



OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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August 7, 2023

Transition Military and Veterans Affairs Committee Minutes

Meeting Location: City Hall, Exam Room 3 Mezzanine

Meeting Date: July 26, 2023

Meeting Time: 4:00 p.m.

Chair: Rich Possert, Acting Chair

Attendees: James Crozier, Will Lahen, Carol Register, Chris Miller, Dee Quaranta, Joe Tavares, Harrison Conyers, Wendy Layton, Austin Belet, Peter Harding, Matt Tuohy, Amber Lehman, Terry Carr, Jaclyn Crecilus, Aylmar Thompson, Reece Wilson, Demetris Harrison, Pat Mulvihill, Leonard Harris, Bob Adelhelm, Joe Snowberger, Rich Possert, Deborah Fonzelle, Travis Akers, Sandra Boyd, George Carroll, Errol White, Mildred Smith.

1. Meeting Called to Order 4:04 PM VADM Rich Possert
2. Minutes from prior meeting- Minutes moved by Dee Quaranta and seconded by Joe Tavares. Unanimously approved.
3. Rich Possert provided a brief overview and introduced Austin Belet, Navy Reservist and Peter Harding, Navy Veteran as new committee members. Mr. Possert also introduced City Council Member Will Lahen (Military Liaison) and City Council Member Chris Miller (alternate Military Liaison).
 - a. Bob Adelhelm asked how many members of the transition committee are Veterans.
4. Old business-None
5. New Business:
 - a. CM Lahen stated that he retired from the Navy and has a family history with both of his grandfathers being Veterans. He currently works for the

Wounded Warrior Project. CM Lahnen mentioned that there are six City Council members that are Veterans.

- b. CM Miller is a retired US Army Colonel. CM Miller expressed a deep commitment to taking care of military families. He enjoyed a 30-year military career and finished as the Inspector General for the Florida National Guard. He currently works for Congressman John Rutherford. He stated that the City Council and Administration will work together for Veterans and military families.
 - i. Travis Akers asked about the 23-24 proposed City of Jacksonville Budget and how much is focused on military affairs and Veterans.
 - 1. CM Lahnen stated that the budget is based on the prior year's budget with inflation factored in. CM Lahnen stated that he was open to ideas with a focus on assisting military transition to the civilian workplace.
 - 2. Travis Akers mentioned the \$1.7 million budget for the Military Affairs and Veterans Department
 - a. At the chair's request, Harrison Conyers mentioned that MAVD typically has \$2-\$3 million dollars in grants under management, that allows MAVD to provide expanded services without a direct impact to the general operating budget.
- c. Mildred Smith asked about whether there was affordable housing near the proposed Veterans Center, as discussed by Lori Boyer at the meeting of July 19th. Rich Possert mentioned that the site is just a proposal.
- d. Travis Akers asked both City Council members what are the most relevant issues raised by constituents.
 - i. CM Lahnen stated that the ship count at NS Mayport (federal issue) was mentioned and also an overall community interest in wanted to volunteer to assist Veterans.
 - ii. CM Miller mentioned that they majority of feedback regarding City of Jacksonville services have been overwhelmingly positive. He directs constituents to first contact the Military Affairs and Veterans Department for issues related to VA benefits and social services. He stated he was committed to support expanding on the services that are already provided. CM Miller feels that we need to find ways to provide information to those transitioning out of the military. He mentioned that United Way Mission United is a valuable tool in

referring clients to services and that MAVD Outreach has been very visible in the community.

- iii. Travis Akers reminded those attending to follow Robert Rules of Order and the need to fill out public comment cards.
- e. Rich Possert stated that a website listing services available from Veterans Serving Organizations would be helpful for service members transitioning out. He also stated that bringing back Vets4Vets would be a great resource.
- f. Demetris Harrison asked how services to Veterans are measured.
 - i. Harrison Conyers stated that the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs provides reports on the impact of Veteran Service Officer claims work each. Year. The last report showed \$27 million in new dollars for Duval County Veterans and \$513 million dollars in recurring funding, which was an all time high. Mr. Conyers also stated that the Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program reports the number of homeless Veterans served, placed in employment, housed, etc. Additionally. MAVD tracks the amount of funding provided for rent/utility assistance.
 - g. Rich Possert mentioned that having a survey could be implemented for those transitioning out of the service.
 - i. Wendy Layton mentioned that follow-up for transitioning service members is conducted by several programs, but more can be done.
 - h. Dee Quaranta asked the City Council members to make sure that notices regarding City of Jacksonville funding be provided to Veteran Serving Organizations.
 - i. Joe Tavares asked about the status of Vets4Vets. Rich Possert mentioned that the Veterans Council of Duval County and MAVD where in discussion about bringing it back in the Fall.
- 6. Public Comment: Rich Possert asked for a motion to adjust the agenda to allow the public attending the meeting to ask questions of the City Council members. Travis Akers moved, and Dee Quaranta seconded. Unanimously approved.
 - a. George Carroll asked about having a forensic audit conducted on the naming rights agreement of the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena. Additionally, he raised concern about concession donation revenue and parking discounts for Veterans.

- b. Lisa Penn discussed the SkillBridge program for those servicemembers transitioning out of the military. She stated that the DoD does not have a way for those that have transitioned out to register challenges that they are facing.
 - c. Joe Snowberger expressed concern that the committee was “blurring the line” between its focus and what MAVD should be focused on. He stated that too much of what is being discussed is not COJ related. Mr. Snowberger asked for a community conversation to be held with the Veteran Serving Organizations to be organized by MAVD.
7. Review of committee timeline-
- a. Joe Tavares requested additional discussion on the Veterans Center’s focus/services and staffing.
 - i. Rich Possert stated that the minutes from the previous meeting should be reviewed as the Veterans Center was discussed on 7/19/23.
 - ii. Travis Akers mentioned that the committee will provide a recommendation on the Veterans Center and that the Administration will work out the details.
 - b. Peter Harding asked about the City of Jacksonville pursuing DIG and DRG funding. Harrison Conyers explained that MAVD had just received \$1.088 million in grant funds on July 1, 2023, and that they have acquired and managed almost \$9 million in grants since 2015.
 - c. Dee Quaranta asked if the committee will get to review and discuss the Committee Report prior to it being submitted to Mayor Deegan. Rich Possert stated that he felt that there would be a committee review and Travis Akers agreed.
 - d. Joe Tavares asked about the placement of the Veterans Center in the Transition report. Travis Akers explained that the report is broken out into short-, mid- and long-term deliverables.
8. Strengths, Opportunities and Challenges for military, Veterans, and their family’s support services.
- a. Austin Belet mentioned that transportation from the bases to services and events in Jacksonville is difficult. Proposed that COJ and other agencies should market what services and events are available to the military population.

- b. Rich Possert mentioned that a better orientation could be provided between COJ and the bases Fleet and Family Services.
- c. Travis Akers mentioned that a partnership between MWR and the COJ Office of Sport Entertainment and Events (OSE) would be beneficial. Also, that UBER/Lyft access near the main gates of bases would be good.
- d. Bob Adelhelm stated that he doesn't feel like it is a COJ responsibility to provide entertainment services for the active-duty military. Maybe a website could be promoted to direct service members to Visit Jax and COJ OSE.
- e. Rich Possert stated that MAVD might want to discuss some of these issues with the base CO's.
 - i. Wendy Layton mentioned that the Trident Ministry Team at NS Mayport was meeting on 7/27/23 to discuss some of these matters and that MAVD participates in these meetings.
- f. Joe Tavares asked about handicapped Veterans living in assisted living facilities and if there are grants to provide transportation to community/Veterans Events (JTA Connections).

9. Open Discussion

- a. Travis Akers mentioned about the value of SkillBridge and the need for more public awareness. Wendy Layton mentioned that the bases need to do a better job of SkillBridge awareness. (SkillBridge is focused on those within 120 days of transitioning).
- b. Joe Tavares discussed that mentorships is important for those transitioning.
- c. Dee Quaranta mentioned that not all transitioning service members are ready for 9-5 job.

10. Public Comment

- a. Lisa Penn stated that information on transportation need to be posted at Jacksonville International Airport.
 - i. Rich Possert mentioned that the military lounge is open at JIA and has that information.
- b. Joe Snowberger praised the work of the committee members. He stated that an E-directory of all Veterans Services in the community and a calendar of events would be a vital resource.

- c. George Carroll stated that he wanted all of his requests for information responded to with out the use of FOIA request. He also stated that a Veterans Hospital is needed in the community and suggested NAS Jacksonville as a site.
- d. Joe Snowberger stated that regarding the Veterans Center there should be a community conversation to get a diversity of opinions. He suggested a survey.

11. Motion to Adjourn at 6:09 PM by Bob Adelhelm and seconded by Travis Akers.

Minutes: Minutes prepared by Harrison Conyers, Interim Director, Military Affairs and Veterans Services

The written minutes for this meeting are only an overview of what was discussed. For verbatim comments for this meeting, please listen to the audio.

The following items have been submitted for public record. Please contact Legislative Services for these items:

20230726 **Minutes** Noticed Military and Veterans Affairs Transition Meeting

20230726 **Noticed Meeting** CM Lahnen and CM Miller re Military and Veterans Affairs

20230726 **Agenda** Noticed Military and Veterans Affairs Transition Meeting

20230726 **Sign in Sheets** Noticed Military and Veterans Affairs Transition Meeting

20230726 **Comment Cards** Noticed Military and Veterans Affairs Transition Meeting

20230726 **Audio** of the Noticed Military and Veterans Affairs Transition Meeting held on July 26, 2023

CM/cr

cc: Council Members and Staff
Margaret "Peggy" Sidman, Director/Council Secretary
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