



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
June 5, 2018**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting was called to order by Chair McDavid at 3:34 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by Chair McDavid followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance: Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Robert Cheslock, Ronald Coveney, Frederick Leaf, Peter Galgano, Christopher McDavid,, Paul Tarbox, Michael A. Thomas, and Kjell Tollefsen.

Absent: Steven Harris, Patrick Nelligan, and Tatiana Quinzi

Chair McDavid entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Tarbox and seconded by Trustee Thomas. Motion passed unanimously without any corrections or edits to the minutes.

Chair McDavid commented on the past prior quarters achievements regarding the budget and then introduced Commissioner Saadi.

Commissioner's update: The Commissioner thanked everyone for the hard work on restoring the \$2 million into the budget and then went on to speak of the events attended and accomplishments of the DVA during the previous fiscal quarter. This included the Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Ceremony at the State Capitol, Holland Club Luncheon in Groton and the Welcome Home & Freedom Salute Ceremony in honor of 103rd Airlift Wing & 103rd Control Squadron held on April 8, 2018. He also attended the Military/Veteran Yard Goat Appreciation Game held on May 18, 2018 and several War Time Service Medal Ceremonies across the State. The Commissioner discussed the Re-Dedication and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the "Returned Soldier Monument" and spoke of the three Memorial Day Parades and ceremonies he attend in Berlin, Enfield and Danbury. He acknowledged the volunteers from Cigna that came onto the DVA Campus for "Cigna Day of Giving" and thanked Advocacy and Assistance Director Ryan McKenna for conducting Municipal Veteran Representative Training on the DVA Campus for 50 trainees. The Commissioner then spoke on many upcoming

events including the July 4th VFW Massing of the Flags Ceremony & August 10th Veteran Unclaimed Cremains Ceremony.

II. Old Business

A. DVA Healthcare Center Update (HCC) – Dual License Working Group:

Chair McDavid asked Commissioner Saadi for an update who then explained that the DVA continues with a dual license approach as to the HCC through a working group with OPM, DSS and DPH to transitions from a single chronic disease license to a dual license facility. The working group is developing an RFP to hire a Healthcare Management Consultant (HMC) to assist with the transition.

Trustees questioned the Commissioner on the funding of the HMC which he explained would come from existing DVA appropriations however, the funds will not be taken away from any of the funding that services the Veterans.

B. Budget & Staffing /Manager Update:

The Chair recognized Fiscal Manager Michael Clark from DVA's Fiscal Office to give an update on the budget and staffing trends. Mr. Clark explained that the DVA has a projected salary surplus of 480,000 dollars and a projected operating budget deficit of \$204,000. He further explained that OPM has refused to approve using part of the salary surplus to cover operating expenses as a one-time event. He further stated that OPM told him to have the Commissioner use IGW Funds to cover the deficit which both Mr. Clark and Commissioner Saadi oppose.

The Commissioner then provided an update as the DVA staffing highlighting the status of the searches for HCC Director, Residential Director and Safety and Security Director. In response to questions the Commissioner explained that a Staff Attorney was needed at the DVA to provide continuity and consistency in DVA Rules, regulations, MOU/MOAs and to oversee FOIA, CHRO and several other categories of legal and administrative issues.

Trustees Thomas and Tarbox asked for a clarification of the regulation applying to transferring funds from Personal Services to Operating Expenses which was explained by Mr. Clark. Trustees Benson, Barry and Cacciola expressed their concerns about a backlog of the installation of headstones at the Middletown Veterans Cemetery and the staffing issues in Cemetery and Memorial Services. The Commissioner responded to these concerns stating that both issues would be reviewed immediately and action taken in a timely manner.

C. Projects Update

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update including an explanation of the Middletown State Veteran Cemetery Expansion project with a completion date of December 2018, and the Cemetery Appearance project with a completion date of February 2020. He further explained that there is no paving date at the Cemetery due to the weather which delayed the progress of the project. Director Danao went on to say that these two projects total approximately \$8.6 million in improvements fully funded by the federal Cemetery Grants program.

Director Danao also updated the Trustees on the Residential Facility A-Wing renovations and the Returned Soldier Monument was funded by donations and is now considered a public monument. He reported that retiling of building 50 is nearly complete and we are awaiting the award of construction phase of Building 2. Director Danao went on to explain that the agency is moving forward with fire alarms updates campus wide based on allocation of \$186,000 by the bond commission. The Campus Emergency Generator Replacement has been completed and the Security and Safety improvements are awaiting state funding pre-design. Director Danao reported on the recent bond allocation approvals including \$300,000 is allocated for replacement of the HCC Chiller and \$353,000 for ADA Upgrades to Buildings 2, 3 and 4.

Trustees Benson and Thomas raised the issue of the backlog of headstones to which Director Danao answered that the delay of installation of the headstones had to do with matters not in the agencies control. Commissioner Saadi directed Mr. Danao and other DVA staff to present him with a new plan to address this issue within a week.

III. New Business

A. Legislative Updates:

Commissioner Saadi explained that the Definition of Veteran Bill – SB 287, which would have clarified the issue of who is a Veterans under state law died on Senate Calendar, however if he is Commissioner in 2019 he plans to reintroduce the bill.

Commissioner Saadi reported that the Municipal Veterans’ Bill - HB 5317 which would have updated the name of such persons to “Municipal Veterans Representative” and provided more flexibility to municipalities died on House Calendar, however, if he is Commissioner in 2019 he plans to reintroduce the bill.

Commissioner Saadi reported on a bill HB 5319 which would have directed proceeds from sale of property abandoned by Veterans Charitable organizations to the Department’s Institutional General Welfare (IGW) fund. This was not reported out of Financial, Revenue or Bonding Committee however, he hopes that the VA Committee will reintroduce in 2019.

Commissioner Saadi reported on a bill providing benefits for certain veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury or who have had an experience of military sexual trauma – HB 284 which passed. The Commissioner explained that the DVA will provide the appropriate form and guidance to State agencies and municipalities but the DVA will not be the arbiter of denials of eligibility.

B. Cemetery – Saturday Burial Policy:

Commissioner Saadi and Mr. McKenna reported that effective July 7, 2018, Saturday burials will be restored at the Middletown Cemetery. Additionally, updated rules and regulations for individuals visiting the Veterans Cemetery have been promulgated and the Federal Marker Reimbursement Procedures have been updated.

C. Residential Facility Saturday Transportation Update:

Commissioner Saadi reported that due to the staffing constraints and budget reductions DVA temporarily suspended regular Saturday transportation for Veteran Residents in March 2018. However, working with Physical Plant, Transportation Department and Residential Services the Commissioner has authorized Recreational Saturday Transportation to resume on June 16, 2018.

D. Respite Care Beds Reopened in HCC:

Commissioner Saadi reported that in 2017 former Commissioner Connolly issued a moratorium on the HCC Respite Care Program to focus staff on care for regularly admitted chronic care Veteran Patients. DVA conducted a review of this moratorium and based on input from medical, fiscal and human resource staff the Commissioner lifted the moratorium and HCC began accepting Respite Care admissions a few weeks prior and beds are booked through August. The Commissioner also reports there are 12 individuals on the waiting list.

Chair McDavid recognized Commissioner Saadi for additional new business. Commissioner Saadi reviewed the current Program Fee Policy which is based on 30% of income with no cap on payment and no minimum income exemption. The Commissioner explained that in light of the previous work performed by BOT Program Fee subcommittees and internal DVA review that he is recommending the reconvening of the Subcommittee to entertain the following recommendation:

1. Update the Program Fee to 25% of Income;
2. Cap the program Fee at not more than \$900 monthly;
3. Exempt from the Program Fee any Veteran with \$300 or less of monthly income,

Chair McDavid reappointed the Program Fee subcommittee as follows: Trustees Barry, Coveney, Dziekan, Nelligan, Tarbox and Tollefson. The Commissioner asked that a representative from the fiscal office be included. The Commissioner asked that the committee on Program Fees meet before the fall, preferably before the next Board of Trustees meeting set for September, 2018 to provide recommendations to be implemented, if appropriate, in the late fall of 2018.

Chair Mc David recognized Trustee Coveney for new business. Trustee Coveney made a motion that this board advise the Commissioner to immediately contact the proper authorities to investigate staff or staff members who purportedly administered incorrect overdoses of morphine to a patient in the DVA HCC. Trustee Coveney expressed his concerns that no one is above the law and such incidents must be properly and fully investigated and the Commissioner must ensure this happens. Trustee Coveney also stated that the Commissioner should advise staff of their Whistleblower Protection Act rights.

Based on the potential of both medical and personnel information being discussed it was recommended by Chairman McDavid to go to Executive Session. Motion passed unanimously. After deliberations in executive session Chairman McDavid requested a motion to go back into regular session which passed unanimously. At 5:41 PM the Board reconvened in Regular Session. Trustee Coveney withdrew his motion based upon the discussion in the Executive Session that, among other things, the Commissioner will contact the appropriate state agencies, review the matter further and report back to the Board.

Chair McDavid reviewed dates with the Board and set the next Board meeting for Wednesday, September 12, 2018 at 3:30pm.

IV. Closing

There being no further business, Chair McDavid entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Thomas and seconded by Trustee Tarbox. Motion passed unanimously at 5:51 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Christopher McDavid, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 6/13/2018