

Transition Meeting Notes

1. How do you propose the Simmons Administration should prioritize the policy goals in this area, and on what timeframe?

- a. *The prioritization of policy in this area for the administration should be on the easiest yet most needed areas and goals of this committee. There are short term benefits that we believe need to be addressed in the first 100 days, and then long-term goals that will take longer to address due to research, financing, and legislation.*
- b. Short Term
 - i. Development of clear and easily available + accessible websites for veterans to use that list local/state/federal resources + benefits, FAQs, as well as contact info to help veterans understand who to contact or where to go if they have questions.
 1. Job and educational opportunities
 - a. I.e., Vets to teachers, vets to construction workers
 2. List of veteran owned business
 - ii. The establishment of an office and team (even if small but at-least **with a full-time worker** and *part time worker (if city can afford with grant help)* at city hall for veterans next to the senior center. An office that is easily accessible, and a team that can guide and help veterans when they come in or call with any questions they may have. A friendly place where veterans can visit and connect with the government, whether it is local, state, or federal.
 1. A liaison who can serve as connection between the Veterans Council (main veterans' group that represents all smaller veteran organizations) and the mayor
 - a. Veterans Council should maybe have a say or provide guidance in choosing the liaison
 2. Within the office a place to help with administrative events, especially with Toys for Tots
 - a. Volunteers could work inside on business side with access to Wi-Fi, printers, and etc. to help coordinate and network. Toys for Tots is important and has provided toys for families in need for decades. It is a year round process that would benefit from Veterans Office
 - b. Could also be space to help Soldiers Strong, which provides medical devices and educational opportunities
- c. Long Term
 - i. Expansion of veteran benefits, so that benefits those veterans receive mirror other veteran friendly cities.
 1. Update the property tax deduction/discount law for veterans (amount hasn't changed in decades but cost of living and taxes have gone up). Deduction/discount would extend to all veterans

with DD214 on file with the town clerk. The amount would be based off the assessed value of your house

- a. The amount eligible for deduction should be one number that applies for everyone, like the current amount. The amount would come off the assessment that is taken every three years regardless of wealth
 - b. Formula needs to be updated to meet current financial environment and national standards
 2. Prioritized or more accessible + discounted parking for veterans. Free license plates for veterans for Gold Star Spouse and Purple Heart families or beach passes and museums
 - ii. Better relationship between city leadership and veteran community and Board of Ed/schools and veterans' community
 1. Annual townhall between the mayor and veterans (campaign promise)
 2. City needs to be more proactive in advertising celebrations and parades for veterans. Help connect veterans and news/tv organizations to bring about awareness of veteran issues and Patriotic celebrations (Memorial and Veterans Day)
 - a. Banners in town, and advertisements in papers. Work with restaurants for discounts and set tables up outside so people can dine and support + enjoy celebrating our veterans
 3. Small programs exist between Board of Ed/Schools and veterans, but they are not serious or well known. Establishment of bigger and more well-funded programs to build lasting connection
 - iii. Connecting with the town clerk to establish list and count of veterans in the city
 - iv. Upkeep and repair of veteran memorials and parks
 1. St John's Park
 - a. Signage and repair from skateboard damage
 2. Homer Wise Park
 3. Vine Road and Fort Stamford Monuments
2. **Which goals are achievable in the first 100 days of the Administration?**
 - a. The creation of a staffed veterans office, along with the development of a website are the top two goals that are achievable within the first 100 days of the administration
3. **Which goals will require legislation to move forward? Which items can be advanced through the actions of the Administration alone? What is the fiscal impact of these legislative or executive actions?**
 - a. Legislation Required
 - i. Property Tax Exemption
 - ii. Discounted Parking
 - b. Administration Alone

- i. City veteran's webpage revamp
 - ii. City veterans' office
 - iii. Help with advertisement of veteran's parades + celebrations
 - iv. Townhalls
 - v. Establishment of better relations between veterans + city and veterans + Board of Ed/Schools
 - vi. Town clerk veterans list
- c. Fiscal impact
 - i. The increase in how much veterans can deduct in property tax would have an impact on the city budget, but not a large enough impact to throw the budget out of equilibrium. The creation of an office with at least one full time paid staffer would also have a slight fiscal impact but not enough that it would require other city programs to be cut. Both would require a commitment from the city to the creation and maintenance of both programs though.

4. Are there specific challenges you can identify with regard to achieving the Simmons Administration's goals, and how would you suggest addressing those?

- a. The biggest challenge(s) are fiscal, and the allotment of money for a veteran's office and staff at city hall, as well as getting legislation passed that would help veterans with property taxes and other benefits.
- b. The hiring of a veteran's liaison and getting someone who understands the issues and cares about helping veterans with their issues; however, there are a ton of veterans who are either here or have just returned who have extensive knowledge of the issues, including employment and educational opportunities, and how and where to address them.
 - i. While not the preference or recommendation of this committee, if only a part time liaison is within the city budget, then that would be a great start and a liaison should be hired. The veteran's community is a generous and giving community and many would be more than willing to come in and help and support the office + liaison
 - ii. The liaison should report directly to Chief of Staff or another administration official to make sure that the work and job is getting done and taken seriously
 - iii. There are also possible grants that are available that the city should investigate, and that could help with hiring a liaison
 - 1. American Legion and VFW can help in providing training and instructions
- c. Working and speaking with veterans and the veteran's council as problems arise will be an important way of addressing those problems, but also advancing these goals.

5. What examples of success from other states, countries, or the private sector in this policy area should the Administration study?

- a. New York City
 - i. Veterans Housing

- ii. Benefits and Services
 - b. US Army
 - i. Soldier For Life Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP)
 - ii. Connection and link to CT veteran benefits
- 6. **Are there any other issues/considerations you would like to highlight regarding this policy area?**
 - a. Achieving the first 100 days goal is of the utmost importance, and it can be done.
 - b. Emphasis on the city and mayor being more proactive in connecting veterans and city, as well as veterans and non-veterans/students
 - i. Example: Recent veterans day parade was a great ceremony, but many Stamford residents were unaware and same goes for news organizations
 - 1. Better advertisement by the city, connecting with restaurants like they do for restaurant week and Alive @ 5 to promote and celebrate veterans
 - 2. Mayor and city need to act as conduit
 - c. Establishing an accurate count of how many veterans are actually in the city of Stamford and working with the town clerk to establish that list/record or find it.
 - d. Veterans annual townhall with Mayor Simmons