



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** APRIL 19, 2017

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of the Recommendation from Ad Hoc Veterans Commission Advisory Group.

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**ISSUE:** Recommendation From Ad Hoc Veterans Commission Advisory Group.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council receive the report from the Ad Hoc Veterans Commission Advisory Group.

**BACKGROUND:** In December 2016, City Council adopted a resolution (Attachment) to create a temporary Ad Hoc Veterans Commission Advisory Group whose mission was to provide a recommendation to City Council advising whether or not to create a permanent Alexandria Veterans Commission ("Commission") that would address the concerns and needs of veterans, service members, their family members and caregivers.

The City Manager appointed the following seven members of the community to serve on the group:

- *Danielle Corazza*, Veteran, U.S. Army & Service-Disabled Veteran Small Business Owner
- *Douglas Gurka*, Veteran, U.S. Army & Commander of American Legion Post 24
- *Kathryn Kolbe*, (Chair), U.S. Airforce (retired)
- *Sean Kumar*, U.S. Army
- *Bill Rausch*, Veteran, U.S. Army & Executive Director of Got Your 6
- *Kevin Wensing*, U.S. Navy (retired)
- *Bob Wood*, U.S. Army (retired)

The group met twice a month over the course of a three-month period to discuss the issues and needs of the veteran community in Alexandria and determine the need for a permanent City of Alexandria Veterans Commission.

**DISCUSSION:** The group determined that a permanent Commission was not necessary at this time, and made the following recommendations for consideration by City Council.

There is currently little presence on the City's website for the many programs that could be beneficial to the City's veteran population. It can be difficult to navigate the many department pages that list specific services for these members of the community. The group recommends that ***the City create and maintain a webpage on their website that provides links to services for veterans, active service members, their families and care givers.*** The site could provide links that specifically apply to the military community and provide resources for housing, employment, social services and the Alexandria City Public Schools, amongst others. The consolidation of resource information onto one webpage will make it easier for community members to locate the information they need and will help city staff provide responses to resident inquiries about services and programs. Staff supports this recommendation.

In addition to a webpage, the group recommends ***that the City create a category in Call.Click.Connect that directs residents to the City's website and provides a form for veteran related inquiries*** that will be directed to the designated staff liaison. Currently, if residents have a question or concern related to veterans' issues, there is not a Call.Click.Connect category that identifies and categorizes the need a specific to this population to assure it is directed to the correct individual for a response. Staff supports this recommendation.

While there are numerous City staff that manage programs throughout the City that support veterans and their families, there is currently no point of contact for all veteran concerns between the community and the City of Alexandria. The group recommends that ***the City designate an existing staff member as the representative to the veteran and military community to support veterans' issue and act as a point of contact between members of the community and the City.***

This staff member would have an understanding of the City programs that support the veteran community and be able to direct them to the information or contact person for those specific programs. Any Call.Click.Connect inquiries that could not be addressed through the Call Center would be directed to this person for further coordination, and they would be responsible for maintaining the City's webpage for veterans. Staff supports this recommendation and will identify an individual from the Department of Community and Health Services to act as this representative.

In lieu of having a central City Commission for Veterans, the City should strive to include the voice of the veteran community on existing boards and commissions. The group recommends ***that the City include a box to be checked on all applications for City Boards and Commissions identifying the applicant as active military or an honorably discharged veteran.*** The identification of status can provide information to help City Council assure a diversity of interests is being represented when making appointments to other city advisory groups. Staff supports this recommendation.

Alexandria is consistently listed as a great city for veterans and was recently noted in the Top Five Cities for Veterans. In 2016, Military Times ranked Alexandria as the Number 1 medium-sized city for veterans. These rankings are based on factors such as the medium income for vets, which is 68% higher than that of non-vets, and extremely low homelessness rates: In 2015, Alexandria functionally ended veteran homelessness in the City by providing greater capacity to house homeless veterans than the need for veteran housing. The opportunities for higher education at the numerous nearby colleges and universities is a contributing factors as is Alexandria's proximity to five Virginia benefits facilities. That same year, the Alexandria City School Board adopted a Military-Friendly Policy recognize the contributions made by military personnel and to work with neighborhood schools to accommodate military children. The Alexandria City Council also proclaimed 2014 as The Year of the Veteran. Because of these factors, as well as the numerous non-profits and social groups in

Alexandria that support veterans, the group recommends ***that City Council adopt a resolution identifying Alexandria as a Military-Friendly City.*** The Advisory Group is willing to assist in the drafting of a resolution. Staff supports this recommendation.

To provide better coordination between the Washington Metropolitan jurisdictions and local base commanders, the groups recommends that ***the City Council propose and encourage discussion of the inclusion of a representative of the Military District of Washington to be members of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Board of Directors.*** Staff supports this recommendation.

While the group is not recommending the formation of a permanent City of Alexandria Veterans Commission, they do recommend that ***the veteran and military community in Alexandria should form an Advisory Committee, independent of but advisory to the City government as well as other organizations, when necessary.*** Staff supports this recommendation.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** Due to the nature of the suggestions, staff believes that the recommendations of the group can be accomplished within the current budget and be absorbed at existing staffing levels. There will be no fiscal impact.

**ATTACHMENT:** Resolution

**STAFF:**

Hillary Orr, Special Assistant to the City Manager