



Minutes Tempe Veterans Commission January 14, 2026

Minutes of the TEMPE VETERANS COMMISSION held at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, January 14, in a hybrid format via Microsoft Teams and in-person at Tempe Public Library.

(MEMBERS) Present:

Jim Lange, Chair
Gwendolyn Opel, Vice Chair
Melanie James, Secretary
William "Dennis" Gorman
Romaldo Gonzales
José Moreno
Dillion McDade

(MEMBERS) Absent:

Aaron McBride
Juan Garcia

City Staff Present:

Michael Garrison, Veterans Services Coordinator
Karla Flores, Administrative Assistant II+

Public Appearances

There were no public appearances.

Guest Appearances

Kara DeArrastia, City Clerk for the City of Tempe, was present at the meeting.

Agenda Item 1 - Call to Order

MOTION: Commission Chair Jim Lange moved to CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER at 6:07 p.m.

SECOND: Motion Seconded by Commissioner W.D. Gorman; Motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 2 - Attendance

Commissioner Garcia and Commissioner McBride Informed Chairman Lange that they could not attend the meeting.

Agenda Item 3 - Call to the Audience for Public Appearances

There were no public appearances.

Agenda Item 4 - Review and Approval of December 10, 2025, Tempe Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes

MOTION: Motion initiated by Commissioner W.D. Gorman to APPROVE December 10, 2025, Minutes.

SECOND: Motion Seconded by Vice Chair Opel; Motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 5 - Chair's Remarks

Chairman J. Lange reiterated the importance of attendance and active participation, noting that excused absences are permissible to maintain a healthy and engaged Commission. He expressed that he is very gracious and thankful to be in this position, surrounded by committed individuals who bring valuable contributions to the table.

Agenda Item 6 - Community Health and Human Services Updates

Since June, Mr. Garrison has provided direct services to 124 veterans, averaging four to five contacts per individual, with support ranging from occasional meetings to weekly assistance. Mr. Garrison noted he has focused on housing assistance, VA benefits navigation, financial aid for moving, eviction prevention, and utility assistance, while also managing a fund for veterans in need. Mr. Garrison mentioned he is collaborating with Congressman Stanton's office to plan an April Veteran Resource Fair and recently attended a VA mixer with support organizations, recognizing contributions from Rick Kreiberg and his team. Mr. Garrison continues to strengthen partnerships with the Arizona Department of Veteran Services, SSVF providers, and nonprofits, highlighting the success of Home Base for wellness and mental health. Mr. Garrison is preparing for the upcoming event, working with Susie Steckner on T-shirt designs for the Veterans Commission, and encouraging anyone with questions to contact him via email.

Agenda Item 7 - Presentation: City of Tempe Clerk, Kara DeArrastia

Ms. DeArrastia provided a comprehensive overview of the Veterans Commission's powers and duties as outlined in the Tempe City Code (Division 20, Sections 2-365 through 2-368). The presentation covered the Commission's advisory role to the Mayor, City Council, and City departments, including responsibilities related to improving quality of life for veterans, promoting veteran-supportive employment practices, and advising on affordable housing initiatives for veteran families. Ms. DeArrastia explained how the Commission conducts its work through properly noticed public meetings in compliance with Arizona's Open Meeting Law (OML). The presentation also addressed member expectations and meeting procedures, emphasizing compliance with OML requirements, agenda posting, quorum rules, and parliamentary procedures for transparent decision-making. Ms. DeArrastia highlighted the role of staff liaison in agenda preparation, meeting documentation, and ensuring adherence to legal requirements. Additionally, Ms. DeArrastia shared an informational example from another Tempe commission regarding recruitment challenges and governance flexibility, noting that no action was requested or required at this time. Resources available to Commissioners were reviewed, including the Tempe City Code, Arizona Attorney General's Open Meeting Law Handbook, City ethics guidelines, and Robert's Rules of Order. Ms. DeArrastia encouraged Commissioners to reach out to the staff liaison for follow-up questions or coordination with the City Clerk's Office or City Attorney's Office.

Agenda Item 8 – Discussion and POSSIBLE ACTION on potential changes to commission seat composition to broaden eligibility

The commission discussed mirroring the Sustainability and Resilience Commission's approach to member composition. Instead of each seat being designated to a specific organization, the commission could advertise open seats to a range of specialty areas. This approach would increase recruitment efforts and provide more flexibility during vacancies. After a brief discussion, the commission decided to move forward with this change recommendation.

MOTION: Motion initiated by Vice Chair Opel to commission seat composition to broaden eligibility.

SECOND: Motion Seconded by Commissioner Moreno; Motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 9 – Discussion regarding an operation welcome home style program

Chair Lange proposed starting a "Welcome Home" program to honor soldiers returning from service, similar to Gilbert's initiative. The idea includes coordinating a special welcome for each soldier with their family, providing transportation such as a limousine or family car, and arranging an escort by local veterans and motorcycle groups to Town Hall, where the community can gather to show appreciation. Vice Chair Opel and Commissioner Gorman expressed support for the initiative but emphasized Cost consideration, such as transportation, and suggested establishing a communication mechanism to identify soldiers returning home. The commission agreed to research the details and keep this item on the agenda for further discussion.

Agenda Item 10 – Commissioner Updates

- Commissioner Gonzales provided an update on the upcoming Veterans Resource Expo planned for April or May. He motioned this event aims to connect veterans, active-duty service members and their families with essential resources and support services.
- Commissioner Gorman mentioned the upcoming event for the traveling wall, which will be in superior, Arizona for four days in April. He highlighted that the state council donated \$5000 to the veteran's affinity.

- Mr. Garrison provided Commissioner Garcia's update regarding the Red, White, and Blue Awards. The event will take place on February 25 at the Embassy Suites in a breakfast format. The cost for veterans is \$45, with proceeds supporting the event and scholarship opportunities. The goal is to attract approximately 150 attendees. Mr. Garrison is serving as vice chair for the event alongside Commissioner Garcia and will assume the role of chair for the Chamber of Commerce. Attendees are encouraged to provide candid feedback to help improve future events.

Agenda Item 11 – Future Agenda Items

- Discussion regarding an operation welcome home style program

Agenda Item 12– Adjournment

MOTION: Commissioner Dillion motioned to ADJOURN the Meeting.

SECOND: Motion Seconded by Commissioner Moreno; Motion passed unanimously.

Chair J. Lange declared the meeting adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, February 11, 2026.

Minutes Prepared by: Karla Flores

Reviewed by: Michael Garrison

Jim Lange, Chair
Tempe Veterans Commission

UNAPPROVED