

Minutes

Tempe Veterans Commission

Wednesday, December 11, 2024

Minutes of the TEMPE VETERANS COMMISSION recorded at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, December 11, 2024, held and in a hybrid format in-person at the Tempe Public Library , and via Microsoft Teams.

(MEMBERS) Present:

Romaldo Gonzales
Beno Thomas (Chair)
William “Dennis” Gorman
Jim Lange (Vice-Chair)
Gwendolyn “Gwen” DeNeal
Phil Kraft
Melanie James, Secretary
Jose Moreno
Aaron McBride

(MEMBERS) Absent:

Juan Garcia
Ryan Swearingen

City Staff Present:

Octavia Harris, Deputy Community Health and Human Services Director – Community Partnerships and Tempe Community Council
Dr. Jacqueline Webster, Deputy Community Health and Human Services Director – Social Services Division
Jorge Benavente, Administrative Assistant II+ - Community Health and Human Services

Public Appearances

There were no public appearances.

Guest Appearances

Kelly Taylor, Marketing Coordinator - Tempe Center for the Arts

Agenda Item 1 – Call to Order (1 min)

MOTION: Commissioner Gorman moved to BEGIN the meeting.
SECOND: The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moreno.
AYES: The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 2 – Attendance (1 min)

Commissioners Garcia and Swearingen were unable to attend the meeting.

Agenda Item 3 – Public Appearances

There were no public appearances.

Agenda Item 4 – Chair’s Remarks (5 min)

Welcomes everyone, acknowledges the busy holiday season and recent Veteran’s Day activities. Encourages commissioners to reflect on what the Commission accomplished in 2024 and looks forward to the annual report discussion.

Agenda Item 5 – Review and approval of August 2024 & October 2024 Meeting Minutes (5 min)

Chair acknowledges that previous mobile meetings caused delays in approving minutes. Commissioners review minutes.

MOTION: Commissioner Kraft moved to APPROVE August & October 2024 meeting minutes.

SECOND: The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moreno.

AYES: The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 6 – Introduction: Dr. Jacqueline Webster, Deputy Community Health & Human Services Director – Social Services Division

Staff introduces Dr. Jacqueline Webster, the new Deputy Director of Community Health & Human Services Director of the Social Services Division. Jacqueline's introduction. It is her fourth week in the position; she is a Arizona native, Arizona State University (ASU) graduate, and she has a background in Human Services and administrative roles in behavioral health and university settings. Dr. Webster's division will oversee the Commission and the Veterans Coordinator position.

Current staff liaison (Octavia Harris) notes that Dr. Webster will take over as liaison, and that this is Octavia's last meeting. Another staff person also leaving city service is announced. Commissioners welcome Dr. Webster and express hope that the Veterans Coordinator position will be filled soon.

Agenda Item 7 – Open Meeting Law Video (15 min)

The Commission watches an Open Meeting Law training video.

Reminder given to submit confirmation forms to the City Clerk that they have viewed the training.

Discussion about ensuring Commissioners know how to avoid quorum issues outside meetings.

Agenda Item 8 – Annual Report Development and Approval (50 min)

Octavia Harris leads discussion on drafting the 2024 Annual Report. The report includes Commissioners' attendance, meeting frequency, vacancies, mission statement, accomplishments, and goals.

Accomplishments highlighted:

- Recognition of veterans through Agent Orange Awareness Day, proclamations, resource outreach at events like Veterans Day parade and resource village, Voices for Freedom concert, mobile meetings, and short speaker series at resource fairs.
- Guest speakers included staff from congressional offices and Dr. Sarkar (Workforce Development and Veterans Mental Health).
- Communications efforts improved, including the newsletter and outreach strategies.

Future goals for 2025:

- Continue supporting Community Salutes event and increase community attendance.
- Strengthen partnerships with Veterans Service Organizations, other municipalities (e.g., Mesa, Phoenix), and promote volunteer opportunities and resource events.
- Improve communications, ensure quarterly newsletter.
- Achieve quorum at every regular meeting.

MOTION: Commissioner James moved to APPROVE the Annual Report.

SECOND: The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moreno.

AYES: The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 9 – Commissioner Updates (10 min)

Commissioner inquiries about procedure for inviting speakers: Must notify staff liaison at least a week prior to the meeting to place item on agenda.

Congratulations extended to Robin Arredondo on appointment to CEO of Tempe Chamber. Discussion on possibly writing a letter or making a public comment at Council meeting.

Upcoming events:

- Blood Drive at American Legion/VFW on December 18, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
- Year-end networking bash at LFA Tacos following the blood drive.
- Volunteer opportunities for Fiesta Bowl balloon and flag carriers on Dec. 28 and Dec. 31.

Commissioner mentions the ASU Veterans Honor Stole Ceremony on Saturday. Alumni Association event afterward.

Screening of “The 6888th” film at Arizona Mills with a surviving member present.

Staff (Octavia Harris) mentions the January 15 Tempe Envision Center event (art unveiling, community open house).

Discussion of hosting a Veterans resource breakfast at the Envision Center in spring 2025.

Agenda Item 10 Future Agenda Items (5 min)

- Town hall date moved from March 29 to March 22, 2025, for toxic exposures.
- Discussion to finalize agenda and logistics for the March town hall at future meetings.
- Suggestion to invite Abe McCann (Home Base) to speak at a future meeting.
- Early planning for August 10 Agent Orange Awareness commemoration.
- Potential procurement of Commission shirts/hats and discussion of uniformity/branding at a future meeting.

Agenda Item 11 – Adjournment

Chair thanks outgoing staff liaisons Octavia Harris and Jorge Benavente.

The next meeting will be on January 8, 2024.

Minutes Prepared by: Jorge Benavente

Reviewed by: Octavia Harris

Beno Thomas, Chair
Tempe Veteran Commission