



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
May 1, 2019**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

In the absence of an appointed Chairperson the Meeting was called to order by Commissioner Saadi at 3:32 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by Patrick Nelligan followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance: John Banks, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Peter Galgano, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Heather Sandler, and Kjell Tollefsen. Alyssa Kelleher attended via phone. Also in attendance from the DVA staff, Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Patrice Olson, Laura Nelson, Ryan McKenna, Steve Scatena, Joe Danao, Lesbia Nieves, Tammy Marzik and Darlene Deschaine.

Absent: Paul Barry, Richard Dziekan, Steven Harris, Michael Tetrault, and Michael Thomas.

The Acting Chairman asked all appointed and reappointed Trustees to stand for the oath which was administered by DVA Staff Attorney Patrice Olson who then distributed introductory packets and information to newly appointed Trustees, Juan Cruz and Heather Sandler. The Commissioner stated that Attorney Olson would be available to brief them on the statutory obligations as a Trustee. Acting Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Trustee Benson asked that the minutes be amended as he was mistakenly not on the attendance roll for the March 19, 2019, meeting. Motion by Trustee Leaf and seconded by Trustee Tollefsen to amend the minutes which passed unanimously.

Commissioner's update: The Commissioner reported on recent events and achievements of the CT DVA including attending many events throughout the state the Military Department rededicated of Camp Hartell and the 32nd Annual Easterseals Crystal Ball to benefit Veterans Rally and two Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day events on March 30th, in Hartford and in Danbury. On April 9th DVA OAA participated in the Heroes for Hire event at the Pratt & Whitney stadium in East Hartford. The Commissioner reported that on April 11th the Hartford Yard Goats kicked off opening day with a ceremony to dedicate a POW/MIA remembrance seat at the stadium. On April 23rd, the Commissioner recognized WWII Veteran, DVA HCC patient Marye Kraemer on her 100th birthday. The upcoming events that the Commissioner reported on included Yard Goats Military Appreciation Game being held

May 18th; the Jewish Federation WWII Veteran Event tentatively scheduled for May 19th, the CT Veterans Memorial 1st Annual Memorial Day Ceremony on May 24th. The Commissioner explained that a DVA team is participating in the CT Veterans Legal Center, "Ride for Veterans." On July 23rd the DVA is hosting a cookout on Campus for the veterans and the 102nd Band will be performing at this event, and the DVA Annual Stand Down is on September 20th.

Commissioner Saadi updated the Board that the Governor has two remaining appointments to the Board as well as an appointment of the Board Chairperson. Acting Chair recognized Trustees Dziekan and Leaf who questioned the status of the Governor's appointees to the Board of Trustees. The Commissioner reported that there is a total of 18 openings on the Board of Trustees in which the Governor can appoint up to 10 members including the Chairperson. There are currently 6 Legislative Appointees, 1 Veteran voted in by the Healthcare Center and 1 Veteran voted in by the Residential facility. The Commissioner assured the Board that he has been in contact with the Governor's Office and will continue to update the members when he receives any new updates.

II. Old Business

A. DVA Healthcare Center Update (HCC) – License Transition:

Acting Chair Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi for an update on the Healthcare Center (HCC) transition process who explained that the DVA continues the process of transitioning the Chronic Disease Hospital (CDH) to a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) which includes standing up an independently licensed outpatient clinic in the Residential Facility. The Commissioner reported that this process involves significant training and retraining of HCC staff and the updating of numerous HCC and DVA policies and procedures. The Commissioner asked Healthcare Center Administrator Laura Nelson to update the Board on this process and she reported that the process is 87% complete and inspections will begin next week. Administrator Nelson reported that former DVA physician, Dr. Romano voluntarily transferred to join another state agency. Currently the DVA has multiple attending physicians pursuant to a MOA with UConn Health which is been working "very well."

In response to a question from Trustee Benson, Administrator Nelson reported that the UConn Doctors are at the HCC daily and are on call 24 hours a day. Commissioner Saadi further explained that the number of physician rotations will increase in June. Acting Chair Nelligan asked Administrator Nelson if telemedicine, the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients is being implemented. Administrator Nelson reported that telemedicine is not part of the current transition but is being considered for future implementation. In response to a question from the Commissioner, Administrator Nelson reported that the outpatient clinic is being renovated and updated.

B. Fiscal Report:

The Commissioner reported there is no change in the numbers as last reported in March except that the DVA has approximately a \$550,000 salary surplus due to vacancies, however, the DVA has reported a deficiency in the its operating expenses line time of approximately \$270,000. The Commissioner reported that the DVA has requested authorization from OPM to transfer approximately half of the \$550,000 from the salary surplus to the cover operating expenses with the remaining amount of the salary surplus going to the state's General Fund. Most of the OE deficiency is based on temporary and onetime increase in energy and utility use and costs including a two water main breaks

on campus and a pipe burst in Building 5. The DVA is in the process of consolidating operations and leaseholds from multipole buildings to building 50 which will reduce energy use and other utility costs.

C. Projects Update

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update including the information on Cemetery projects, the asbestos abatement project and the status of bond allocation requests. The cemetery appearance project is half way complete with an estimated completion date in spring of 2020. The Cemetery Services Master Plan is complete and public hearings will be held across the state in May. Mr. Danao went on to report that the abatement projects in B-Wing is complete and others are ongoing campus wide. Patriot's Landing Homes will have the main water line replaced which will take Dinosaur State Park off DVA water supply. Mr. Danao went on to report that the two 400-gallon hot water tanks and A/C units in the HCC need to be replaced. Acting Chair Nelligan asked Mr. Danao if solar panels would be an option to investigate for future energy savings. Mr. Danao answered that, at this time, this is not an option as the electrical structure on the campus could not support the solar panels. Mr. Danao went on to state that the best solution in saving energy costs would be to switch over to gas on demand.

D. Semi-Private/Independent living model

Commissioner Saadi introduced Residential and Program Director Leslie Nieves to present the Semi-Private Independent living model. Director Nieves reported that the DVA is in the process of renovating C-Wing in the Residential Facility and establishing a new Semi-private/Semi-independent Living Program with 12 semi-private rooms that will also provide a common area. Priority will be given to Veteran Residents who are working of Campus or attending school or trade certification program. All participants must be able to perform the ADLs and participate in minor cleaning and upkeep of the wing. The intent is to promote greater independence and self-confidence and better prepare Veterans to transition to community-based employment and housing. If this concept works, it could be a model for other wings of the residential facility. The Commissioner went on to state that A-Wing is gutted, however, due to the lack of funding this project is still on hold.

Other Old Business

Trustee Benson asked whether the Civil Air Patrol has responded to a letter from the Board the fund raising through of Wreaths Across America. Acting Chair Nelligan stated that he has not received a response and stated that he would follow up by phone.

III. New Business

A. Legislative Update

Acting Chair Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi to report on the next item on agenda regarding the legislative update. The Commissioner reported on a new bill, HB 7064 which will update the name of the Municipal Veterans service contact person to "Municipal Veterans Representative" and would allow volunteers to service as said Municipal Veterans Representatives in addition to Municipal Veterans Commissions and Employees. This program is administered by the DVA in connecting Veterans to programs and services. There is no fiscal impact to towns and may effectuate greater

connection of Veterans to programs and services using qualified volunteers. The Commissioner went on to state that there is opposition to this bill and some towns are concerned that volunteers won't be as well versed or committed to helping the veterans in need. The Commissioner stated that he recently responded to a state representative concerning this issue and stated that most of these volunteers are better versed in Veterans rights and needs than a paid employee. The Commissioner went on to state that he's drafting up some language to clarify some of these concerns.

Acting Chair Nelligan asked if there was any type of tally on cases in any given year from the participating cities towns and Ryan McKenna answered that we don't currently have a tally, however, we can ask the towns for this information. This can be done the next time we send out our annual request for data from the towns. The Commissioner stated that the other bill DVA is working on is the definition of the two-year requirement of being admitted into DVA.

The Chair recognized Phil Cacciola who stated that he's been to the State Cemetery and stated that it looks great. He also wanted to update the board on the upcoming events in Middletown including the placing of flags on graves the Saturday before Memorial Day, Wreaths Across America, and the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony of the Shephard Homes on May 21st. This is a housing facility for veterans which currently accepted 26 veterans that have been placed. There is a total of 32 individual homes and it is subsidized by Section 8 housing. Home Depot donated all the appliances for this housing project.

IV. Closing

The Commissioner reminded the board that the Cemetery Master Plan Meeting will take place at 5PM after the BoT meeting. The Commissioner asked the new board members to tell the Board about themselves. Trustee Heather Sandler is as Navy veteran, a 2010 UConn graduate and a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the Veterans Administration. Trustee Juan Cruz is an Army Veteran who works for the Department of Homeland Security. The Acting Chair stated that the next board meeting will be held on July 10, 2019 at 3:30 pm. There being no further business, Acting Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Leaf and seconded by Trustee Galgano. Motion passed unanimously at 4:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Patrick Nelligan, Acting Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 7 May 2019