



MEETING MINUTES
MILITARY and VETERANS LIAISON COMMITTEE
MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2019 - 6:00 P.M.
125 EAST AVENUE, ROOM 231
NORWALK, CT 06851

1. CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: the meeting was called to order by Chairperson Jeff DeWitt at 6:01 p.m.

2. PUBLIC FORUM:

a. Kelly Kultys from The Norwalk Hour attended. She's new to the area. She came from the Burlington County Times in New Jersey. Part of her coverage was news and events at Joint Base McGuire AFB – Fort Dix – Naval Air Engineering Station Lakehurst in central New Jersey. She will be covering the committee and City Hall.

3. ROLL CALL:

a. Present: Jeff DeWitt, Chair; Bryan Rooney, Military Outreach and Deputy Chair; Bob King, Labor and Business Relations Chair; Larry Cafero, Legal Services Chair; Fred Wilms, Financial Services Chair; Leon Breault, Veteran At-large; Dan Caporale, Veteran At-large; Howard Dixon, Veteran At-large; Don Overton, Veteran At-large; Matt Seebeck, Veteran At-large; Irene Dixon, Mayor Rilling's Staff; Megan DiMeglio, subbing for Deanna D'Amore – Health Department

b. Absent or excused: Deanna D'Amore, Medical and Health Services Chair; Kras Carlucci, Housing Services Chair

4. CHAIRMAN COMMENTS:

a. Chair deferred comments to Veteran At-large Don Overton. Don shared that he has been a veteran subject matter expert at the state and local levels. He wants to bring those skills to the Norwalk community. He is the new Service Officer at the American Legion and VFW in Norwalk and will be establishing office hours to help veterans with VA claims. Connecticut as a state is behind providing assistance to veterans. There are only 8 claims representatives in the state to assist veterans all the way through the Court of Appeals and beyond. Ramon Agosto in Bridgeport is the closest contact. There may be an opportunity to move some or all of the Veteran Services in Bridgeport to Norwalk in the future. There is opportunity at bringing more veteran related entrepreneurial programs to NCC. Public-private partnerships with Newman's Own, etc. is a possibility also. Justice involved veterans' programs for the court system is something Connecticut or local courts could take on to help rehabilitate veterans outside of the typical path for someone charged with a crime. Buffalo, New York has had success with their "Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court", a hybrid drug and mental health court that serves veterans who are struggling with addiction and / or mental illness by diverting them from the traditional



criminal justice system into a specialized veterans court. More here:

<http://www2.erie.gov/veterans/index.php?q=buffalo-veterans-treatment-court> New approach to veterans care = greater access to private sector health care. Grant programs run by the VA for suicide prevention, etc., are on the horizon. Address the lack of Tricare providers in the area. More emphasis on communities to take care of veteran's needs. The timing of this committee forming puts Norwalk well ahead of the curve. Don offers his help to any of the sub-committee chairs to research topics and assist in whatever way he can.

5. READING OF THE MINUTES:

a. As the meeting minutes were distributed and no corrections were recommended, Leon Breault made a motion and Bob King seconded to dispense with the reading of the minutes. Motion carried unanimously.

6. REPORTS:

a. Brian Rooney – Military Outreach: 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. Developing a trifold style brochure about the committee is a priority as an initial step towards publicizing 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.

A template of how established commissions document their by-laws and business rules were used to create our own. Committee members are asked to review and document any recommended changes for the April meeting. The goal is to finalize a version internally and then begin the process for formal approval by the Ordinance Committee and City Council. At Fred Wilms' suggestion, Jeff DeWitt will seek Corporation Counsel's informal opinion before the next meeting also. The good news is it is unlikely this document would be addressed by Ordinance before their May meeting due to their present workload. If there are simple updates such as typos, etc., e-mail those directly to Bryan Rooney before the next meeting so he can update the master copy.

b. Bob King – Business & Labor: created a one-pager "Why Hire A Veteran" and "Essential information and points of contact for employers. His company, King Industries, employs 30 veterans. His document of top 3 reasons to hire a veteran was shared with the group. Spoke about the MOS (military occupation specialty) translator on the Stars & Stripes newspaper web page (<http://veteranjobs.stripes.com/skills-translator/>). The state reimburse does reimburse employees for 50% of training for new job. Meetings with Connecticut Department of Labor Veterans Employment Representative Dan Laffin has met with Bob several times. UPS has a veteran hiring preference, Orion, Lucas Group, Bradley-Morris, all are good for veterans.

c. Fred Wilms – Financial Services: created a one-pager related to home mortgages. The VA Home Loan Guaranty program is the cornerstone program. 22 million of these guarantees have been written. 100% financing for the house, and can roll the 3% fee into the loan also. Most banks offer it. Community banks typically don't. Need a Certificate of Eligibility from the VA first before the process starts. Then the traditional mortgage process starts to validate cash flow to qualify. Future one-pager will include how to improve credit score to qualify for programs such as the VA home loan guaranty. Matt Seebeck included that there is a significant home inspection above and beyond a typical mortgage process. This should be part of the education process.

d. Larry Cafero – Legal Chair: thrilled to serve on the committee. Sees himself as a legal observer of the meetings themselves, and also, to compile legal services information available to veterans. Practicing law for 30 years in Norwalk and was a state rep for 22 years. Larry spoke about House Bill 5232 that didn't pass but would have required a list of attorneys who provide reduced cost legal services to veterans and their families to be made public. Services would include judicial or administrative appearances, the military department through the judicial department to publish the list. He will find out if the bill will be reintroduced. Recommends that the committee put together our own list of local attorneys who would help with wills, family law, real estate, criminal, etc. Distribute that list on an as-needed basis to the military and veteran community. Don Overton offered the [Yale legal community](#) as a resource. There may be a limit to how far they go, especially into civil matters, probate of wills, etc. Could be just criminal related. The group spoke about establishing workshops for legal assistance related to business startups such as how to form an LLC. Don Overton recommends utilizing the Small Business Administration to assist with hosting local workshops on topics like this.

7. OLD BUSINESS:

a. Survey: discussion about contents of the survey. 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.

In addition, Larry Manzi from the City of Norwalk IT department shared the same advice and recommends not storing names, etc.

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.

Fred Wilms recommended getting to voter registration data and cross reference names from survey from voter registration data.

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.

The Tax Collector's Office reports 1,437 households receiving some sort of veteran tax exemption. Well below the 3,000 estimate of military or veteran residents.

b. Charter:

(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

(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). **(OPEN)**

(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 April meeting.

(2) Web site on the Norwalk portal. On 3/12/19, the IT department has been asked to create a page along the same lines as the Arts Commission. **(OPEN)**

(3) Publicity: print and digital. Bryan Rooney will take this. **(OPEN)**

(4) 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)**

9. GOOD OF THE ORDER:

a. Don Overton – the Connecticut Radio Information System, Inc. (CRIS) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) radio-reading service that has been serving people who are blind or print-challenged for nearly four decades. They operate with a small staff and a large number of dedicated

volunteers who provide voice talent. CRIS Radio broadcasts 24 hours a day, seven days a week featuring articles published in more than 70 newspapers and magazines, including award-winning children's magazines available online and on-demand. There is market to provide veteran specific programming in the future. Don will work this.

b. Matt Seebeck: would like an introduction to the Housing Chair, Kras Carlucci. He has met two military/veterans who have housing issues. He would like to get educated on the processes in place in the city to help people. Introduction made via e-mail on 3/15/19.

c. Irene Dixon – recommended utilizing the local government channel 79 on Optimum to get the word out. Larry Cafero recommended a still frame information screen related to the committee as needed.

d. Howard Dixon – remove “City Manager” from the By-Laws. Replace with City Clerk or Town Clerk, whichever is appropriate.

e. Jeff DeWitt – American Legion Week in Norwalk by mayoral proclamation. March 10-16, 2019 are the dates. Commemoration of the American Legion Centennial on March 15, 2019.

f. The Norwalk Veterans Memorial Committee is in the process of contacting all World War II veterans in Norwalk or connections to Norwalk to be the Grand Marshalls of the Memorial Day parade.

g. Bryan Rooney – kudos to the State of Pennsylvania where is Army National Guard unit is located, for establishing a state GI Bill for PA National Guard members. It will pay for the first 10 semesters of benefits. The highlight is the transferability of benefits to family members.

h. Bryan Rooney – met a young woman in the gym who was leaving for Marine Corps boot camp soon. Recommends the committee keep track of residents like this as the committee matures.

i. Matt Seebeck – just became aware of a Military Police company from Connecticut deploying soon.

j. Howard Dixon – in the future, find what services the bases in the area can provide to retirees.

k. Leon Breault – recommended contacting Michele Nye, professor at Norwalk Community College, prior Army nurse, as a replacement for the vacancy on the committee.

l. REPEAT: King Industries' event on May 18, 2019 to place flags at St John's [223 Richards Avenue, Norwalk, CT](#) and St. Mary's Cemetery, [3-1 Broad Street, Norwalk, CT](#). Event start time is 9:30 a.m.

m. REPEAT: Peggy Overton discussed the fact that spouses of military and veterans need to be a part of our work (“they serve(d) too”). Peggy would also like to see additional local businesses participate in some sort of discounts.

9. ADJOURNMENT: the meeting was adjourned by Chairperson Jeff DeWitt at 7:37 p.m.

10. Next meeting is Monday, April 8, 2019, 6:00 p.m.