

**VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
Wednesday, May 27, 2026, 10:00 a.m.  
Gilbert Kahale Recreation Area – Dining Hall

**Present**

**Members in attendance**

Michael Doolittle, Chair  
Marcia Brinkley, Vice-Chair  
Reginald Alexander, Member  
Antonio Gaspar, Member  
Edwin Guzman, Member  
Minoru Hanato, Member  
Wayne Nishijima, Member  
Doreen Raymond, Member  
Tom Wojszynski, Member  
Melissa Samura, Department of Parks and Recreation Deputy Director (Ex-Officio)  
Amy Bautista, Veterans Advisory Committee Secretary  
J Yoshimoto, Department of Parks and Recreation, Corporation Counsel

**Guests**

Jonelle Fukushima  
Edith Garcia

**Absent**

Birk Billingsley, Member  
Isaac Nahakuelua, Member

Chair M Doolittle: Confirmed have quorum.

**Call to Order**

Chair M Doolittle: Called meeting to order at 10:06 a.m.

**STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None

**ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

Chair M Doolittle: Introduced February 25, 2026 minutes.

M Hanato moved to accept minutes.

T Wojszynski seconded the motion.

All stated aye.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

- a. Update by Chair Doolittle on information for veteran homelessness and veteran suicide in Hawai'i County.

Chair M Doolittle: Thinks VA is rekindling program (Together with Veterans) on suicide awareness and prevention. Attend conference where VA stated they had reduced Veteran homelessness by 40%. Question to VA was what proportion of suicide is accounted for the reductions in homelessness? VA does not track that information.

A Gaspar: American Legion, Post 3, holds signs every 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month on Kamehameha Avenue.

Vice-Chair M Brinkley: "Be the one" is a program the American Legion came up with to try to teach Veterans how to identify somebody who needs help and how to help them.

M Hanato: Do returning Veterans go through debriefing system before discharge?

E Garcia: All branches go through T.A.P.S. but it is not sufficient. More of an employment transition program.

E Guzman: Came back from deployment in 09', there was a process but they just wanted to get out.

R Alexander: Programs are in place, there out there. If the Veteran does not self-identify, the system is not going to catch them.

Chair M Doolittle: One of the problems, especially for the Veterans Advisory Committee, is that we don't have a budget. Within the purview of the statutes and code, we are an advisory board. We can advise the Mayor and Council on things we should look at but as individuals members we can go out in the community and start programs and outreach.

E Garcia: There are non-profits taking advantage of the funding. Important to look into those non-profits. As a citizen, requesting an investigation...

Chair M Doolittle: Interjected to correct E Garcia's statement. Giving you time to make a statement but you're making a false statement. I agree, there are a lot of non-profits that do take advantage of the system and they do get a lot of grant money.

R Alexander: Can we table this or can we do some process?

J Yoshimoto: Let's stick to the agenda. Members of the committee are entitled to have a discussion, members of public are allowed to submit testimony on each particular item. Ms. Garcia, if you are submitting testimony, as you are now, that's your opportunity but

once that's complete, it's the committee that has a discussion. If they want to hear from you on a particular matter they may call upon you.

R Alexander: all that information and all that process is out there but what we know is they don't self-identify, they don't go seek the help, and the feds and the DOD don't go outside into the community. The community has to bring it up and make it an issue.

A Vet Center is not the VA. It's sponsored by the DOD. It's one little part of the out processing. Secondary to the Vet Center is the VA.

D Raymond: Kona Vet center, you have to be referred.

R Alexander: the VA does only five different things: health care, education, benefits, pension and death. It does not do anything outside of those five different things.

Chair M Doolittle: That's where the short circuit is. We don't really get the information to the people who need the services, they have to go seek it out themselves. Suicide awareness and prevention, were supposed to go out and be able to identify somebody whose at risk of suicide and that's really a difficult thing for a layman.

R Alexander: There's processes and people in place. All that information is being channeled and the resources are there. How can we make that work better for this community? We have to make those issues be known so we can get resources. We have to talk to them and they have to make it an issue.

Chair M Doolittle: I'm confused as to how we integrate the federal benefits and federal agencies into a County structure. We're an advisory committee. We advise the Council and the Mayor.

R Alexander: Who do they advise?

Chair M Doolittle: They don't advise, they can make a statement.

R Alexander: No. They can actually bring stuff up and make it an issue.

J Yoshimoto: The committee could provide input to the Mayor and the County Council on these particular issues by drafting a letter outlining what the concerns are, the outcome the committee would like to see happen. County Council could pass a resolution to asking the DOD to modify its policies or practices.

Chair M Doolittle: I would like to enlist into addressing things we can petition for.

In audible. Someone was requesting to speak.

J Yoshimoto: On the public comment portion, each particular agenda item the public has the opportunity to weigh in.

J Fukushima: Our community islandwide is severely lacking. It's not that we don't have all of the resources, we seem to be operating in silos. Do recognize can be difficult to get to correct resources within different branches.

R Alexander: Oahu has a single location where Veterans can get all of the services they need, we don't have that in Hilo. We have all this stuff, all around, by different entities and different organizations with different principals and different missions. The vision is to round all that up and centralize all that information and resources so Veterans can utilize that information.

Chair M Doolittle: How does the Office of Veterans Services in the State integrate with the Federal system?

R Alexander: They're the direct link between the State and the Federal Government.

D Raymond: How many Veterans do we have on this island?

T Wojszynski: The VAs official number is a little bit over 12,000.

R Alexander: The last census did not ask about Veterans.

T Wojszynski: From my perspective, the challenge about the numbers is the size of the Big Island, we're 4,000 square miles. We are highly distributed on this island. American Legion tries to get Veterans to come out and engage.

What I have struggled with is when you make a request to Council or the Mayor, you have to be excruciatingly specific. So what is the outcome we're trying to drive? What are we asking for?

Vice-Chair M Brinkley: Want to congratulate Edith and Josh for award received and to remind everyone there are other groups that may not be Veteran focused but they would love to help, might want to target the County to support.

Chair M Doolittle: Want to give Edith a chance to finish her comments.

E Garcia: There's money out there just need a non-profit sometimes. Really disappointing to see Veterans non-profits mis-utilizing the money.

Chair M Doolittle: Agree with you that non-profits do not have a rigid requirements for where they spend the money.

E Garcia: Think it would be good to create accountability for non-profits.

J Yoshimoto: If I may suggest, for the next agenda, up to the committee of course, address discussion on recommendations to the Mayor and Council on specific topics the committee would like to see. If anyone has drafts or ideas, send them to Amy or myself.

E Garcia: Can I make another recommendation in the name of someone else?

J Yoshimoto: Chair's discretion.

Chair M Doolittle: Any suggestions are welcome and that's what we want from the membership.

E Garcia: Youngest member loves going to the zoo. Think would be awesome for Veteran families to go for free.

T Wojszynski: There are some models out there. I will reach out to see if we can get a template. There is national level funding.

b. Continued discussion on future meeting location.

Chair M Doolittle: Haven't had an in-person meeting since February 2020. We need to at least do that once a year. It's a long distance big obligation to meet personally in-person but it valuable to do.

M Samura: Director has approved zoom meetings to continue and once a year in-person is optional.

**NEW BUSINESS**

a. Brief introduction of committee members.

Michael Doolittle, served for eight years in the Army infantry. Did two tours in Vietnam. Mystic Palms is a 13 acre plantation I own that I'm trying to give to a 501(c)3 if they will operate it in perpetuity. Been here 16 years.

Edwin Guzman, I got two sides, retired military; reserved battalion 442<sup>nd</sup> infantry, 2008/2009 deployed to Kuwait and a then a brief humanitarian deployment. Retired at the age of 58. Had a civilian job working with the VA, under the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) for 35 years.

Antonio Gaspar, drafted in 1968, served two years in the Army and returned to reserves at Fort DeRussy to complete 6 years military obligation. Worked for the Army National Guard full-time. Served 36 years.

Marcia Brinkley, retired Army nurse. Joined when I was 18. Moved to Hawai'i in 2010. Try to help with as many Veterans organizations as I can: Secretary of the West Hawai'i Veterans Cemetery Development and Expansion Association, Vice-Region of Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Post 4. Also, a retired lawyer.

Doreen Raymond, did 20 years in the Navy and another 27 years working as defense contractor with the seal team. Moved to Hawai'i County three years ago. Wrote to government about the lack of benefits promised in Hawai'i County. Joined American Legion.

Wayne Nishijima, spent three years active duty with the Army as an air defense artillery officer. Third year in Vietnam with first infantry division. Got Ph.D. in plant pathology. Returned to Hilo working at UH Hilo and joined the Army National Guard. Currently active with the Big Island National Guard Retirees Association, only association of its kind in Hawai'i.

Minoru Hanato, born and raised in Kona. Graduated Konawaena High School. Joined the Corp when I was 17. Did two tours in Vietnam as a mechanic and a gunner. After the Corp, became an aircraft mechanic. Took care of handicap wife for 15 years, full time. Established Military Honor Guard with the American Legion. Established West Hawai'i Veterans Cemetery Organization.

Tom Wojszynski, enlisted in the Air Force when I was 17. Come out as a Russian Linguist. Transitioned to the Officer Corp, got my undergraduate and master's degree in electrical engineering. Retired in 1997 after 19 years. Was a compliance officer and ended career in acquisitions. Worked for Google for 13 years till 2021. Moved to Big Island in 2022. President of West Hawai'i Veterans Cemetery Development and Expansion Association, Vice-Commander of Americal Legion Post 4, and sit on Hawai'i Island Commission Governor's Commission for Hawai'i America 250.

Reginald Alexander, joined Military at 17. Did four years out of San Diego and 26 years out of Pearl Harbor Hawai'i. Retired at 46 from military. Worked for 15 years with Veterans Administration, Benefits Division.

b. Review of committee's purpose statement and discussion of the committee's goals.

J Yoshimoto: A few years ago the Code was amended to include other related Veterans issues and that was a big change to what this committee currently does.

Chair M Doolittle: Actually, changed from Veterans Cemetery Committee to Veterans Advisory Committee and opened up the purview for discussion.

J Yoshimoto: Healthy for committee to look at where it is and where it wants to go. Opportunity to self-reflect. If an idea comes up, this would be the committee to discuss it and make recommendations to the Mayor or Council.

c. Training on the Parliamentary Procedure, Sunshine law and Ethics by Assistant Corporation Counsel, J Yoshimoto.

J Yoshimoto: Will go through briefly and do a full training for new members. If anyone wants a refresher, we can do that.

Overview on Committee

- 12 Members on the committee
- 7 or more shall have served in the United States uniformed services
- Appointed by Mayor, confirmed by Council
- Terms are five years
- Members can succeed themselves but no more than three consecutive terms
- Chair and Vice-Chair elected biennial by members
- Meetings held at discretion of the Chair, traditionally held quarterly
- Duty of the committee is to advise the Mayor and Council pertaining to the operation, management, and maintenance of the veterans cemeteries, and discuss and make recommendations on issues affecting veterans residing in Hawai'i County.
- At the request of the Mayor, the committee shall discuss and make recommendations on other specific veterans-related issues.

T Wojszynski: What is the HRS we recently modified?

J Yoshimoto: At the committee's request, amended code to remove affiliations and make all at large.

Overview on Parliamentary Procedure

- Chair allows everyone equal opportunity to speak
- Try not to interrupt each other
- One person speak at a time

Overview on Sunshine Law

- All board discussions need to happen in a meeting
- Correspondence should be directed to Secretary and J; not entire committee
- Need to follow agenda, can only discuss matters that are on the agenda. If something comes up that is not on the agenda, can agendaize for a future agenda, provided that agenda items relate to the powers, duties and functions of the committee.
- Committee can establish permitted interaction groups
- If have to go into closed meeting to discuss anything privileged can do that
- Remote/zoom meetings; secretary takes care of agenda; quorum needs to be visible throughout the meeting; anyone in room need to state; if remote goes down need to stop meeting
- Accept testimony from members of the public

### Overview of Ethics

- County Charter and County Code have ethics provisions that all county officers and employees are required to abide by
- As an advisory committee members not defined as an officer or employee of the county
- Ethics code sets forth parameters we all should abide by
- Need to fair courteous and impartial
- No conflicts of interest
- nepotism policy
- fair treatment provision
- gift provision, reporting requirement

d. Presentation by A Gaspar on the AARP Foundation Tax Aide program.

A Gaspar: I am AARP tax counselor. Walk through of process to become an AARP tax counselor.

e. Presentation by J Sze on Veteran's survey data collected.

No presentation given. J Sze no present.

f. J Sze discussion on possible veteran discount/free admission at the Pana'ewa Rainforest Zoo and Gardens.

No discussion. J Sze no present.

### **REPORT ON CEMETERIES – STATE VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD**

a. Hawai'i Island – Department of Defense, Office of Veterans Services, East Hawai'i Representative – Kelcie Figueira.

No report. Kelcie Figueira not present.

b. Cemetery Audit Update – Parks & Recreation Director, Deputy Director or authorized designee.

M Samura: Will have J Dempsey attend in August to present cap review and compliance updates.

T Wojszynski: members of West Hawai'i Veterans Cemetery Association meet with John Alamodin's staff a couple of weeks ago to talk about everything other than the expansion. Expansion 3-5 year process. Made requests: water well, ADA compliant restroom, electricity. Working directly with State Office of Veterans Services to make sure expansion is done with community involvement.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Chair M Doolittle: Spoke to Kelcie Figueira who has conflict with State online meetings and the Veterans Advisory Committee meetings.

M Brinkley: Change of command ceremony tomorrow at Pohakuloa, Lt Colonel Alvarado leaving Lt Colonel Park incoming Garrison Commander.

M Samura: As of last Friday, May 22<sup>nd</sup> Josh Sze has resigned from the committee.

Any and all events that happen at Veterans Cemeteries must complete an application for facilities use.

**NEXT MEETING** – August 26, 2026

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion to adjourn by M Hanato. Seconded by W Nishijima.

No discussion. Collective ayes.

Meeting adjourned 12:12 p.m.

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