ADVISORY BOARD ON VETERANS SERVICES MINUTES

Teams Audio
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Friday, October 1, 2021
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

Board Members: Ms. Bridget Komine, Chair
Mr. Blair Suzuki, Vice Chair
Ms. Mary Kay Hertog
Mr. Jim Traxler
Ms. Roxanne (Rocky) Bruhn
Mr. Reyn Kaupiko
Ms. Donna Shimizu

OVS Staff: Mr. Ron Han, OVS, Director
Ms. Yolanda Ehere, Secretary
Ms. Yam Yi Lee, Administrative Services Assistant

Guests: Mr. Sergio Chao, Director, VBA Benefits
Dr. Adam Robinson, Director, VAPICHS
Ms. Amy Rohlfs, Public Affairs Officer, VAPICHS
Mr. Wade Ishii, Asst. Chief Engineering Officer, State of Hawaii DOD Engineering
Mr. Juan Babiak, Veterans Liaison, Yukio Okutsu State Veterans
Ms. Katherine Korenaga, Community and Project Development Director, Department of Human Services
Ms. Ann Greenlee, U.S. Department of Labor, VETS
Mr. Jim Horton, Director, National Cemetery of the Pacific
Ms. Carol Kanayama, Department of Labor and Industrial Relations

Absent: Mr. Michael Lilly
Mr. Carlos Santana – Senator Mazie Hirono’s Office Representative
Department of Health

I. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & CALL TO ORDER – A Moment of Silence
Roxanne Bruhn led the Pledge of Allegiance. After a moment of silence, Chair Bridget Komine called the meeting to order at 0900 hours.
II. MINUTES
The Board reviewed the September 3, 2021 minutes. Roxanne Bruhn motioned to accept the September 3, 2021 minutes and Mary Kay Hertog seconded.

III. COMMUNICATIONS
None.

IV. DEPARTMENT REPORTS
Mr. Sergio Chao, Director, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - Benefits

Briefed on: New Fiscal Year (FY22) – We are now compiling the final numbers. Record year for Vocational Rehab – 322 positive outcomes and 679 new plans for veterans and servicemembers. There is a huge hiring initiative going on for VBA nationwide. The Honolulu office got about 11 positions to fill: now conducting interviews.

Dr. Adam Robinson, Director & Ms. Amy Rohlfs, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - Pacific Island Health Care System - Medical

Briefed on: COVID vaccine update – Moderna & JJ hasn’t been approved for 3rd dosage. We are not doing COVID testing for veterans for administrative purposes. New Windward CBOC coming in November. Aloha Project is moving forward and is on schedule

Question for Dr. Robinson:
1. Roxanne Bruhn asked Dr. Robinson about the women’s clinic at Spark Matsunaga if it is still open? Several people received notification there is no doctor. Dr. Robinson answered that clinic is still open. Amy answered that the veterans could call 18002141306.

Mr. Ron Han, OVS, Director

Briefed on: Thank you to Congressional staffers!! HSVC received grant for $6million.

Mr. Wade Ishii, Asst. Chief Engineering Officer, State of Hawaii DOD Engineering

Briefed on:
- Federal Veterans Affairs (VA) Grants Activities/Correspondence - Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery ($5.901M) – Funded (Expansion and Improvements)
- HSVC Expansion and Improvements, Oahu - September 27, 2021: VA signed Grant in the amount of $5,901,475.
- Hawaii State Veterans Home, Oahu - September 24, 2021: Ground lease between HHFDC and DOD routing for signatures/execution. 99 years term
commencing Oct. 1, 2021 through September 20, 2120. Lease rent of $1/year for years 1 – 4. Lease rent to be 50% of net cash flow for years 5-99 w/ renegotiations and caps in place. Continuing to work w/ VA and Payment Management System (PMS) to resolve federal funds payment issues. October 1, 2021: Project construction ~20% complete.

- West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery – Expansion and Improvements - Project Initiation Request (PIR) letter to be sent to DAGS soon.
- Kauai Veterans Cemetery, Phase 2B Access Road, Expansion and Improvements - October 1, 2021: Project construction is ~70% complete.
- Maui Veterans Cemetery Expansion and Improvements - As a good-will gesture, this project will provide entry signage for the Makawao Cemetery. Project construction ~96% complete.
- Maui Veterans Cemetery Additional Columbaria Niches - October 1, 2021: Project construction ~40% complete.

Mr. Juan Babiak, Veterans Liaison, Yukio Okutsu State Veterans

Briefed on: Cleared outbreak mode on September 20th. 96.3% staff is fully vaccinated.

Ms. Katherine Korenaga, Community and Project Development Director, Department of Human Services

Briefed on: Clarification of SNAP and food stamps waivers – As of July, we went back to doing eligibility reviews on an annual or six months basis. In October, families may get a 25% increase with a thrifty food plan. Because of the eligibility reviews, the process of reapplying for benefits will take 15-25 working days.


Mr. Jim Horton, Director, National Cemetery of the Pacific – $15 million formal award on construction project next week; will start after Christmas. Awarded $750K for expansion projects approved at the end of the fiscal year.

Question for Jim Horton:
1. Roxanne Bruhn asked Jim Horton if Punchbowl participates in the Wreath Across America? Jim Horton answered yes, we do through Carwell Ross, but due to the restrictions it’s been a hit or miss. There is no formal ceremony for this year.

Department of Health – Not present. No submitted report.
Department of Labor and Industrial Relations - No submitted report, but Carol Kanayama from Workforce Development Division introduced herself. Rapid Response effort to give information to the National Guard men and women who will be deactivated.

Mr. Carlos Santana, Senator Mazie Hirono’s Office Representative – Not present.

BOARD MEMBER’S REPORTS

4. Oahu - Ms. Bridget Komine, Chair - No submitted report.
5. Oahu - Ms. Reyn Kaupiko - No submitted report.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Legislative Committee
   • No Report.
B. By Laws and Procedures
   • No Report.
C. Recognition and Awards
   • No Report.
D. Women’s Committee
   • Col. Ellison along with OVS staff Diane Ramsey and Anne Matute have been attending the National Association Women Center meeting.
E. Project and Events Committee
   • Rededication of the WWII Memorial
     1. Went to visit the Punchbowl site with Jim Hisano (DAGS) and Stone Craft manufacturers
     2. Looking at where it will be placed
     3. Ceremony will be small in respect to restrictions
   • Maui Veterans Cemetery Blessing/Dedication Event
     1. 96% is completed
     2. Blessing should be in the new calendar year.

V. NEW BUSINESS - None

VI. OLD BUSINESS - None
VII. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**
- Department of Veterans Affairs - Ms. Vivian Hutson, Senior Advisor for Pacific Strategy introduced herself.

VIII. **WORKING SESSION** - OVS / Advisory Board Issues / Ideas

IX. **ADJOURN** – 10:32am
Roxanne Bruhn motioned, and Mary Kay Hertog seconded.

Yolanda Ehere – Recorder