



REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - FINAL

Tuesday, August 12, 2025 – 6:00 pm

CALL TO ORDER

President Barnickel called meeting to order at 6:05PM.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

President Bill Barnickel, Commissioners Joseph Baba, Hanley Chan, Jason Chittavong, Prince Kelly Jordan, Jenny Perez, John Reissenweber

EXCUSED:

VP Rusanoff, Commissioners Boatman, Dacumos, Kutovaya

Quorum established.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

President Barnickel led attendees in reciting Pledge of Allegiance.

SET AGENDA

President Barnickel called for motion to approve agenda.

Motion / Second / All in Favor

Motion passed. Agenda approved as submitted.

No public comment on the agenda.

Absent: Boatman, Dacumos, Kutovaya, Rusanoff

WELCOMING REMARKS: President Barnickel

- President Barnickel welcomed meeting attendees. He extended a special welcome to former SF Veterans Affairs commissioners Raymond Wong and Doug Bullard, noting their many decades of veteran advocacy work and community service.



PRESENTATIONS

- San Francisco War Memorial Event Commemorating 80 years since the end of WWII: Guest Speaker Steven Geiger shared details of the September 2 event. Highlights included:
 - Mr. Geiger shared his personal history as the son of a WWII concentration camp survivor and as a 1956 Hungarian refugee welcomed to America through a U.S. Army base.
 - A special honoree at September 2 event will be a 103-year-old San Francisco resident and WWII Army veteran.
 - Emphasized the importance that young people are aware of U.S. military history
 - Extended an invitation to all commissioners to the September 2 event.
- Veteran Suicide Prevention Awareness – VA Healthcare System
VA Program Coordinator Amanda Lopez, LCSW, provided a presentation on the VA's Community-Based Veteran Suicide Prevention Program – a public health approach to expand veteran suicide prevention efforts beyond the VA healthcare system and into the community. [For more information, see slides posted to VAC website.] Points raised during presentation and discussion included:
 - Suicide rates among veterans is 72% higher than general population.
 - Many at-risk veterans are not connected to VA services, making community outreach essential.
 - Key strategies include early screening in medical and community settings, lethal means safety (especially firearm storage), and free training offered to community partners.
 - Discussion points from Q&A with commissioners included benefits of therapy animals, recognizing warning signs, and the vital importance of community education.
 - Concern was raised that the actual number of veteran suicides is likely underreported, as some deaths are misclassified. Ms. Lopez agreed that more outreach and accurate tracking are needed.



COMMUNICATIONS

County Veterans Service Office Report:

- SFCVSO acting director Maurice Delmer presented July report. [For more information, please see slides posted to VAC website.] Highlights from report included:
 - Significant increases in claims, walk-ins, and benefit applications from June to July.
 - Encouraged support for CA SB 694 to restrict unaccredited claims consultants that target veterans. California Assembly Appropriations Committee will hold a hearing on SB 694 on Wednesday, August 20. Mr. Delmer noted CVSO is trying to get a big turnout of veterans to testify at the hearing and asked commissioners to help spread the word throughout the veterans community.
 - Reviewed upcoming outreach activities including City College Veterans Benefits Day (August 28) and War Memorial resources fair.
 - Question asked about CVSO staff level. Mr. Delmer noted city hiring freeze remains in place. Need for additional staff support at the VA Medical Center was noted by commission. Commissioners offered suggestions, including pursuing idea of getting more staff support from work study volunteers.
 - In answer to a commissioner's inquiry, Mr. Delmer confirmed the CVSO director position, which was considered for a classification downgrade during city budget talks, will not be downgraded.

VAC Executive Team Updates:

- Secretary: Announced change to Commission's November meeting date and room location. Due to Veterans Day holiday (November 11), the Commission's regularly scheduled meeting on November 11 has been rescheduled to **Thursday, November 6 at 6:00pm in Room 408.**
- Vice-President: Absent, no update.
- President: Spoke about success of July 23 "Veterans Connect" event sponsored by Swords to Plowshares. Offered special thanks to Commissioner James Boatman for organizing and publicizing the event through his role as a Sword to Plowshares program manager. Additionally mentioned success of Memorial Day event at the San Francisco Presidio. He thanked all commissioners who attended and participated in the ceremony. Concluded remarks by thanking fellow commissioners for their participation and regular attendance at commission meetings.



APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES [Action]

- President Barnickel asked if there were comments or questions from commissioners on May 13, 2025 meeting minutes. No comments.
- No public comment.
- Motion called to approve May 13, 2025 regular meeting minutes.
- Motion / Second / All in Favor. Motion passed. Minutes approved as submitted.

Absent: Boatman, Dacumos, Kutovaya, Rusanoff

NEW BUSINESS

- Explore opportunities for Commission to participate in celebrations honoring 250-year anniversary of US Navy.
 - There is interest in veteran participation with the Mayor during a press conference tentatively planned to be held at Lands End. Commissioners Jordan and Chan will gather more details and provide an update at next month's meeting.
- Conditions of Veterans Alley Mural in the Tenderloin. Commissioners reviewed letter to District 5 Supervisor. [Letter posted to VAC website.]
 - Motion called to approve letter. Motion seconded / All in favor. Motion passed. Letter approved as submitted and will be emailed to District 5 Supervisor's office.

Absent: Boatman, Dacumos, Kutovaya, Rusanoff

- Veterans Affairs Commission Lapel Pins.
 - Commission Chan introduced item. Cited other City advisory commissions that have pins and noted it is something that will be helpful to identify commissioners to the public. He shared sample pin designs.
 - Motion called to request commission pins from HSA. Motion seconded / All in favor. Motion passed. Secretary will forward request to HSA.



Absent: Boatman, Dacumos, Kutovaya, Rusanoff

- Mayoral Certificate of Honor for Dr. John Straznickas on the occasion of his retirement from the San Francisco VA Healthcare System after many years of dedicated service. Requested by Commissioner Rusanoff.
- In Commissioner Rusanoff's absence, Commissioner Perez read his comments, recommending this recognition for Dr. Straznickas.
- Motion called to approve request. Motion Seconded / All in favor. Motion passed. The commission secretary will submit request to the Mayor's Office.

Absent: Boatman, Dacumos, Kutovaya, Rusanoff

OLD BUSINESS

- Approve letter in support of CA SB 296: Disabled Veterans Property Tax Exemption.
- Letter drafted by Commissioner Kutovaya and shared with commissioners for review.
- Motion called to approve letter. Motion Seconded / All in favor. Motion passed.

Absent: Boatman, Dacumos, Kutovaya, Rusanoff

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.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Commissioner Jordan spoke about a New York non-profit called Tuesday's Children that supports survivors of the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks. The organization will hold a 9/11 Patriots Day golf fundraiser at Harding Park on September 11, 2025. Commissioners are invited to attend and possibly participate in a press conference with the Mayor and other invited elected officials. Commissioner Jordan will send more information to the commission secretary to distribute to commission.
- Commissioner Chan mentioned the Grand National Rodeo being held on October 10 and 11 at the Cow Palace. Free admission for all veterans.



- Commissioner Perez spoke about veterans at VA Hospital who do not have family or friends to visit them. She encouraged other commissioners to visit these veterans if possible, noting that such visits can make a meaningful difference in their lives.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Speaker Raymond Wong requested administrative support from the Commission for the annual San Francisco Veterans Day Parade. He noted the parade has been supported and organized by Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) for past 50+ years. Historically, members of the Veterans Affairs Commission have served as parade judges and grand marshals. He would like to see commission expand its support to ensure continued success of the parade.
- Speaker Chris Ward Kline spoke of safety concerns related to 5G towers near public spaces, including the Main Library and Art Museum. Chris warned of potential risks such as overdoses and suicides linked to misuse of this technology and urged attendees to report suspicious installations to authorities. He concluded by adding his support of VFW's request for help with the Veterans Day Parade.

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.

- President Barnickel acknowledged the recent passing of San Francisco resident and Korean War U.S. Army veteran **Paul P. Choi**. In recognition of his service and contributions, the meeting was **dedicated in his honor**. The Commission extends its heartfelt condolences to Mr. Choi's family.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned by President Barnickel at 7:37pm.

Meeting held in memory and honor of:

Paul P. Choi
U.S. Army – Korean War Veteran
December 24, 1930 – March 19, 2025



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, September 9, 2025.**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Murphy
Commission Secretary
Veterans Affairs Commission

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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



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.



24/7 Confidential
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Crisis Line:
(415) 781-0500