



MEETING MINUTES
MILITARY and VETERANS LIAISON COMMITTEE
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 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 6:09 p.m., and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bob King.

2. **PUBLIC FORUM:**

- a. Peggy Overton, wife of Veteran At-large Don Overton was introduced.

3. **ROLL CALL:**

- a. Present: Jeff DeWitt, Chair; Bryan Rooney, Military Outreach and Deputy Chair; Bob King, Labor and Business Relations Chair; Deanna D'Amore, Medical and Health 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; Irene Dixon, Mayor Rilling's Staff
- b. Absent or excused: Larry Cafero, Legal Services Chair; Kras Carlucci, Housing Services Chair; Matt Seebeck, Veteran At-large; Steve Marsan, Veteran At-large

4. **CHAIRMAN COMMENTS:**

- a. George Tsiranides, Norwalk Common Council, District D, stopped in the meeting room and introduced himself. He spoke about his son who is currently serving in the United States Army.
- b. In addition, the security guard on duty in City Hall, Hans, is an Army Reservist.
- c. Connections to those who have family serving, who are serving, or have served, are found in many places. This is who we are helping through our efforts.

5. **READING OF THE MINUTES:**

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

6. **REPORTS:**

- a. Bob King – Business & Labor: researching Connecticut State web site, Department of Labor, AMVETS. Compiling information for a one-page for benefits of hiring veterans for employers. Also, to help employers translate military skills. Chairman DeWitt spoke about the Google commercial during the Super Bowl. Google has come up with a way to help translate Military Occupational Specialty code and Air Force Specialty Codes related to a soldier/airmen's



job, into skills and jobs available. A copy of it is here: <https://youtu.be/fJopp9RIPJc> Excellent tool and kudos to Google for the effort.

b. Deanna D'Amore – Health Services Chair: met with a medical director about the committee, outreach, assistance. It was recommended we work with the Fairfield County Medical Association. Can lead an effort to download a list of providers in Norwalk and have an intern speak to each about whether they accept Tricare insurance. Discussed a recent article in the NY Times about the national budget decreasing funding to the VA. This will open options to veterans who live as little as a 30-minute drive from a Veterans Affairs health care facility will instead be able to choose private care. The impact to Norwalk is the medical and mental health care providers will see an increase in patients who are veterans. Don Overton spoke about how the legislative process will address the issues. The trend is going away from military medical care for active duty even in combat situations. A little premature for our committee to address it at the local level but the next few months will be telling. The federal government can't administer all of the various healthcare options (Tricare, VA, Affordable Care Act) successfully. As the veteran population decreases, the VA healthcare system may go away. Trending to managed care and outsourced treatment is a possible outcome. This will allow facilities that are expensive to maintain, to close. Don will keep the committee apprised as he is actively monitoring progress.

(1) This highlights the valuable input the At-large veterans on the committee can have on the tone and direction of committee business.

c. Fred Wilms – Financial Services: focusing on 1) services that banks offer veterans as consumers, discounts on opening an account, home equity loans, etc.; will reach out to banks in Norwalk to see what is offered around town and create a spreadsheet of the results, 2) getting VA home loan guaranty program information to banks, 3) commercial banking – gathering information related to Small Business Administration funds available to veteran owned businesses.

d. Legal and Housing Chairs are new to the committee and unable to make this meeting. Jeff DeWitt has reached out to both of people with some thoughts about the direction and focus of each position. We are looking forward to their contributions.

Note: discussed the need to begin to document the progress of each of the Chairs with one-pagers so each committee member can come away from meetings with more detail. One deliverable down the road will be to include this information in a manual or pamphlet that will be in every veteran's home or made available digitally to download.

7. OLD BUSINESS:

a. Survey: 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.

Based on all of this input, it's largely agreed the data of a survey should be kept anonymous. A template of an initial survey to gather basic data is included in these minutes as Addendum 1. The decision to move forward with the survey is tabled until the next meeting.

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. See 8a(1) for more.

8. NEW BUSINESS:

a. Bryan Rooney defined some 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). Jeff DeWitt has contacted Susan Wallerstein of the Arts Commission to share their charter and lessons learned so this process can be efficient and expedited for the MVLC. She in turn, recommended contacting Nancy Rosett from the Bike/Walk Commission who has more recent experience. Irene Dixon shared that the Ordinance Committee may not be able to hear this until May. **(OPEN)**

(A) A late development after the meeting was some advice and concern from Irene Dixon based on what she has learned about formalizing a committee legally. Three things: 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.

(2) Web site on the Norwalk portal. On 2/7/19, 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) Dan Caporale offered the MVLC an opportunity to use the Norwalk Veteran Memorial Committee (NVMC) web site to host our information. He went on to say he feels the NVMC should be a part of the MVLC. Jeff DeWitt clarified that the mission of the two committees is different. The NVMC is charged with ceremonial events honoring veterans: Shea-Magrath Memorial ceremony, Memorial Day Parade, Veterans Day. The MVLC's purpose is in the realm of civic and legislative responsibilities to veterans who have served and military who are still serving. Drastically different charters and missions and should be kept separate. **(CLOSED)**

(5) 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. Bob King brought up 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. Dan Caporale brought up some frustration about the inconsistency in placing flags. Addendum 2 of these minutes has some tentative guidance.

b. The Republican Town Committee is collecting candy, single serve chips, and magazines to send to troops in Afghanistan. The collection point is the American Legion. Deadline is February 18, 2019, 7:00 p.m. when the RTC will box the items for shipment.

c. 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 7:12 p.m.

10. Next meeting is Monday, March 11, 2019, 6:00 p.m.

Addendum 1

CITY OF NORWALK CENSUS OF VETERAN POPULATION SURVEY QUESTIONS (ANONYMOUS)

BIOGRAPHICAL

Gender:

Marital status (married, single):

Race:

Date of Birth (MM/YYYY only):

Zip Code:

MILITARY AFFILIATION

Status (Guard, Reserve, Active, Veteran):

Branch of Service(s):

Dates of Service:

HOUSING

Home owner (own, rent, other):

If “other”, clarify (optional):

HEALTH

Method of primary health care (VA, Tricare, Private, Medicare/Medicaid, Other):

If “other”, clarify (optional):

EMPLOYMENT

Status of employment (full time student, self-employed, employed full time (40+ hours), employed part time, unemployed, retired):

If self-employed, do you own your own business:

FINANCIAL STATUS

Household income (under \$50K, \$51-75K, \$75-100K, over \$100K):

COMMENTS

If in need of assistance related to VA claims, housing, employment, please specify:

Addendum 2

PLACEMENT OF FLAGS IN CEMETERIES ON MEMORIAL DAY

According to the Flag Code, the flag is only to be placed on veteran's graves on Memorial Day, Armed Forces Day, Veterans Day, Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day and other specific dates listed on American Flags online.

Military Cemeteries

Flags are given positions of honor in military veteran's cemeteries. For families and friends of veterans buried in a military cemetery, check with the cemetery office for flag ceremony information. Some larger military cemeteries handle the placing of flags through monument commissions, and some smaller military cemeteries allow Boy Scouts to help place flags. Flags usually go in veterans flag-holders that denote the branch of service. These flags and holders go into storage after the day of remembrance.

Placement

For grave markers, purchase a flag with a 3/8-inch staff for a tight and steady fit.

Place the flag holder (if available) and the flag in the center of the head portion of the upright-style of monument.

If the veteran shares a monument with a spouse, place the flag in the center of the veteran's side of the monument or on the side of the veteran's monument in front of other flowers, where the veteran's information can be read.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration, flags placed at graves should be erected in a uniform matter, usually one foot, centered and in front of the headstone or grave marker.

Flat Markers

Many veterans receive flat markers if they are being buried in a Veterans Section of a cemetery. Many of the flat markers are at the foot of the veteran's grave, while their other headstone, often shared with a spouse, is at the head.

General

For all flag ceremonies, remember to follow the rules of flag etiquette. These include never letting the flag touch the ground and ensuring flags are in excellent condition.

Depending on the logistics of decorating a cemetery, the National Cemetery Administration does allow graves to be adorned with flags the weekend before Memorial Day and the flags can be removed shortly after the holiday. With this allowance, flags may not be illuminated at night, which is a deviation from the flag code, but it is an authorized deviation, according to the cemetery administration.