someone at Norwalk Community College regarding the survey. It was recommended that the survey be less in depth. Category of discharge shouldn't include negative options.

Don Overton, recommends that we have a unique opportunity to get out ahead of the state to capture more useful data. Assessing veteran owned businesses is an option to include in the survey. The results of the survey could be used by the state to incentivize the opportunity for veterans to move to Connecticut and more specifically, Norwalk. Any positive data gleaned from the survey can be used in that regard. For every dollar saved in programs like property tax exemptions, two dollars goes back into the local economy through sales tax, etc. There are ways the survey can identify opportunities to present to the Common Council that will create opportunities in Norwalk for veterans. Avoid PII altogether but gather general trends.

Bryan Rooney discussed our need to decide what the purpose of the survey is. If it's simply statistical analysis, then we need the largest pool of questions possible. Maybe that method would be a good first-step. The next survey could then relate to veterans and military awareness of programs and benefits in Norwalk such as the City of Norwalk property tax exemption, banking advantages, retail discounts, etc. Another option would be to survey veteran's awareness of services normally available on a military base. Even beyond statistics, the survey could help create a sense of community behind what the committee is chartered to do.

Mayor Rilling originally requested the survey to understand the veteran community. Awareness of services is important but demographic information is important too. Irene Dixon will get clarification from the mayor about his goals for the survey.

Don Overton will reach out to Connecticut Veterans Affairs for data. In order to engage with external agencies such as Connecticut VA effectively, the committee needs legal standing. Jeff DeWitt will contact the Arts Commission for their lessons learned and any source documents that can be mirrored to expedite our efforts.

b. **(ON HOLD)** By Laws / Charter (repeat; tabled indefinitely):

(1) Deanna D'Amore asked that the language be changed for her position from "medical professional" to more align with her position as a health *administrator* for the city.

(2) Ensure the charter clearly states the purpose of the At-large veterans on the committee. The goal for them is to provide the focus area chairs first person testimonial of the experiences of being a veteran and/or serving in the military. Much more important is the kind of expertise Don Overton brings to meetings through his relationship with the legislative process and the Veterans Administration to educate us all on developments.

(3) Bryan Rooney will make the adjustments to the charter / by-laws and present it at the next meeting in March.

(4) The process after MVLC approves it, Brian Candela, attorney for the Ordinance Committee, will review it for their approval.

c. Priorities (repeat)

(1) Convert present charter into by-laws. When completed, present to Ordinance Committee for approval (meets every 3rd Tuesday), then Town Council approval (meets every 4th Wednesday). **(CLOSED UNTIL JANUARY 2020)**

(A) Irene Dixon learned about formalizing a committee legally. Three concerns: 1) Connecticut General Statute, Title 7 (Municipalities), [Chapter 99](#), Section 7-190 says there must be a "bare majority" by political party on every commission; right now we are 7 one major party, 3 unaffiliated, 2 other major party, 1 registered out of state, and 1 unknown; it's important to know the answer for our future; need the definition of what "bare majority" means; 2) can someone who is registered to vote out of state, serve on a municipal commission; and 3) can someone who resides outside of the municipality serve on the commission, specifically city employees who live elsewhere. Attorney Jean from the Counsel's office has been asked to look into all three concerns. **(OPEN) UPDATE:** Attorney Jean has replied. Response will be shared at the May meeting.

(2) Future meetings should include defining direction such as event partnerships, schools and churches, and similar venues to advertise through them that the committee exists and invite people to committee meetings. **(OPEN)**

7. NEW BUSINESS

a. A fairly urgent need for a budget is becoming necessary for outreach and more. Reaching the 1,800 names provided by the Tax Assessors office would need to be done by mail. Postage, envelopes, printing of material, and more will be necessary.

8. GOOD OF THE ORDER:

a. Don Overton spoke about community-based health care being a reality right now. The first touch point for veterans separating and those serving in Norwalk, will be right here at home instead of the VA in West Haven. Community based models are the wave of the future. Effective June 6, 2019, the [Mission Act](#) is now alive and well.

A key component of the MISSION Act is a new urgent care benefit that provides eligible Veterans with greater choice and access to timely, high-quality care. With urgent care, Veterans have a new option for care for the treatment of minor injuries and illnesses, such as colds, sore throats and minor skin infections. The benefit is offered in addition to the opportunity to receive care from a VA provider, as VA also offers same-day services.

Communities understand the value and dignity of a veteran in the community, so this is a natural fit. Veterans can bring a lot to the local economy as well. Norwalk is positioned well to move forward through the committee. Subject matter experts need to be a visible part of the solution. They need to be housed in a place where veterans can go directly to that person or multiple people. A veteran's resource table on weekends for accessibility to those who work full time should also be a consideration. A position like this can report to a new position being filled right now – Chief of Community Services. The committee's hope is that veteran care and assistance be a part of that solution.

Public Private Partnership (P3) is a big part of the solution. Local corporations providing solutions to funding concerns is a priority. Positions in the future can be funded through grant monies also. Several grant-funded positions exist in Norwalk already. A bonus would be to have state funded position either moved to or grown, in Norwalk

-- Jeff DeWitt and Don Overton will begin to draft a plan and then meet with Mayor Rilling on our proposals.

b. Leon Breault mentioned the first nylon parachutes were made in Connecticut in World War II. The first person to test those parachutes – Adeline Gray.

On June 6, 1942, Adeline Gray made the first jump by a human with a nylon parachute at Brainard Field in Hartford. Her jump, performed before a group of Army officials, put the world's first nylon parachute to the test. The Pioneer Parachute Company of Manchester fabricated the new nylon material, which was developed as an alternative to silk. Working in concert with the Cheney Brothers Company of Manchester and the DuPont Company, Pioneer Parachute developed a material that combined "compactness with lightness, resiliency and strength."

Gray, who was 24 years old at the time of the jump, was from Oxford and worked as a licensed parachute rigger and packer at the Pioneer Parachute Company. She began jumping at age 19 and at the time of the nylon "jump test" had completed 32 jumps and was the only licensed female parachute jumper in Connecticut.

c. (repeat) Howard Dixon – in the future, find what services the bases in the area can provide to retirees.

Military and veteran related events around Norwalk

JUNE 2019

14: Scouts – Legion – Norwalk Fire Department joint U.S. flag retirement ceremony, 100 Fairfield Ave, (5:00)

15: Mulvoy-Tarlov-Aquino VFW Post 603 Monthly Membership Meeting (12:00)

17: Bingo by the Auxiliary (doors at 5:00, games at 7:00)

18: Membership meeting for American Legion Post 12 and Auxiliary Unit 12 (7:00)

20: Sons of the American Legion Squadron 12 Membership Meeting (7:00)

24: Bingo by the Auxiliary (doors at 5:00, games at 7:00)

JULY 2019

7: Veteran of the Month and Flag Raising Ceremony honoring a deceased veteran (11:00)

10. ADJOURNMENT: the meeting was adjourned by Jeff DeWitt at 7:02 p.m.

11. Next meeting is Monday, July 8, 2019, 6:00 p.m., room 231.