

## Minutes

### Transition Military and Veterans Affairs Committee

Date: July 19, 2023

Location: City Hall, Exam Room 1 Mezzanine

117 West Duval Street

Jacksonville, FL 32202

Chair: VADM Rick Snyder, USN (ret)

Attendees: Jerry Jackson, Dee Quaranta, VADM Rick Snyder, USN (ret), Harrison Conyers, Demetris Harrison, Pat Mulvihill, Walter Smith Jr., Leonard Harris, Tony D'Aleo, Bob Adelhelm, Shay Hill, Joe Snowberger, Rich Possert, Noah Moran, Travis Akers, Sandra Boyd, George Carroll, Larry Quinnett, Lori Boyer, Reece Wilson, Ed Randolph, Errol White, Michelle Kloss, Jessica Denson, Rondrea Byrd Brown.

1. Meeting Called to Order 4:01 PM VADM Rick Snyder
2. Minutes from prior meeting- Minutes moved by Bob Adelhelm and seconded by Tony D'Aleo. Unanimously approved.
3. VADM Snyder provided a brief overview of the previous meeting and introduced Demetrius Harrison a new member. VADM Snyder stated that Lori Boyer and Ed Randolph would provide information related to a proposed Veterans Community/Wellness Center during the meeting.
4. Old business-None
5. New Business:
  - a. Bob Adelhelm outlined his vision for a Veterans Community Center vs a Resource Center. He views the community center as a gathering place where Veterans share experiences across eras and service branches. He stated that Veterans can be referred to existing Resource Centers. A community center could be a host for the Veterans Council of Duval County. He provided information on centers in Hawaii and Citrus Heights, Calif. (information provided is retained in MAVD transition folder).
    - i. Dee Quaranta expressed the need for a more holistic center that provides multiple services including Veteran Service Officers.
      1. VADM Snyder expressed support for Ms. Quaranta's statement.
    - ii. Travis Akers stated that a center needs to be a stand-alone facility in a central location. Mr. Akers stated that he wants an inclusive facility that includes communities that feel marginalized.
  - b. Tony D'Aleo spoke against a "wellness" center. He wants a place that is open to all, where Veterans can meet eyeball to eyeball. He acknowledged that younger

Veterans do not typically like coming to centers and are more interested in outdoor activities. Mr. D'Aleo stated that it is the Vietnam Veterans that are in leadership at most area Veteran Serving Organizations such as American Legion and DAV.

- i. Travis Akers stated that return on investment of public dollars should be a focus.
  - ii. VADM Snyder stated that we have to propose a place that is inviting to all Veterans. He referenced the survey results from the Endeavor survey of 2022.
- c. Rich Possert stated that Veterans Resource Centers are very often located at College/Universities and public libraries. Mr. Possert mentioned the logistics and costs of having a center have to be factored into any decision. A centralized location is important. Tampa has a Veterans Memorial Park and museum along US 301.
- d. VADM Snyder discussed that this transition committee needs to offer a concept of design for the project and that COJ staff can provide the proposed project costs and details.
  - i. Harrison Conyers confirmed that MAVD can research costs of any buildout and renovations with the Public Works Department and custodial and staffing costs with the Parks Department.
- e. Lori Boyer provided a proposal and supporting materials for a property located at 535 N. Washington Street. The property is situated next to the Emerald Trail along Hogans Creek in the Cathedral District. The property is also proposed to have a park for senior citizens adjacent to the building. Public Works is planning to acquire the property. The building is 10,000 square feet with bathrooms and a kitchen. The parking lot is currently utilized by the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. DIA needs up to a year to move JSO from the parking lot to another site.
  - i. Bob Adelhelm asked about crime in the area. Mrs. Boyer stated that this zone is actually one of the lower areas for crime activity.
  - ii. Leonard Harris asked about homelessness in the area. Mrs. Boyer acknowledged that was a pertinent issue.
  - iii. VADM Snyder asked about JTA bus access. Mrs. Boyer promised to have an overlay of JTA routes and provide to Harrison Conyers.
  - iv. Mrs. Boyer stated that it would require several hundred thousand dollars to renovate the building due to some fire damage.
  - v. Travis Akers asked about getting access to the site. Mrs. Boyer stated that would have to be coordinated with JSO.
  - vi. Rich Possert asked about the USS Orleck site as a possibility. Mrs. Boyer stated that the entire site is restricted for recreational purposes. She added that the current design incorporates a 10,000 square foot museum.

- f. Demetris Harris asked about current utilization levels at American Legions and other Veterans affiliated buildings.
  - g. VADM Snyder mentioned that any center will need a nice lobby area and places for fitness activities, classrooms/office space and snacks.
  - h. Rich Possert discussed how Jacksonville has a plethora of Veterans centric monuments and buildings in the area, like the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena, Purple Heart Trail, USS Orleck, and the Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Wall, and that there needs to be a way to link them together.
  - i. Bob Adelhelm stated that the center needs to be open to military families.
  - j. Dee Quaranta stated that the center needs to include a gym, office space for Veteran Serving Organizations and walking trails. She asked who will be on-site to check Veterans status. Ms. Quaranta stated that the center utilization needs to be measurable to justify return on investment.
6. VADM Snyder reviewed the committee status update that was provided to transition committee members.
- a. Engage the Mayor to attend various Veterans events in the community.
  - b. VADM Snyder recommended a standing committee to discuss Veterans issues and possible service enhancements.
    - i. Rich Possert mentioned that the Veterans Council of Duval County was the appropriate place to discuss these issues.
  - c. COJ MAVD should serve as a host for summits/forums for VSO collaboration.
  - d. Increasing marketing funding for MAVD will enable greater community knowledge and utilization of services.
7. Public Comment:
- a. Rafael Santiago stated that MAVD generated about \$27 million new dollars last year and \$513 in recurring federal funding through its casework for Veterans. He also stated that MAVD can track clients by zip code.
  - b. Jerry Jackson-stated that downtown has the majority of homeless Veterans in the community. He feels that Jacksonville doesn't provide enough services for homeless Veterans.
  - c. Jessica Denson, Executive Assistant for Council Member Tyrone Clark-Murray wanted the committee to know that the council member was a Veteran.
  - d. Rondrea Brown stated that mental health issues are closely related to homelessness. She asked if we have canvassed the streets to survey homeless needs.
  - e. George Carroll requested an audit of the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena concession funds and naming rights contract compliance.
8. Motion to Adjourn was made at 5:44PM by Rich Possert, seconded by Bob Adelhelm.

Rich Possert will chair the next meeting on July 26, 2023.