REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, September 8, 2026 – 6:00 pm

CALL TO ORDER

President Barnickel called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT:
President Bill Barnickel, VP Hanley Chan, Council Members: James Boatman, Channie Barker, Deborah Dacumos (remote), Aditya Lakshminarayan, Jenny Perez, John Reissenweber, Nicholas Rusanoff

EXCUSED:
Joseph Baba

Quorum established.

RAMAYTUSH OHLONE LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The council secretary read the land acknowledgment.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Council members and attendees recited Pledge of Allegiance.

SET AGENDA

President Barnickel asked if there were any comments or changes to the agenda. No changes. Agenda approved as submitted.

PRESENTATION – Horsemanship Program

The scheduled presentation could not take place because the presenter experienced a family emergency and needed to reschedule.

President Barnickel provided a brief overview of the presentation. He noted the program had previously been experienced by veterans and spoke positively about the potential therapeutic benefits of working with horses. The presentation will be rescheduled for a future Council meeting.

COMMUNICATIONS

County Veterans Service (CVSO) – August Report:

Gerardo Carr, CVSO manager, presented an activities report for August. [The full CVSO report can be found on the VAC website.]

- Gerardo reviewed numbers for benefits awarded, scheduled and in-person appointments, claims filed, and walk-in clients served at the Gough St. office and SFVA Fort Miley in August.

- It was noted CVSO is recruiting for its work-study program. One work-study participant was scheduled to begin on September 9 and two additional applicants are pending approval.

- Finally, Gerardo reported the office is working on revisions to its website to provide veterans with more accessible information about available services, including resources for LGBTQ+ veterans and homeless veterans.

Council discussion comments included:

- Council member Rusanoff congratulated Gerardo on his recent appointment as the permanent manager for the CVSO. He further inquired about support the CVSO can provide veterans seeking character-of-service discharge upgrades. Gerardo responded that the CVSO is working to strengthen its connection with organizations, such as Swords to Plowshares, that provide legal assistance for discharge upgrades. Council member Rusanoff suggested the CVSO consider having veterans sign a release of information form so the CVSO and legal service providers can communicate more efficiently. He also asked if future CVSO reports could include tracking information on the number of veterans being assisted with discharge upgrades. Gerardo said he would look into incorporating this information into future reports, noting that he would need a few months' time to establish partnership and processes first.

- Council VP Chan followed up about information requested at the previous meeting concerning CVSO funding. Gerardo provided a printed budget report he received from his supervisor with funding information for CVSO services. Council member Chan clarified that the requested information concerned the amount of state funding allocated to CVSO. Gerardo said he would find that information and follow up.

- As there were no further questions, the CVSO update was concluded.

VAC Executive Team Updates:

Secretary:

- The secretary provided two updates from actions approved at the previous meeting:
    - Council's letter to the Mayor and BoS regarding Streamlining Taskforce changes to VAC: The Mayor's Office responded by thanking the Council for its advocacy and said its office will follow up if additional information is needed. BoS confirmed receipt of letter and noted it was distributed to BoS members.
    - Council's letter re Mayor's Food Security Initiative / Veterans CalFresh Eligibility: The Mayor's Office responded by thanking the Council and requested a representative from the City's Health and Human Services team give a presentation at the next Council meeting. The presentation has been added to the October 13 meeting agenda.

Vice-President:

- VP Chan discussed H.R. 9237, the "Take Care of America's Veterans Act." He noted it is a good bill, but that Section 108 is an area of concern as it will affect disability ratings associated with sleep apnea and tinnitus, which he identified as common veteran claims. He suggested the legislation is something the Council should monitor. He also mentioned CA SB 296 concerning property tax exemptions for disabled veterans. He noted a draft letter he placed on the agenda would be discussed later under New Business.

President:

- President Barnickel mentioned that CA SB 296, which VP Chan would discuss later in the meeting, is on the governor's desk now. He noted that even if it gets vetoed it will still pass. He also referenced another state bill that would waive CA taxes for retired veterans. It did not pass, but it's an issue the Council should continue to track. President Barnickel also mentioned the 126 units allocated for homeless veterans as part of the Van Ness Avenue housing project. It is the most units set aside for veterans in many years.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES [ACTION]

- President Barnickel asked council members if there were comments or corrections to the August 11, 2026 meeting minutes. He called for public comment re meeting minutes. No public comment.

- Motion to approve / Second / All in Favor

- August 11, 2026 meeting minutes approved as submitted.

  Absent: Baba

OLD BUSINESS

- Veterans Justice Court Funding Update [DISCUSSION]

  - Council member Nick Rusanoff provided an update on the funding of two Veterans Justice Court positions – a case manager and clinic therapist. Following advocacy efforts by this council and the veterans community, the Board of Supervisors allocated $150,000 to preserve the case manager position. The therapist position remains unfunded. Council member Rusanoff said he would gather more information about the position's funding needs and add it to a future meeting agenda. President Barnickel thanked Council member Rusanoff for leading this effort.

- Restoration of the Veterans Affairs Commission from its recent change to Veterans Affairs Council. [DISCUSSION]

  - VP Chan noted the Council's letter was sent and received by the Mayor's Office and the Board of Supervisors. He added that the Council is in a "wait and see" period regarding further action. He noted a member of the Board of Supervisors may address this matter. The Council agreed to continue monitoring the issue.

NEW BUSINESS

- Letter drafted by VP Chan in support of CA SB296, which would provide property tax relief for qualifying 100% service-connected disabled veterans and eligible surviving spouses. The letter prepared by VP Chan was circulated to council members before the meeting. [ACTION]

- VP Chan discussed the impact of property taxes on severely disabled veterans living on fixed incomes and described the legislation as addressing housing stability for qualifying veterans. He reported the bill received bipartisan support and passed the Assembly without opposition. Council members discussed the bill and the proposed letter.

- Motion to approve the letter / Second / All in Favor

- Draft letter approved as submitted.

  Absent: Baba

- Tracking Veterans Legislation. [DISCUSSION]

- VP Chan shared his idea of gathering information about significant veteran-related bills and bringing them, on a regular basis, before the Council for discussion and possible action. He said he would like to be responsible for tracking bills he believes the Council may want to discuss. As an example, he cited a local bill coming up in October that Supervisor Melgar finished and hopefully Supervisor Wong will take over. VP Chan will provide an update on this bill at next month's council meeting. During discussion, Council member Dacumos mentioned concerns about the impact of Proposition 19 on some veterans' families. She described situations in which surviving family members experienced substantial increases in property-tax assessments after a veteran or parent died and property was transferred within the family. She cited this as an example of the need to understand how broader state policies can affect San Francisco veterans and their families.

- Council members agreed on importance of including discussions about veterans legislation in future meeting agendas.

- National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month: Raising Awareness of Veteran Suicide Rates and Upcoming US Coast Guard Event in San Francisco. [DISCUSSION]

- Council member James Boatman discussed a U.S. Coast Guard event in recognition of September as National Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month. The event will take place on Friday, September 18 at 9:30am at Marin side of Golden Gate Bridge. A flyer with more information will be shared with council members via email.

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.

- President Barnickel extended good welfare to Council member Dacumos in appreciation for her attendance at council meetings while dealing with significant health challenges over the past several months. He shared best wishes for her continued recovery.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Council member Dacumos discussed upcoming Fleet Week activities. An Interfaith Blessing of the Fleet will be held on October 11 at 9:00am at the Presidio Chapel.

- VP Chan and Council member Boatman shared information about an event commemorating 25 years since 9/11/01. A memorial and citizenship event is scheduled for Friday, September 11, 2026 at the Main Post of the Presidio. The event is hosted by Heart and Armor and scheduled from 10:30 to noon.

- Council member Perez provided remarks about September as a month of reflection, service, and remembrance. She recognized several September days of observance and emphasized the theme of service, remembrance, heritage, and support for veterans and their families.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- No public comment.

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 6:47pm.

The next regular meeting of the Veterans Affairs Council will be held in-person at 6:00pm in Room 416 at San Francisco City Hall on **Tuesday, October 13, 2026.**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Murphy
Council Secretary
Veterans Affairs Council

This document is Official Business of the Veterans Affairs Council, City and County of San Francisco. It is part of the official Public Record of the City and County of San Francisco.

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Veterans Affairs Council 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.

SUICIDE
PREVENTION

24/7 Confidential
Support

Text MYLIFE to 741741
Crisis Line:
(415) 781-0500