

VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, May 28, 2025, 10:00 a.m.

Zoom Video Conferencing and Kona Department of Parks and Recreation Office

Present

Members in attendance (via zoom)

Michael Doolittle, Chair
Isaac Nahakuelua, Member
Marcia Brinkley, Vice-Chair
Birk Billingsley, Member
George Sheridan, Member
Joshua Sze, Member
Debra Lewis, Member

Members in attendance at Department of Parks and Recreation Kona office (Via zoom)

Minoru Hanato, Member
Tom Wojszynski, Member
Antonio Gaspar, Member
Melissa Samura, Department of Parks and Recreation Deputy Director (Ex-Officio)

Guests

Micah Gauthier from Mental Health Restoration Foundation
Denise Link – Hilo Vet Center, Mental Health Professional
Kimo Alameda, County of Hawai‘i Mayor

Also in attendance (via zoom)

J Yoshimoto, Department of Parks and Recreation Corporation Counsel
Amy Bautista, Veterans Advisory Committee Secretary
Edith
Elizabeth x Global Wellness
Jimmy Kayihura

Absent

John Hiduchick-Nakayama, Member

Chair M Doolittle confirmed have quorum.

Call to Order

Chair M Doolittle called meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

MICAH GAUTHIER foundation focuses on suicide prevention and assists veterans with recovery resources. Not licensed intentionally so not required to report. Foundation has access to professionals. Believes veteran suicide is an epidemic right now.

ELIZABETH spoke on refocusing resources to be spent on targeting the core, what is leading to these traumas.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Chair M Dolittle introduced February 26, 2025 minutes. M Hanato made motion to accept the minutes. D Lewis seconded the motion.

No discussion.

No opposition. Minutes accepted.

OLD BUSINESS

- a. Update on the County of Hawai'i's website listings of monuments and parks of historical significance

T Wojszynski: Cemetery directory is on-going. Receives reports and updates the county wide directory. Directory can be accessed off of the Veterans Advisory Committee webpage under parks and recreation. Website also has an island wide directory of all known memorials. Motion to remove off future agendas and move to close this item.

D Lewis seconded the motion.

M Brinkley: Captain Cook Post Office was just renamed for 1st Lt John Kaihahau who was killed in Vietnam and has earned a distinguished cross and is being considered for a metal of honor.

D Lewis: DAR just added a similar 250th Anniversary plaque at the Yukio Okutsu Veterans Center.

T Wojszynski: moved to amend motion. Move to close items a. and b. on old business agenda.

All amendments continue to go to T Wojszynski.

M Brinkley seconded the amended motion.

No opposition.

b. Update on the veterans cemetery directory and interment locator

REPEATING

T Wojszynski: moved to amend motion. Move to close items a. and b. on old business agenda.

All amendments continue to go to T Wojszynski.

M Brinkley seconded the amended motion.

No opposition.

c. Update on committee vacancies

One vacancy presently on committee.

M Doolittle: Have asked Mayor's office to submit candidate information so committee can have input.

No additional comments.

M Doolittle: Item is closed.

d. Update on information for veteran homelessness and veteran suicide in Hawai'i County

I Nahakuelua: information submitted to get onto the agenda.

Was a part of the meeting materials.

I Nahakuelua: Read information. Has tried to get information on suicide for veterans but has not been able to get call backs. Wondering if committee has power or influence to have Hilo Bennioff Medical Center, morgue, police keep demographics on suicide for veterans that they could release to the committee?

T Wojszynski: what's worked best is direct written communication to the Chief (of Police) and Chief Medical Officer of Hilo Bennioff.

Statistics provided have been collected from various resources.

M Doolittle: don't know who a veteran is unless a veteran makes it known that he is a veteran.

I Nahakuelua: VA has an annual report with veteran counts.

J Yoshimoto: would recommend instead of letter going straight to Chief, that it go to the Mayor. Powers and duties of the committee are to advise the Mayor and the Council. Send to Mayor as a committee recommendation.

I Nahakuelua: could any letter to the Mayor request cooperation from Hilo Bennioff Medical Center? See if they have any data or urge them to collect data?

Edith: was wondering if making access for veterans to register in any system will make resources better?

I Nahakuelua: would advise any veteran trying to register to call Wendy Schwartz.

D Link: don't have a system to compile listing of all registered veterans. Suggests medical examiner since they are the ones who perform autopsies and would determine if a death is by suicide.

Wendy Schwartz is with suicide prevention, not directly based in one of the SEBACs. VASH is in SEBAC on both sides. Hope Services has a veteran program as well and may serve veterans that are not registered with the VA.

Group discussion: veterans do not self-identify as veterans. There is a large population of unidentified veterans.

D Lewis: made suggestion to layout standards of care and what is the practice to become a letter to the Mayor.

M Doolittle: made suggestion to organize W Swartz, the Hilo Vet Center and some of the appropriate mental health facilities into a forum where they can discuss and layout protocols.

Clarity and discussion amongst these groups would be a better way to set up standards and directives.

J Kayihura: spoke on disconnect and head way being made.

e. Discussion on proposed amendment to Section 15-61, Hawai'i County Code, as amended, in conjunction with Hawai'i Revised Statutes, Section 363-5:

i. Removal of "Big Island Retired Military Association" from list of organizations to be represented, as the organization is disbanding.

- Specific representation designates must have one representative from each of the following organizations: American Legion, Big Island National Guard Retirees Association, Big Island Retired Military Association and Veterans of Foreign Wars. The Committee must also include eight at-large members.

M Doolittle: don't get nominations from organizations to sit on committee. Couple of organization getting ready to close: Big Island National Guard Retirees Association and Big Island Retired Military Association. Been opinion that should have every position on committee as an open seat and more regionally designated so would have full county representation on committee. Have a requirement that ½ plus 1 have to be veterans.

Group discussion: on proposed revised language. Revised language has to be proposed by a county council member. CM Hustace is happy to propose language as long as committee agrees upon it. Need to be explicit, want representation throughout the island. County-wide is aim.

K Alameda: having conversations on increasing veteran opportunities. Fully committed on moving county support as much as we can within our jurisdiction. Districts are fairly equally populated.

T Wojszynski: motion to approve language as amended by D Lewis.

Group discussion: proposed language discussed.

T Wojszynski: amend motion to adopt language D Lewis provided in the chat.

Section 15-62. Membership and tenure.

(b) The membership of the committee shall consist of twelve at-large members who actively participate in the community, represent a variety of perspectives and capabilities pertaining to veteran issues throughout Hawai'i County. Seven or more of the twelve members of the committee shall have served in the United States uniformed services; provided that the committee may still meet and conduct business if due to a vacancy or vacancies less than seven members have served in the United States uniformed services.

Seconded by D. Lewis.

M Doolittle: All in favor say aye.

Collective ayes.

No opposition.

M Doolittle: Motion carries.

- f. Discussion regarding issues and ways to curtail costs for parades
i. Discussion for assistance from the Police and Fire Departments

M Doolittle: have discussed at length. No further progress on how to better provide funding for parades.

T Wojszynski: sent note to Chief Moszkowicz about police provided funding for all parades and Deputy Chief Mahuna sent a response saying that is not the police departments responsibility.

M Doolittle: suggest asking for pro bono help that police and fire may provide.

T Wojszynski: has noticed the amounts requested for CRFs has increased significantly. May want to ask for more.

M Doolittle: close that item of business.

NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

REPORT ON CEMETERIES – STATE VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD

- a. Hawaii Island – East Hawaii Representative – Kelcie Figueira (OVS)

Kelcie Figueira not in attendance.

- b. Cemetery Audit Results – Director/Deputy Director

M Samura: report generated in August of 2023. There were two critical items that needed to be taken care of. One was addressed, SOP for decedent chain of custody. Need to

Veterans Advisory Committee
May 28, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
Page 7

follow up on gravesite layout plan and registry. Out of eight categories of compliance, with high or medium priority, 148 items met and 43 remain unmet.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

T Wojszynski: Sit on Hawai'i America 250, the Governor's commission to prepare the state for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the declaration of independence on July 4, 2026. Series of sponsored and sanctioned events coming up over the next several months.

M Doolittle: was moved by what M Samura shared at memorial day patriot marker dedication.

NEXT MEETING

August 27, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.

Motion to adjourn by T Wojszynski. Seconded by G Sheridan.

Collective ayes. No opposed.

Meeting adjourned. 11:40 a.m.

Summary of Veterans Advisory Committee meeting prepared by:
Amy Bautista
Veterans Advisory Committee, Secretary