

**The San Mateo County Veterans Commission
Annual Report to the Board of Supervisors
April 10, 2018**

The Veterans Commission was established by the Board of Supervisors on June 2, 2015 by Resolution 073812. The Commission is made up of 11 voting members and two alternates. Commissioners are appointed to serve three-year terms. A Chair and Vice-Chair are elected annually by majority vote. Commission meetings are held on the second Monday of each odd numbered month.

Mission

The mission of the Veterans Commission is to promote programs and policies that address the unmet needs of veterans in San Mateo County.

Duties

To advise and make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors; to develop and implement an annual work plan; to provide a public forum for input from the veterans community to identify unmet needs; to work with existing veterans' advocacy and service organizations to help coordinate systems of care and benefits; to act as an advocate for veterans, taking positions pertaining to federal, state and local policies, programs, procedures and any legislation affecting veterans and their families; and to fulfill other duties and engage in other activities as directed by the Board of Supervisors.

2017 Report

2017 was the second full year for the Veterans Commission. The Commission primarily focused on the top two priorities identified in the 2014 Veterans Needs Assessment Study:

- Veteran access to benefits and services
- Housing and homelessness

During the year, three voting Commissioners resigned for personal reasons. A new alternate was appointed and subsequently appointed to full voting membership as were the other two alternates. Two new alternates were appointed by the Board of Supervisors.

Access to Benefits and Services

There were several initiatives and programs in which the Commission supported this priority including:

- The second annual *Veteran of the Year* luncheon held on November 9, 2017 to recognize those who have gone beyond to serve the veteran community

and the community at large. We recognized a Veteran of the Year, a Patriot (non-veteran) of the Year and an Enterprise of the Year for their service. The 300 attendees heard keynote speaker Admiral James O. Ellis, Jr, USN-Ret. and celebrated the awardees. The objective of this event is to bring greater public awareness of our veteran community and give recognition to those special individuals and organizations who continue to serve the veteran community.

- The Commission actively supported the first San Mateo County Veterans Stand Down held on May 5 to provide services to veterans in need.
- In partnership with PenTV, three 30-minute programs titled *Thank You for Your Service, Now What?* were filmed and broadcast. Each episode had a panel of experts on veterans' services and benefits discussing how local county veterans could qualify for and access their entitled benefits.
- In 2016 the Commission took the lead in partnership with the County's VSO in promoting a new County Veteran ID card. This effort continued in 2017 with an agreement from the County Parks Department agreeing to free admission for all card holders.
- The Commission regularly invited to its meetings numerous government and non-government partners who provide services to veterans, thus providing awareness to the Commissioners and the public of these services and organizations.

Housing and Homelessness

The Commission has a standing sub-committee on Housing and Homelessness that has been actively working with the County HSA and Core Agencies as well as the VA and community-based organizations to find homes and shelter for homeless veterans and those in need. By the County's count we ended the year with 63 identified homeless veterans of which 46 were sheltered and 17 unsheltered. The committee is working on several projects including:

- Actively monitoring several apartment development projects funded under the project-based HUD-VASH Voucher Program including:
 - o Willow Commons, Menlo Park – 60 units fully occupied with a waiting list of 60
 - o Bay Meadows Bridge Apartments, San Mateo – 67 units with 12 reserved for veterans with estimated completion date in 2020
 - o Gateway Project, Millbrae – 444 units with 55 reserved for veterans. The Commission has written letters of support to the City of Millbrae and Commissioners have attended city council meetings to lobby on behalf of the project.

- Colma Veterans Village, Colma – 65 one bedroom apartments for veterans with HUD-VASH vouchers. The project has broken ground with completion expected in 2019.
 - Republic Properties Corp. project at American Legion Post 105 site, Redwood City – 329 units with 15% for veterans; estimated completion 2021-2022.
- The committee is actively working with the Central Peninsula Church on a tenant based voucher program to expand the universe of landlords participating in the HUD-VASH Voucher program for veterans. Four landlords are participating in the program so far. Plans are to expand the program to additional churches and fraternal organizations throughout the county.
 - A program to house homeless veterans in donated Recreational Vehicles is getting underway with plans to identify possible sites to establish RV hook-ups.
 - The Commission worked in partnership and as a resource to a youth working on his Eagle Scout project to provide backpacks with “survival” gear for homeless veterans. The scout delivered 168 backpacks to the CVSO’s office along with 57 \$25 Safeway gift cards for veterans in need.

2018 Priorities and Programs

The Commission will continue to support the aforementioned priorities and programs including:

- The third annual Veteran of the Year luncheon scheduled for November 8, 2018.
- The Commission is developing a marketing and communications plan in coordination with the CVSO to more effectively reach out to veterans using the power of social media. The goal is to increase veteran awareness of available benefits and services in the county. The plan will be presented to the Board of Supervisors along with the estimated cost to implement.
- The Commission will actively support the County’s Women Veterans Summit scheduled for May 16.
- The Housing and Homelessness sub-committee will continue its work.

Recommendations

The Commission is recommending the County Human Services Agency and County Veterans Service Office continue to increase efforts to reach out to the veteran community to increase the awareness of benefits and services available. According to the 2017 annual report from the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO), San Mateo County has one of the state's lowest utilization rates of Compensation & Pension benefits. Greater and more effective outreach should be able to bring more benefits to the County's veterans.

The Commission is also recommending that the Board of Supervisors consider supporting and funding a program to provide mentoring services for county veterans. [Has the Commission taken a position on this yet?] The program would involve volunteer mentors providing mentoring to any veteran who would like and benefit from such a service. The goal would be to help veterans seeking to transition from active service to the civilian job market, unemployed veterans looking for employment, veterans looking for career mentoring or any other life issues. To implement such a program would initially require as least one full time person to define, organize and administer the program.