



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Special Meeting Minutes
January 31, 2024**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting was held in the Commissioner's Conference Room at the Department of Veterans Affairs located at 287 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Trustees in attendance: Richard Adgers, Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Carlita Cotton, Peter Galgano Jr., Adele Hodges, Alyssa Kelleher, Frederick Leaf, John Lawlor, Professor Moore, Patrick Nelligan and Sharad Samy, Michael Saylor and Sherri Vogt.

Absent:, Juan Cruz, Richard Harris, Heather Sandler. Richard Dzieken

DVA Staff in attendance: Commissioner Ronald P. Welch, John Carragher, Lori Conchado, Joseph Danao, Adrienne Nails, Laura Nelson and Lesbia Nieves.

Chair, Patrick Nelligan called the meeting to order at 3:36 p.m. and offered a motion to change the meeting schedule dates for 2024 to April 10th, July 10th, October 9th and December 11th. Action: Motion made, seconded, and carried.

Healthcare Administrator, Laura Nelson introduced new HCC Veteran Residents, Mr. Professor Moore, Chair and Mr. Michael Saylor, Co-chair.

The meeting was called to review recommendations made by Trustees for areas of focus in 2024.

Mr. Richard Agers:

- Automated fee processing for Residential Veterans.

Outcome: DVA Fiscal staff are working with a state vendor on options.

- \$1,000 cap on Residential Fees.

Outcome: A motion was made to refer this to the Residential Fee Structure Sub-committee for further consideration. The motion was accepted by Mr. Adgers and seconded by Ms. Vogt.

- Diversity Training/peer support – Mr. Adgers would like to see diversity training and more activities on campus to prevent isolation and encourage community and inclusion.

Outcome: Suggestions were made for dances or picnics on campus.

Ms. Sherri Vogt:

- Procure equipment required to ensure safety of resident at HCC. Ms. Vogt inquired on any updates with the repair of the HCC call bell system noting safety concerns and possible other solutions including the possibility of staggering repairs.

Outcome: Deputy Commissioner Joseph Danao recommended not staggering replacements as these projects tend to go unfinished. We currently have a plan in place that is working and have passed our Federal VA survey without issue. The cost of the project is estimated between \$500,000 - \$1,000,000 and is currently unfunded. It may be possible to look at a Capital Fund request for this project.

- Streamline HCC Application process.

Outcome: As a state agency, the DVA has Medicare and Medicaid requirements from the federal VA that must be firmed up prior to admissions. Ms. Vogt was invited to meet with HCC staff who may provide more detailed information on our application process and barriers.

- 2 Additional Veteran Service Officers per District Office to assist with filing claims.

Outcome: The Office of Advocacy & Assistance is adding an Office Assistant to the Newington Office and in process of filing a supervisor position. The office is currently serving approximately 8,000 Veterans statewide and doubling the number may be unrealistic and filing a position for a Cemetery Director would be more of a priority. The DVA has a Veteran Rep Training on 6/7 with letters sent to all 169 municipalities. It was suggested that meetings with the state VFW Chairs re-convene monthly to connect state VSO's with organizations to better serve Veterans.

Ms. Carlita Cotton:

- Municipal Vet Reps. Ms. Cotton mirrors the need for additional VSO's to assist Veterans in applying for benefits.
- Northeastern CT Vets – There is not sufficient municipal support in the Northeast corridor to serve Veterans who must travel to Norwich for state services and homeless Veterans in the Windham and Willimantic area who require additional support seeking benefits.
- Legislative issues/concerns.

Outcome: Ms. Cotton would like to encourage every municipality to garner every bit of influence possible to encourage Veterans to gather in numbers to attend hearings and meetings during the legislative session to use the public comment time effectively to pass legislation to support Veterans.

Ms. Alyssa Kelleher:

- Engage in strategic planning for more outreach and support beyond the campus to reach Veterans in communities and provide programs and assistance to younger Veterans.

Outcome: A suggestion was made to create a working group to collect data and feedback on what is needed. A motion to create a Strategic Planning Sub-committee was made and accepted by Mr. Lawlor and seconded by Mr. Barry. Chair Nelligan will reach out to further discuss expectations.

Mr John Lawlor:

- Capital Improvements. Review CIP for uncompleted projects with attention toward life safety issues and consider a new analysis for completion of future projects with a similar focus on a study for expansion and construction for the Middletown Veterans Cemetery.

Outcome: It was suggested that we look at a plan to allow us to look ahead to budget beyond facility needs to include other expenses such life cycle replacements of health care equipment or anything with life span of five years or more and has a price of \$25,000. It was determined a sub-committee is not currently needed; however, further discussion may be useful.

Mr Samy:

- Enhance Job opportunities for residents (training, job fairs etc.)
- Providing residents with education options to move off campus.
- Provide work training (e.g. Excel, computers)

Outcome: More programs are needed to support Veterans to find jobs and housing so they may transition back into their communities.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a trailing horizontal line, positioned above a solid horizontal line.

Patrick Nelligan, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date: January 6, 2023