



## **REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT**

Tuesday, January 13, 2026 – 6:00 pm

### CALL TO ORDER

President Barnickel called meeting to order at 6:09PM.

### LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Commission Secretary read the Ramaytush Ohlone land acknowledgement.

### ROLL CALL

#### PRESENT:

President Bill Barnickel, Vice-President Hanley Chan, Commissioners Joseph Baba, James Boatman, Deborah Dacumos, Prince Kelly Jordan, Jenny Perez, Nicholas Rusanoff

#### EXCUSED:

Commissioners Darya Kutovaya, John Reissenweber

Quorum established.

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commission and attendees recited Pledge of Allegiance.

### SET AGENDA

President Barnickel asked for comments/changes to the agenda. Hearing none, a motion was called to approve agenda:

Motion / Second / All in Favor

Motion passed. Agenda approved as posted.

Absent: Kutovaya, Reissenweber



## PRESENTATIONS:

- **Swearing-in of 2026 Veterans Affairs Commission Members by San Francisco Sheriff Paul Miyamoto.**

President Barnickel acknowledged the swearing-in proceedings that were held immediately prior to the meeting's call to order. He expressed appreciation to Sheriff Miyamoto for conducting the swearing-in and extended thanks to the Sheriff's staff for their efforts in coordinating his participation.

## COMMUNICATIONS

### **County Veterans Service (CVSO) – December Report:**

- CVSO acting director was unable to attend the meeting. December's report is posted on VAC website. The commission secretary noted the report mentions an upcoming pilot program that will add an additional VSR to the SFVAMC on Wednesdays to assist with claims processing.

### **VAC Executive Team Updates:**

- **Secretary:** Update regarding Commission lapel pins. HSA designer has prepared some initial design concepts and next step is to get price estimates from City-approved vendors. A mock design with cost estimate is anticipated within approximately four weeks.

Secondly, the secretary provided a recap of recommendations from the Commission Streamlining Taskforce. (Taskforce recommendations were originally discussed during the VAC's November 2025 meeting.) Recommendations include retaining VAC as an advisory body, reducing commissioner term length from four to three years, instituting term limits, adding a three-year sunset or review cycle applicable to many City boards and commissions, and recommending VAC be re-named as something other than "commission" since advisory bodies are not usually called commissions. "Council" is one name being considered. Full recommendations with further details can be found on the Commission Streamlining Taskforce website. The secretary clarified that these are recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and they are not final.

- **Vice-President:** Vice President Chan said he is looking forward to the year ahead. He raised concern about the Commission Streamlining Taskforce's recommendation to change the name of the Veterans Affairs Commission. He emphasized the importance of preserving the Commission's historic name, which has been in place since 1982, and suggested adding an actionable item to next month's meeting agenda to address this issue and advise the Board of Supervisors to reject the proposed change. Vice President Chan also highlighted the success of a recent meeting with the Mayor, attended by Commissioner Rusanoff and himself, which led to the posting to permanently fill the CVSO director position. He cited this as an example of the power of this Commission – the commissioners notified the Mayor about an issue and the



Mayor listened and responded. He concluded by expressing his commitment to a productive year in 2026.

- **President:** President Barnickel wished everyone a happy new year and expressed appreciation for the Commission's support during his 12 years of service. He noted that the Commission has accomplished more in the past two to three years than in its previous decades, highlighting key achievements such as securing a veterans' priority in the City's Below Market Rate housing lottery, free admission for veterans to Parks and Recreation facilities, and legislation supporting reservists. He also shared progress on veterans' housing, including the recent approval of 124 units for homeless veterans on Van Ness Avenue, and emphasized the importance of continuing efforts to expand affordable housing opportunities for veterans. The President commended the current Mayor for being highly responsive to the Commission's concerns and for listening to veterans' needs, which has led to tangible results. He encouraged commissioners to pursue individual projects that benefit veterans and offered support for collaborative efforts, underscoring that helping more veterans strengthens the Commission's impact.

## APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

- President Barnickel asked if there were comments or questions from commissioners about the December 9, 2025 meeting minutes. No comments from commissioners. No public comment. **[ACTION]**
- Motion to approve / Second / All in Favor
- Minutes approved as submitted.

Absent: Kutovaya, Reissenweber

## NEW BUSINESS

- Review of best practices and meeting procedures and compliance with applicable laws. **[DISCUSSION]**
- Commission secretary provided a review of applicable meeting rules and compliance requirements, including the Brown Act, the 72-hour agenda posting requirement, Robert's Rules of Order, and the San Francisco City Attorney Good Government Guide. She emphasized that only items listed on a properly posted agenda may be discussed during a meeting and reminded commissioners of procedure to submit agenda items in advance. The secretary also clarified that commissioners must distinguish between speaking in an individual capacity and speaking on behalf of the Commission, which requires formal Commission approval.



- Review and approve Commission outreach letters to Board of Supervisors and Mayor. **[ACTION]**
  - President Barnickel referenced the draft outreach letters to the Mayor and individual members of the Board of Supervisors. Letters extend Commission's New Year greetings and offer to meet with supervisors individually to discuss veteran-specific issues in their district. President Barnickel asked for comments or question. No comments from commissioners. No public comment.
  - Motion to approve / Second / All in Favor
  - Letters approved as submitted and will be sent by commission secretary.

Absent: Kutovaya, Reissenweber
- VA Home Loan Access and San Francisco Housing Policy **[DISCUSSION]**
  - Commissioner Rusanoff presented a detailed analysis of systemic barriers preventing veterans from utilizing VA home loan benefits in San Francisco. [For more information see the Commissioner's full statement attached to these meeting minutes.] During discussion, reference was made to a prior discussion with Supervisor Alan Wong, who expressed interest in exploring legislation on this topic. Commissioner Rusanoff volunteered to draft a letter about this issue to send to Supervisor Alan Wong's Office. The draft will be circulated in advance and agendized for action at the Commission's February 2026 meeting.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

- Status of SFCVSO position – Update from Commissioner Rusanoff. **[DISCUSSION]**
  - Commissioner Rusanoff referenced public comment from the Commission's December 9 meeting by Allan Arata-Vega inviting commissioners to a December 18 Veterans Roundtable Event with the Mayor. Commissioner Rusanoff and a few other commissioners participated in the event and raised concerns about the long-vacant CVSO position. This role is being temporarily filled by rotating veteran claims representatives, which reduces the number of claims processed for veterans. Commissioners emphasized the need to permanently fill the position. The Mayor acknowledged these concerns, and the CVSO position has since been posted for permanent hire. The commission secretary noted the link to the position's job posting was shared with all commissioners.



- Request a Mayoral Certificate of Honor to recognize the outstanding service provided by long time SFCVSO claims representatives John Gallagher and Elvie Flaviano. **[ACTION]**
  - President Barnickel asked for comments or questions regarding request for Mayoral Certificates of Honor. No comments from commissioners. No public comment.
  - Motion to approve / Second / All in Favor
  - Certificate request approved and commission secretary will send request to the Mayor's office.

Absent: Kutovaya, Reissenweber

## **GOOD WELFARE**

This is the opportunity for members of the Veterans Affairs Commission to share special thanks and congratulatory remarks for the good welfare taking place in the veteran community.

- Commissioner Rusanoff extended good welfare to Allan Arata-Vega for his work in organizing the successful Veterans Roundtable Event with Mayor Lurie.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- Commissioner Chan announced he will attend a USMC graduation next week. He noted for the record the graduate's name is Skyy Chen.

## **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Speaker: Leonard Ramirez, representing veterans advocacy efforts in Contra Costa County, provided public comment regarding ongoing efforts to establish a veterans commission in Contra Costa County. He expressed appreciation for the structure and effectiveness of the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission and requested continued dialogue and support. His contact information was left with the commission secretary.

## **HONOR REPORT AND MOMENT OF SILENCE**

In memory of American service members in all wars and conflicts who made the ultimate sacrifice. We also remember the passing of homeless veterans, veterans who died while awaiting approval of benefits, and suicides within the veteran and armed service communities.



## ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned by President Barnickel at 6:58pm.

The next regular meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission will be held in-person at 6:00pm in Room 416 at San Francisco City Hall on **Tuesday, February 10, 2026**.

Links and meeting documents can be found on the Veterans Affairs Commission website.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Murphy  
Commission Secretary  
Veterans Affairs Commission

**Attachment:** Written Statement from Commissioner Nicholas Rusanoff

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### Veterans Affairs Commission Meetings:

General meetings of the SFVAC are scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on the second Tuesday of every month, with the exception for the month of July, when there is no scheduled SF VAC meeting, and are held in Room 416 in City Hall.



Meeting confirmation, and specific announcement of general meetings are made via public posting of the Meeting Agenda as required by law, at least 72 hours prior to scheduled meetings. Agendas for SFVAC meetings (and archived meeting minutes) are available on the SFVAC Pages of the City of San Francisco website, and are also available for public view and inspection at the 5th Floor Government Information Center at the San Francisco Public Library, at 100 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102. The documents librarian telephone number is (415) 554-4472.

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**Veterans  
Crisis Line**



1-800-273-8255  
PRESS 1

If you or a Veteran, you know is in immediate danger to themselves or others, please call 911 or visit your local emergency room.

The Veterans Crisis Line is also available by texting 838255 or by going to their website and chatting with a mental health professional.



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## **ATTACHMENT TO 1/13/2026 VAC Meeting Minutes: Written Statement Submitted by Commissioner Nicholas Rusanoff re New Business Agenda Item of VA Home Loans**

As you have read in the supporting documents, many of these issues have been discussed in detail. Today, I want to focus our attention on the core problem at the center of this matter: the structure of San Francisco's housing stock itself, and how it systematically blocks veterans from using their VA Home Loan benefit.

This is not a single-property issue. It affects every major housing category in San Francisco.

For single-family homes, veterans face barriers due to older housing stock, deferred maintenance, and seller resistance to completing safety-related repairs required under VA standards. These are solvable issues, but in a competitive market, VA-backed offers are often rejected outright. A solution here is targeted repair pathways and seller education to remove misconceptions about VA loans.

For condominiums and townhomes, which make up a large share of San Francisco's housing, the barriers are more structural. Entire buildings are excluded because HOAs are not VA-approved, governing documents contain restrictive language, insurance coverage is insufficient, or litigation is pending. The solution is not changing federal VA rules—it is aligning HOA governance, insurance standards, and disclosure timelines so these homes are financeable by veterans.

For multi-unit and mixed-use properties, veterans encounter issues with unpermitted units, habitability requirements across all units, and zoning or access concerns. These barriers can be addressed through clearer compliance pathways and coordinated enforcement.

For tenancy-in-common properties and co-ops, the ownership structure itself often makes VA financing impossible. The long-term solution is supporting pathways to modernize or convert these structures so they are compatible with standard financing.

When you step back, the pattern is clear. Veterans are not being excluded because they are unqualified. They are being excluded because our local housing frameworks have evolved in a way that renders a federally promised benefit unusable.

That is not accidental. It is systemic discrimination against veterans who served this country honorably.

Our call to action today is for this Commission to engage directly with our Board of Supervisors and the Mayor's Office, to highlight this injustice and demand corrective legislation. That legislation must prioritize new construction, especially apartments and condominiums, so that the housing being built today does not continue to exclude veterans tomorrow. If San Francisco claims to support veterans, then our housing policy must reflect that commitment in practice, not just in principle.