



Annual Internal Review

This report covers the period of 7/1/2020 to 6/30/2021

COMMISSION ON VETERAN AFFAIRS

An election was held in May 2021 to elect new officers whose term expired as follows, Manuel Jimenez appointed by Sabino Renteria was elected Chair of the Commission on Veterans Affairs to fill the expired term of Chair Doris Williams. Commissioner Andrenne Mendoza appointed by Councilmember Vannessa Fuentes was elected Vice Chair to fill the expired term of Vice Chair Manuel Jimenez.

The Commission on Veterans Affairs mission statement as authorized by Austin City Code 2-1-46 is:

Serve as an advisor body to the council concerning the wellbeing of military veterans in the Austin Area. The Commission shall evaluate and recommend programs, policies, and practices designed to alleviate veteran's difficulties in meeting basic needs, obtaining housing, employment, and comprehensive mental health assistance; and act as a central clearinghouse for information relating to the status of veterans in the Austin community.

The Commission's mission is within its scope and objectives to meet mission goals. The Commission implemented the following goals and objectives to meet its mission during the covered period and are as follows:

GOALS

- Create an Office of Veteran Affairs
- Implement a Veteran's/Community Court
- Obtain information on transitioning active duty personnel moving to the Austin area
- Identifying any veteran encampments located in the City of Austin

Annual Review and Work Plan
2020

OBJECTIVES

- Determine judicial authority for a Veteran's Court
- Obtain funding to establish a Veterans Affairs Office
- Work with area military establishments to gather information for a Transition Assistance Program (TAP) that identifies military personnel transitioning into the Austin and surrounding community
- Collaborating with groups to identify any veteran encampments located in the City of Austin

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

It must be taken into consideration the status of this Annual Review in the context of conditions that existed at the beginning of the year and now, i.e., Pre-Covid-19 Coronavirus and Post Covid-19 Coronavirus. Accomplishments were affected by a total shutdown and national disaster declaration in March 2020. Prior to the disaster the Commission on Veterans Affairs addressed the issue of a Veterans Resource Center as one of its goals and set out to determine whether data supports co-locating various veterans' services that already exists in the community into a new One Stop Veterans Resource Center, VRC. Several non-profits in the community were already supplying veteran services.

As it pertains to the Veterans' Court two Commissioners with background and knowledge in the legal system addressed the issue of veterans in the legal system. They researched

the organizational structure of the courts in Travis county to determine jurisdictional authority when veterans enter the judicial system. Findings show that some court laws were too strict, unfavorable to veteran, and should be loosened to better serve veterans. Commissioners agreed that research into courts in Travis county is necessary for collaborate when a veteran enters the judicial court system.

During the July 6, 2020 Regular Meeting, Sam Haytham of Kiro Action, a newly formed nonprofit, presented a plan designed to alleviate veteran homelessness in the City of Austin. Commission passed a recommendation create program called the “Kiro Action Veterans Transitional Housing Program”, (KAVTHP). The program will house one-hundred (100) veterans in need of transitional housing in a pilot program with the goal of expanding the program on successful deployment.

At the September 23, 2020 Regular Meeting a recommendation was passed by the Commission on Veteran Affairs encourages the Austin City Council to work with the Austin Travis County Vietnam Memorial Association to find a prominent location within Edward Rendon Park for a Veterans Memorial.

The Equity Office assessment, and SWOT analyses and report on racial inequities, within the Austin Police Department made faulty claims of comparisons to military service and further promotes dangerous stereotypes. These stereotypes interfere with returning military veterans gaining employment. They contribute to a number of issues military veterans face while transitioning from a sometimes-unappreciated military career to civilian life. On February 10 2021 Regular meeting the Commission on Veteran Affairs passed a recommendation that rejected the stereotypes used by the Equity Office assessment and SWOT analyses and report on racial inequities within the Austin Police Department because the are not congruent with the military and encourages the Austin City Council to do the same.

ANNUAL REVIEW GOALS – 2021-2022

The following Goals for Annual Review 2020-2021 are below. Some Goals for year ending June 30, 2021 specifically those projects that were underway are carried over to Annual Review June 30, 2022:

- Establish a Work Group for the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Pilot Program
- Creation of an COA Office of Veteran and Military Affairs
- Update Bylaws to reflect the Commission’s vote to change monthly meetings to bi-monthly meetings

This concludes the Annual Review 2020-2021 Report.

Manuel Jimenez, Chairperson
Commission on Veterans Affairs