Minutes of the TEMPE VETERANS COMMISSION held on Tuesday, March 19, 6:00 p.m., at the Military & Veteran Success Center, 3320 South Price Road, Tempe, Arizona.

(MEMBERS) Present:
Troy Friedman, Chair
Matthew Schmitt, Vice-Chair
William Blair
Jeremy Farr
Patricia Little-Upah
Michelle Loposky
David Lucier
Abe McCann
Jezreel Ramirez
Laura Skotnicki (telephonically)

(MEMBERS) Absent:
None

City Staff Present:
Octavia Harris, Deputy Human Services Director
Melissa Placencia, Administrative Assistant II+

Guests Present:
Colonel Bruce Pagel, Veterans Furniture Center

Agenda Item 1 – Call to Order
Chair Troy Friedman called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Agenda Item 2 – Public Appearances
None

Agenda Item 3 – Attendance

Agenda Item 4 – Chair’s Remarks

• Joanna Sweatt will be appointed on March 28, 2019

Agenda Item 5 – Review and Approval of the February 5, 2019 Minutes

MOTION: Motion to APPROVE February 5, 2019 minutes by Commission Member William Blair
SECOND: Motion seconded by Commission Member Patricia Little-Upah
YAYS: Chair Troy Friedman, Vice-Chair Matthew Schmitt, Commission Members William Blair, Jeremy Farr, Patricia Little-Upah, Michelle Loposky, David Lucier, Abe McCann, and Laura Skotnicki
ABSENT: None

Agenda Item 6 – Veterans Furniture Center Presentation – Colonel Bruce Pagel (attachment)

Colonel Bruce Pagel gave a brief overview of the Veterans Furniture Center (VFC) provides. Commission Member Michelle Loposky offered to connect Colonel Pagel with an intern to assist with social media and the VFC web presence.

Commission Member Jezreel Ramirez arrived at 6:16 pm

Agenda Item 7 – 2019 Commission Goals Discussion

Chair Troy Friedman asked the Commission to further define the goals for 2019 as outlined in the 2018 Boards and Commissions Annual Report

Safe & Secure Communities:
- Continued support and partnership with CARE7, Tempe Fire Medical Rescue’s VA Telemedicine Program
  - How does the Commission advocate for this?
    - Funding
    - Request another presentation from the Telemedicine program
    - Ask how the Commission can help and include that information in the Annual Report
  - How is the Commission supporting the Tempe Fire Medical Rescue’s VA Telemedicine Program?
    - Advocating
    - How many Veterans does the Telemedicine program serve?

Strong Community Connections:
- Continue Tempe Community Salutes
- Identify a welcome home event
  - Operation Welcome Home Arizona
    - Request a presentation
- Establish awareness with other city departments on the Tempe Veterans Commission
- Communicate and Coordinate with other city departments on related issues
  - David suggested presenting at a professional development workshop to all city employees
  - Councilmember Robin Arredondo-Savage had suggested at a previous meeting creating a Veterans Awareness campaign
    - An effort to identify City of Tempe employee Veterans
    - Request a City of Tempe Veterans Appreciation Day proclamation
    - Once a date is identified, Melissa can assist with creating a flyer

The Commission discussed their purpose and how they can communicate their recommendations with Mayor & Council; Deputy Human Services Director Octavia Harris suggested submitting a Friday Packet memo – Administrative Assistant, Melissa Placencia will send a format of the memo to Commission Members Jeremy Farr, Jezreel Ramirez and Michelle Loposky. Commission Member David Lucier requested more information on communicating via Tempe 11; Melissa will follow up with Communications Manager, Nikki Ripley.
MOTION: Motion to RECOMMEND to Mayor & Council to explore a Tempe Veterans Day by Commission Member Jeremy Farr
SECOND: Motion seconded by Commission Member Abe McCann
After further discussion, the Commission agreed to draft a memo for the Commission to review prior to submitting an official proposal – Jeremy, Abe, Jezreel and Michelle will draft; Commission Member Jeremy Farr withdrew motion

- Support City Council performance measure 3.21 “Engage Tempe employers to achieve a "Veteran-Supportive" designation greater than or equal to the average of Valley cities as awarded by the Arizona Coalition for Military Families:
  - Mentorship Program

- Focus championing on creating an endowment so Tempe residents have access to a one-stop shop for Veterans resources:
  - Funding for the Military & Veteran Success Center
    - Troy met with Mayor Mitchell and Councilmember Robin Arredondo-Savage about creating a budget line item for the Military & Veteran Success center based on the model that was created for the West Valley Center

Financial Stability & Vitality
- Southwest Veterans Chamber of Commerce Partnership
  - Include Tempe Chamber of Commerce with focus on the Military Affairs Committee (MAC)
- Tempe Community Salutes fundraising
  - Discuss further with Parrish

Commission Member William Blair left at 7:34 pm

Agenda Item 8 – Military & Veteran Success Center Update – Chair, Troy Friedman

- Current reorganization within the district and Rio Salado
- Steve Yamamori is no longer the Director
- Center has switched departments which may change the focus and mission
- The Board may vote on a recommendation to allow a non-profit to take over the East and West Valley Centers
  - The District and Foundation are designed to serve students
    - The East and West Valley Centers serve both Veterans and Student Veterans

Agenda Item 9 – Commission Member Updates/Announcements

Commission Member Matthew Schmitt:
- Announced resignation – moving to Washington, DC for school
The Commission congratulated Matt and thanked him for his service on the Commission.

Commission Member David Lucier:
- Moving forward on Fisher House

Commission Member Jeremy Farr:
- Met with Judge Maxon to discuss his vision for the mentorship program – will provide further details at the April meeting
Commission Member Jezreel Ramirez:
  - Woman’s Summit – June 14 and 15
    - Seeking sponsors

Octavia Harris, Deputy Human Services Director
  - Tempe Human Services Day – Saturday, April 6 9:00-2:00 at the Tempe Community Complex

The Commission discussed and agreed to reschedule the April 2nd meeting to April 9th.

**Agenda Item 10 – Future Agenda Items – April 9, 2019**

- Vice-Chair Appointment
- Proposed Mentorship Program Follow-Up
- 2019 Commission Goals
- Military & Veteran Success Center Update
- Commission Member Updates

**Agenda Item 13 – Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

Next meeting will be on April 9, 2019

Minutes Prepared by: Melissa Placencia
Reviewed by: Octavia Harris

Troy Friedman, Chair
Tempe Veterans Commission
Veterans Furniture Center

A volunteer-based 501(c)3 non-profit dedicated to assisting formerly homeless veterans successfully transition into permanent housing.
Our Mission

The Veterans Furniture Center (VFC) provides a full set of new, properly seized furniture and household goods, *free of charge*, to formerly homeless Veterans.

It is our *only* mission!
Who Do We Serve

• The Veterans we serve are transitioning from homelessness to VA supported housing programs – HUDVASH and SSVF.

• They range in age from their early twenties to the late eighties.

• Many are disabled or suffer from chronic illness.

• Some have families but most live alone.

• We also support domestic abuse victims.

• The VFC has delivered furniture to Veterans who have served in WW II, Korea, the Cold War, Viet Nam, Grenada, Panama, Desert Storm, and Iraq and Afghanistan.
How Do We Operate

• The Veterans we serve are all referred to us by social service agencies and each Veteran has a case manager or social worker.

• We have partnered with VA (CRRC and Medical Center), USVETs, Community Bridges, the Walton House, UMOM and other social service agencies who make referrals via email.

• The VFC delivers furniture to at least six Veterans every week (mostly on Fridays) and has averaged around 400 deliveries a year over the last four years, including deliveries to Veterans living in Tempe.

• We are relentless and have not missed a week in almost four years.

• The VFC relies entirely on volunteers, most of whom are themselves Veterans, to deliver furniture and support the operation.
How Do We Operate - Continued

• We purchase furniture – in bulk and at a discount - suitably scaled to the size of the apartments/studios that are made available through the subsidized housing programs we support.

• Relying exclusively on volunteers, our overhead is kept to a minimum – warehouse rent, truck maintenance and fuel costs, and nominal office expenses.

• APL, a global logistics firm, has partnered with the VFC and has helped us streamline our warehouse operations, inventory control and delivery plan.

• The VFC is led by an all-veteran volunteer executive committee and board of directors.

• Our social service agency partners verify Veteran eligibility and ensure that we are serving the “neediest of the needy.”
What Do We Deliver

- Full-sized Bed*
- Nightstand
- Dresser
- Sofa & Chair
- Dining Table & Chairs
- Lamps (2)
- Television**

- Linens (sheets, towels, dish towels)
- Kitchen Kit (dishes, cookware, etc.)
- Coffee Pot
- Toaster
- Hygiene Kit
  - Personal Hygiene
  - Cleaning Supplies

* Living Spaces, a national furniture retailer, has donated more than a year's supply of full sized beds.

**The Coalition to End Homelessness agrees that a television helps these at-risk veterans connect with society.
What Does A “Kit” Cost?

• A full set of furniture costs the VFC approximately $650, although prices vary month to month according to the availability of discounts and in-kind donations.

• The furniture set we deliver includes the bed donated by Living spaces.

• If the VFC continues to make 400 deliveries a year, we need to raise between $250,000 and $300,000 annually.

• We are currently experiencing a funding shortfall and may have to reduce the scale of our operation, thus limiting the number of deliveries but intend to scale-up once additional funds become available.
How Did We Get Here – The Transition

• Several years ago the VFC relied in large part on donated furniture.
• That model proved unsustainable as the number of requests for furniture increased.
• The donated furniture was often broken, dirty or not suited to small apartments and since donations are irregular and unpredictable the VFC was often left short of the inventory we needed to make full deliveries.
• The Board of Directors resolved to shift to a purchase-based model, requiring the VFC to raise funds sufficient to buy new furniture.
• Buying standardized and properly scaled furniture better serves the individual Veteran and has eliminated our inventory problems.
• As an added benefit, the VA advises that having new furniture signals to the Veteran that he or she matters and further motivates them to settle-in and invest in their future – disincentivizing a return to the streets.
The transition is almost complete. The VFC is actively seeking support from local governments, the VA, corporate sponsors, charitable foundations, individuals and other donors, including in-kind contributions (furniture and household goods).
Why Does It Matter

• Veteran homelessness is growing, requests for furniture are increasing and the VFC is currently two weeks behind in scheduled deliveries mostly due to funding shortfalls!

• Most of the apartments to which we deliver are completely empty, save an occasional air mattress.

• Our social service agency partners tell us that having furniture and basic household items can make a significant difference in helping formerly homeless Veterans stay sober and off the streets.

• Ironically, while our social service agency partners are able to provide housing they lack the authority and/or funding to purchase furniture for their clients – the VFC fills that critical gap.

• As a result, the VA considers the VFC a vital and essential partner in the VA’s efforts to help the neediest Veterans move off the streets and into safe, comfortable, and durable housing.
Thank You

• Veteran Run, 501c(3), Non-profit!
• Volunteer Based!
• Currently delivering to at least 6 Veterans every week, fifty-two weeks of the year!
• Our objective is to help formerly homeless Veterans transition to a more stable, safe and comfortable living environment.
• We believe that of all the organizations operating in this space, none have a more direct, persistent or meaningful impact than the VFC!!

Thank You
Contact Information

• COL Bruce A. Pagel, USA (Ret)
  • 623-882-5533
  • bruceapagel@gmail.com
  • bapagel@asu.edu

• VFC Website
  • Veteransfurniturecenter.org
The Veterans Furniture Center

Established in 2009, the Veterans Furniture Center (VFC) is a volunteer based, veteran run, 501(c)3 non-profit organization that provides free, serviceable furniture and basic household goods to veterans transitioning from homelessness to subsidized housing.

The VFC plays an indispensable role in supporting the VA in its battle against veteran homelessness. By providing free furniture and household goods, we fill a “critical gap.” While the VA does an outstanding job transitioning homeless veteran into subsidized housing programs, offering them safe and durable shelter, it lacks the authority and funding to provide furniture or basic household goods.

Veterans in need are referred to us by the VA and other social service agencies. We often find them living in empty apartments without beds, kitchenware or other furniture. Some have families, but most are alone. They range in age from their early twenties to the mid-eighties and have served honorably in all of our nation’s recent conflicts, including, Iraq, Afghanistan, Viet Nam and Korea.

Since 2009 the VFC has provided furniture to over 2,800 veterans, and is averaging approximately 400 deliveries per year of the last four years. Our schedule is both relentless and disciplined, delivering furniture every single week, all year long, often including holidays.

Our social service partners tell us that by simply providing basic furniture and essential household goods, the VFC contributes significantly to helping formerly homeless veterans stay sober and off the streets. The VA considers the VFC a vital partner in helping the neediest veterans move off the streets and into secure housing.

Moving Forward

Our operation had been almost entirely dependent on donated furniture. Because donations were irregular, unpredictable and highly variable in quantity and quality, we were not always able to meet every veteran’s furniture needs, forcing either delayed or partial deliveries.

Recognizing that the current format was not sustainable, the VFC transitioned to a new business model. The new plan calls for the VFC to raise sufficient funds to purchase new, properly sized furniture for delivery to eligible veterans. The new furniture will be better scaled – in terms of size, quantity and quality - to meet this population’s unique needs. Based on our experience, we developed a standard kit that includes a full compliment of bedroom, living room and kitchen furniture, including dishes, cookware, small appliances, linens and a hygiene kit. Relying on wholesale discounts and in-kind donations, we hope to purchase for each transitioning veteran a complete set of new, fully functional furniture for around $650.

Shifting away from the donation-based model will greatly increase the number of veterans we can assist and help us meet the increasing demand for VFC services. And while the VFC has always been a lean and efficient operation – relying mostly on volunteers and very low overhead – the purchase model, with its easily trackable inventory will make us even more effective, fully resolving any risk of inventory shortfalls.

The transition to the new model is underway. Thanks to a generous donation-in-kind from Living Spaces, a national furniture retailer, the VFC is now able to provide a new, clean bed to every veteran we serve. The pie charts below illustrate our expected timeline for transitioning fully to the new paradigm.

The VFC is seeking new partnerships with local veterans groups, corporate sponsors, charitable foundations, and other donors to help the VFC move forward as described above. Please join with us in helping our comrades in arms.
Frequently Asked Questions

**How many veterans have you served?** In 2018 the VFC delivered furniture to almost 400 veterans, some with young families. Since 2009 the VFC has served over 2,800 veterans, averaging approximately 400 deliveries per year over the last four years. We deliver furniture every week, and are on track to match this in 2019.

**What type of furniture do you provide?** We try to meet the veteran’s basic household needs, including beds, sofas, chairs, tables, etc. These apartments are often small, so furnishings need to be scaled appropriately to fit within the limited space available. In the past, because we have depended on used furniture donations - which were irregular, not always serviceable and often oversized - we were sometimes unable to deliver a complete set of furniture. Our new business model directly addresses this issue.

**How do you know the recipients are veterans in need?** We don’t accept walk-ins. Veterans requesting assistance must be referred by the VA or one of several other qualified agencies. They must be referred to us by their case worker. Those requesting assistance from us directly are referred to the VA.

**Doesn’t the VA provide furniture?** No. The VA provides many services to homeless veterans, including subsidized housing through the HUD-VASH and SSFV programs, but lacks the authority and budget to provide furnishings. We often find veterans, including those with small children, sleeping on the floor in empty apartments. They frequently lack kitchenware and are not able to cook meals. Without the basic household goods necessary for meeting their daily needs they remain at risk for returning to the streets.

**What is your overhead?** We make every effort to keep the overhead to a minimum. There are no paid employees and the Board of Directors receives no compensation. Our expenses include rent, utilities, insurance, truck maintenance and fuel and office supplies.

**Are you part of a national organization?** No. The Veterans Furniture Center is a local 501c(3) non-profit, based in Phoenix, serving needy veterans throughout Maricopa County.

**Who are your volunteers?** Most of our volunteers are veterans, many of them retired, almost all of whom volunteer on a continuing basis. Various veteran groups and active-duty military personnel also support the VFC. We also provide volunteer opportunities for civilian groups and companies interested in helping disadvantaged veterans. Our success is due entirely to our volunteers and we are immensely grateful for their generosity.

**Who runs the VFC?**

The VFC is managed by an all volunteer, all veteran Board of Directors, and is subject to outside auditing.

**How can I help?**

The VFC enjoys broad-based community support and we are very grateful to the many small donors who have supported the VFC from the beginning. We especially appreciate Living Spaces, a national furniture chain, who has donated several hundred clean, new beds.

The VFC is actively seeking new partnerships with local veterans groups, corporate sponsors, charitable foundations and other donors. We are looking for partners/sponsors who can either donate new furniture and/or help fund the bulk purchase of our inventory. We are also seeking additional veterans groups to participate in our Support a Vet program and purchase particular items. We also welcome volunteers and have numerous volunteer opportunities for groups and individuals, either on a one time or ongoing basis. You can make a difference. Please join us now. Visit our website! See below.

We are making a difference, but the need is great, and demand exceeds our current resources. Please consider helping by donating or volunteering, or both. Please see our website for more information on how you can help.

Veterans Furniture Center
2319 W. Holly Street in Phoenix
http://www.veteransfurniturecenter.org