

# Minutes Tempe Veterans Commission August 14, 2024

Minutes of the TEMPE VETERANS COMMISSION held on Wednesday, August 14, 2024, at 6:00 PM. – 7:30 PM., via Microsoft Teams and Tempe Public

**(MEMBERS) Present:**

Juan Garcia  
Romaldo Gonzales  
Beno Thomas, Chair  
William “Dennis” Gorman  
Melanie James, Secretary  
Jose Moreno  
Jim Lange, Vice-chair  
Aaron McBride  
Gwendolyn “Gwen” DeNeal

**(MEMBERS) Absent:**

Phil Kraft  
Ryan Swearingen

**City Staff Present:**

Octavia Harris, Deputy CHHS Director  
Jorge Benavente, Administrative Assistant II

**Public Appearances**

There were no public appearances.

**Guest Appearances**

There were no guest appearances.

**Agenda Item 1 – Call to Order**

**MOTION:** Commissioner Gorman moved to START the meeting

**SECOND:** The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moreno, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Agenda Item 2 – Attendance**

Commissioners Kraft and Swearingen were unable to attend the meeting.

**Agenda Item 3 – Public Appearances**

There were no public appearances.

**Agenda Item 4 – Chair’s Remarks**

Chairperson Thomas offered brief yet warmly spirited remarks regarding Commissioner Kraft’s recent health developments. He expressed his hope that, in time, Commissioner Kraft will be able to return and once again enrich the commission with his amiable presence

**Agenda Item 5 – Review of July meeting minutes (5 min)**

**MOTION:** Commissioner Gorman moved to APPROVE the July 10, 2024 meeting minutes

**SECOND:** The motion was seconded by Commissioner DeNeal

**AYES:** the motion passed unanimously.

**Agenda Item 6 – Agent Orange Awareness Event UPDATE– (10 min)**

City Hall will be illuminated from August 22nd to September 1st to support Agent Orange Awareness Day. Additionally, on the 26th, the Mayor and Council will issue a proclamation to formally recognize this important day. Following the reading, all commissioners joined for a group photograph to commemorate the occasion. Furthermore, Commissioners Gorman and Chairperson Thomas have leveraged their connections within ASU athletics to arrange a special announcement during the ASU vs. Wyoming football game on August 31st. While confirmation is pending, both commissioners are optimistic about the positive outcome of their efforts.

#### **Agenda Item 7 – Toxic Substances Exposure Town Hall Event UPDATE (10 min)**

Commissioner Gorman briefly introduced the distinguished speakers confirmed for the upcoming event: Chuck Byers, Dr. Molly McGaughey, and Rick Kreiberg, each an expert in their field and a strong advocate for addressing issues related to toxic substances exposure. Additionally, Commissioner Gorman confirmed that Post 2 is secured as the venue for the event on October 19, 2024.

Chairperson Thomas, encouraged by this news, presented two requests to the commission. Firstly, he inquired whether there are individuals available to assist at the town hall by providing direct information and sign-up assistance to veterans. Commissioner Moreno responded by offering to promote the event within his network. Secondly, Thomas urged the commission to consider a 'call to action' theme for the town hall. Commissioner Gorman emphasizes the lifelong commitment to service and the importance of staying informed about government actions to effectively support fellow veterans.

In the final segment of the meeting, the commission discussed marketing strategies. Deputy Director Harris reported that POI Steckner and her team have started creating promotional materials for various media outlets to publicize the event. As the date approaches, these efforts will intensify to enhance awareness of the town hall.

#### **Agenda Item 8 – Mobile Meeting September 11**

The commission discussed their participation and the logistics of attending the September 11 remembrance event at Tempe Beach Park. Given that this is a mobile event, the usual protocols for meetings do not apply, and as such, official minutes will not be recorded since no formal business is to be conducted.

Commissioner Gorman raised concerns about the impact of not holding a regular meeting during this time, particularly regarding the finalization of certain aspects of the upcoming town hall. In response, Chairperson Thomas proposed the formation of a dedicated committee focused on the town hall to meet separately and resolve any pending issues. Commissioners Gonzales, Moreno, Gorman, and chairperson Thomas will meet to take care of these issues.

#### **Agenda Item 9 – Pledge of Allegiance at Veterans Commission Meetings Discussion**

Chairperson Thomas opened the discussion by reaffirming his commitment to a respectful, meaningful, and thorough debate on the topic. He emphasized that although the subject may be emotionally charged, the intent of the discussion should remain rational.

Vice Chair Lange introduced the discussion by describing the symbolic act under consideration as a way to delineate the commission's role and its dedication to representing and serving the veterans' community. He stressed that this act should not be linked to any agenda or personal aspirations.

Commissioner DeNeal, expressing a personal detachment from the issue, noted that younger generations might be less engaged with symbolic acts due to their association with contemporary narratives. She suggested that any decision by the commission should allow for individual member preferences. Later, she proposed the oath of office as a potential alternative to the pledge of allegiance.

Commissioner Gorman discussed his views on the pledge of allegiance, acknowledging problematic phrases but underscoring his primary focus on serving the veterans' community alongside fellow veterans.

Commissioner Garcia shared his personal warmth to the Pledge, highlighting its role as a foundational element for personal and national integrity. He is supportive of the Pledge's statements as guiding principles for national and service conduct. Commissioner McBride, while supportive of the pledge, emphasized that the commission should remain committed to its core mandate.

Commissioners Moreno and Garcia both expressed appreciation for the diverse perspectives shared, underscoring the value of a variety of viewpoints.

**MOTION: Chair Thomas to MOTION to include the Pledge of Allegiance as part of the each agenda**

**AYES: Moreno, Lange, James**

**NYE: Chairperson Thomas, Garcia, DeNeal, McBride**

**ABSTAIN: Gorman, Gonzales**

**Agenda Item 10 – Commissioner Updates (5 min)**

First Command is moving from Tempe to Gilbert (Val Vista \* Rural)

Pat Tillman awards

**Agenda Item 11 – Future Agenda Items (5 min)**

Chairperson Thomas will reach out to

**Agenda Item 12 – Adjournment**

**MOTION: Commissioner Garcia to MOTION Adjourn the meeting**

**SECOND: Motion Seconded by Commission McBride**

**AYES: Motion passed unanimously.**

The next meeting will be on September 11, 2024.

Minutes Prepared by: Jorge Benavente

Reviewed by: Octavia Harris

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Beno Thomas, Chair  
Tempe Veteran Commission