



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
September 20, 2016**

(Draft minutes subject to review and approval at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting was called to order by Chairperson Christopher McDavid at 3:36PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

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

In attendance: Christopher McDavid (Chair), Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Robert Cheslock, Ronald Coveney, Amy Donahue, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Brien Horan, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Paul Tarbox, and Michael Thomas.

Absent: Tatiana Quinzi (E), Kjell Tollefsen (E) and Rebecca Wareing.

Oath of Office Administered to Board members Cacciola, Cheslock and Tarbox who were not present at the May 31, 2016, Board meeting. Oath was administered by Tom Saadi, DVA Chief of Staff and General Counsel.

Chair McDavid introduced DVA Commissioner Sean Connolly who welcomed the Board and introduced DVA staff present – Tom Saadi, Fausto Parra, Maria Cheney, Joe Danao, Sue Krassler, Shumei Chu, Thomas Stefanko, Noreen Sinclair and Emily Hein.

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

II. Reports:

Commissioner Connolly presented a general update of DVA activities to the Board highlighting recent Veteran and DVA achievements such as; Give back Garden, Veterans Express, CT Wartime Service medal ceremonies, platform to Employment, LEAN program, staff training and then discussed upcoming DVA and Veteran events.

Commissioner Connolly reported that the DVA will have a balanced budget for FY 2017 which included recent budget reduction of approximately \$750,000 as required by the Office of Policy

and Management, staff reduced through attrition and one layoff. Further reported that DVA is working with OPM to develop budget to FY18 and FY19.

Joseph Danao (Director of Projects and Operations) provided a general update on DVA projects including the new Middletown Cemetery Columbarium, Healthcare Center Sculpture renovation and renovations in the Winner's Circle. Mr. Danao also reviewed a list of ongoing projects and their design stage highlighting future expansion of the DVA Middletown Cemetery, DVA Rocky Hill Campus site survey and Environmental Study.

Trustee Coveney asked about electrical shortage on Campus. Mr. Danao explained that the current system has deficiencies due to years of layered renovations and review is part of the full Site Survey.

Trustee Barry asked about the cost of the proposed generator. Mr. Danao responded that the cost of between \$600,000 - \$700,000.

Trustee Benson questioned whether there is a backlog on the installation of headstones beyond the 90 day install time to which Mr. Danao responded in the negative.

Trustee Tarbox asked about the condition of the DVA onsite boilers. Mr. Danao explained that there are multiple options being considered for replacement and that this too is included in the Site Survey.

Chairman McDavid asked if there were any critical projects behind schedule. While no projects are behind schedule Commissioner is always looking to move things forward and many projects are large and will take time.

III. Old Business

Residential Locker Search and interim Residential Policy update presented by Chief of Staff Saadi as a follow up to May Board meeting briefing. Mr. Saadi explained that disciplinary violations and related involuntary discharges increased after implementation of the interim policies which ceased searches of Veterans' vehicles, packages, and lockers. However, violations and involuntary discharges peaked in the June – July timeframe and have been steadily declining. Therefore, the Commissioner will not revert to the terminated searches and will reissue the interim policy as a permanent DVA policy.

Trustee Nelligan asked about the impact of involuntary discharges on the Residential census. Saadi explained that while it had a short term impact the census has stabilized between 195-200 Veteran Residents.

Trustee Tarbox asked who can initiate a search. Mr. Saadi explained that searches only occur now if there is a reason to believe someone has contraband on campus and that searches are performed of vehicles, packages and lockers by Residential staff coordinating with DVA Security personnel.

Residential Program Fee update was provided by Commissioner Connolly followed by Mr. Saadi who presented the research and analysis supporting the proposal to base the Program Fee on one-

third of a Veteran Resident's income with a \$500 cap and that no Veteran Resident would pay a Program Fee for the first four months of residency.

Significant discussion followed with Trustee Nelligan and Trustee Thomas asking about the current cost/market value of the residential program for Veteran Residents. Mr. Saadi and Fiscal Officer Chu explained that the cost to the state is approximately \$110 per day. Trustee Coveney asked about rules governing Program Fees and the use of money in the IGW to which Saadi responded that the fee is not rent but to offset some of the cost of programs for Veterans and that IGW funds are for the direct benefit of Veterans and cannot be used for state salaries. Trustee Barry asked whether Federal Per Diem is paid to the DVA or General Fund. Ms. Chu explained that per diem is paid to General Fund.

Trustee Coveney explained concerns with the proposal stating that some Veterans may leave due to the higher payment as examples he stated that there are veterans on disability collecting \$4,000 per month, another Veteran who recently received a \$200,000 lump sum settlement of a claim and other veterans who have homes off Campus however they prefer to reside at the DVA Campus. He said if the cap is too high Veterans may leave the Campus. Commissioner Connolly explained that the proposed approach reflects best practices and that DVA has provided greater case management support to help Veterans find permanent housing in the community including housing that caters to Veterans. Trustee Nelligan asked about Residential demographics and suggested possibly grandfathering in current Veterans. Trustee Benson proposed a subcommittee be appointed to review the issue. Trustee Barry explained that the Board are responsible to eh Veterans and also to serve as guardians of taxpayer funds. In response to Trustee Horan's question Saadi explained that the Program Fee is based on income and not assets. Trustee Harris asked whether the DVA was running out of Residential space to which the Commissioner replied no however, staffing is limited. Trustee Dziekan stated his concern as to the fee increasing in the future to which the commissioner responded that since is based on a percentage of income there is no need to raise the amount in the future. Trustee Tarbox, explained that the Program Review and Investigations Committee suggestion of adding a COLA to the fee was not based on an imperial data as there are no good compatibles. Trustee Leaf asked how the IGW is impacted by Legislative appropriations, the Commissioner explained that while there may be some correlation between appropriations and the funds in the IGW the DVA cannot spend the IGW on employee salaries. Trustee Coveney asked whether IGW funds were used for the Winner's Circle renovations and Mr. Danao responded in the negative.

IV. New Business

The update Personal Property Policy was introduced by the Commissioner and further explained by Ms. Cheney and Mr. Saadi. In response to Trustee questions Ms. Cheney stated that Veterans were allowed to have cell phones and chargers and that while there was no on Campus storage many Veterans store excess property off Campus.

Changes to the Detail Work and Vocational programs were explained by Commissioner Connolly and Mr. Saadi. The Detail work program is being phased out and combined with an updated Vocational and Therapeutic work program following Federal guidelines and best practices which include training and hands on learning, supervision and regular performance evaluations focusing on developing vocational marketable job skills.

Trustee Leaf asked whether basis legal support services are available for DVA Veteran Residents including preparation of willing wills and healthcare proxies to which Ms. Cheney replied that both items are address by DVA staff however more substantive legal support must be obtained outside of DVA. Discussion ensued regarding potential community partners that may be able to provide such services including Yale and Quinnipiac Schools of Law. Trustee Harris recommended contacting the Harford Probate Court for legal support at future Stand-downs.

Trustee Coveney expressed concerns for Veteran workers suggesting that the State should award more civil service points to Veteran Residents at the DVA Campus for purposes of State employment. Commissioner Connolly explained that DVA has many Veterans as employees and has hired several while they were Residents at DVA.

Trustee Coveney presented a proposal to establish a non-profit operated by the DVA Veterans' Council to help obtain vehicles and other items for DVA Veterans. Discussion ensued with Trustees suggesting the Veterans' Council work with existing Non-profits due to the structure of the Veterans' Council not being conducive to establishing a non-profit as well as the length of time to obtain non-profit status. Trustee Thomas expressed an interest in assisting

V. Closing remarks

Commissioner Connolly announced that effective October 1, 2016, Veteran Owned Small businesses will receive a 15% preference when bidding on State contracts and that the certification is process by DVA and that the application is on the DVA website.

Chairman McDavid stated that he intended to begin forming sub-committees to assist the DVA with a focus on items before the Board as well as the four Core function areas. More information will follow via email.

There being no further business, Chair McDavid entertained a motion to adjourn – Motion made by Trustee Harris and seconded by Trustee Horan. Motion passed unanimously at 5:27PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Christopher McDavid, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 10/31/2016