



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
December 12, 2018**

*(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)*

**I. Convene Meeting:**

The Meeting was called to order by Chair McDavid at 3:30 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: Mark Altieri, Paul Barry, Philip Cacciola, Robert Cheslock, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Frederick Leaf, Christopher McDavid, Patrick Nelligan, Paul Tarbox, and Kjell Tollefsen.

Absent: Richard Benson, Richard Dziekan, Alyssa Kelleher, Tatiana Quinzi and Michael Thomas.

Chair McDavid entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Nelligan and seconded by Trustee Tollefsen. Motion passed unanimously with no corrections or edits to the minutes.

Chair McDavid welcomed new Board Member Mark Altieri and then turned it over to Commissioner Saadi to administer the oath. Trustee Altieri pledged to uphold his responsibilities as a Board of Trustees member.

**Commissioner's update:** The Commissioner introduced Laura Nelson, newly hired Director of the DVA Healthcare Center. Ms. Nelson explained that she's been working in the healthcare field for over thirty years overseeing several skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities. Ms. Nelson also has several years of consulting experience in which she helped getting some facilities on track to achieve their license criteria. Ms. Nelson stated that she will, through the Commissioner, keep the Board members updated on the license conversion. The Commissioner also introduced Patrice Olson, newly hired Staff Attorney for the DVA who is a 20 year Air Force Veteran.

The Commissioner then spoke of events attended and accomplishments of the DVA during the previous fiscal quarter including the annual Stand Down Event, which was attended by over 1,000 Veterans, assisted by more than 300 volunteers and staffed by more than 100 service providers, the commissioner speaking at the monument dedication in honor of Medal of Honor recipient U.S. Air Force Master Sergeant John A. Chapman, Vets Rock event at the Mohegan Sun and the Veterans Small Business Week

at the DVA campus. The Commissioner highlighted the quilt donated by USMC Veteran Harvey Silverman, with each Unit patch of the USMC units that served in the Vietnam War and the very successful 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual AT&T Annual Veterans Charity 3 Miler on the DVA campus during which Mr. Armond Jolly, a 96 year old, WWII Combat wounded Navy veteran, walked the first mile. All proceeds from this event goes to AT&T Veterans Outreach and the DVA's Quality of Life programs. The Quarter concluded with two major events - the CT Veterans Hall of Fame ceremony during which nine CT Veterans were inducted and the Veterans Rock Concert in the DVA Auditorium which was organized by A Big Mac Production and Trustee Patrick Nelligan. Trustee Nelligan reported that the bands agreed to play for free and all proceeds raised during this event will be going to the DVA IGW.

The Commissioner then spoke on the upcoming events which included the DVA Holiday Extravaganza & Tree Lighting Ceremony in the Main Dining Room and Wreaths Across America at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown on Dec 15<sup>th</sup> and the Governor-Elect's Health & Human Services report meeting taking place at the DVA on Dec 17<sup>th</sup>.

The Chair recognized new Trustee Mark Altieri and asked him to say a few words before going onto the next item on the agenda. Trustee Altieri stated that it was an honor to serve on the board and that this agency saved his life. Trustee Altieri went on to say that his time in the military allowed him to be at the DVA and the services that were offered him here has been lifesaving. Trustee Altieri is very humbled and happy to be on the board, he's happy to take his life experiences to serve the board and learn as he goes.

## **II. Old Business**

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

Chair McDavid asked Commissioner Saadi for an update on the HCC License transition. The Commissioner stated the DVA continues to review current Veteran Patient and the clinical care needs of the Veterans on the HCC admission waiting list. The working group collaboratively determined that transitioning the HCC from a CDH to a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) will better address the needs of existing Veteran Patients, provide a continuum of care for Veteran Residents; and better serve Veterans across our State in need of long-term clinical care as demonstrated by the Veterans on the HCC admission waiting. The Commissioner reported that the transition team, led by HCC Administrator Laura Nelson along with our Project Administrator Bud Hodes, is working closely with all stakeholders, including the Office of Labor Relations, Union leadership, in determining the methods and timelines for this licensure transition. There are hundreds of check list items that need to be accomplished to obtain the SNF license. The Commissioner went on to say that the amount of oversight and regulations to obtain a SNF is far more regulated than a CDH. It is significantly more regulations than the CDH. The Commissioner has made the Governor-elect's transition team aware of this license Transition process.

The Commissioner addressed rumors that B-Clinic would no longer be able to service our veterans stating that the DVA is working UConn and the Federal VA to assure that the B-Clinic will remain operational which involves the maintaining of certain primary care services on Campus and establishing a Sharing Agreement with the Federal VA. The Commissioner explained that the DVA Pharmacy is already licensed independently and operates independently from the CDH. By a late spring is when the transition should be complete.

Trustee Paul Barry questioned the financial implications of transition to the DVA our budget. The Commissioner responded that there would not be a two million dollar savings for the transition of the license however, there may be savings in laboratory services and more savings in staffing changes and there may be potentially revenue generating opportunities primary care physicians billing third party payers under Medicare.

The Chair recognized Trustee Nelligan who asked whether the Clinic will be run independently and would the HCC be able to provide services such as x-rays and other services that community based walk-in clinics provide. Director Nelson responded that because most x-rays are done mobile now and it's usually billable to the patient she doesn't recommend this. She also stated that since the technology changes so often and the equipment is so expensive it is not cost efficient to lean in that direction.

Trustee Tarbox asked whether a survey of other states has been conducted regarding this SNF model. The Commissioner stated that he learned during over the summer from other state Directors at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs conference that no other state has a state chronic disease hospital but instead they provide skilled nursing and adult day care among other similar services as those are what is needed most by Veterans. Director Nelson also stated that the Federal VA does not recognize Chronic Disease Hospitals and inspects the DVA HCC as a skilled nursing facility. Trustee Altieri wanted a time frame to give to the veteran residents for their piece of mind on the transition of the license. Commissioner answered the target is late spring.

### **B. Budget & Staffing Update:**

The Commissioner reported on the Budget and staffing trends explaining that with the FY19 appropriation of \$19 million and the OPM adjustment of approximately \$600,000 DVA is operating with and appropriation of \$22.5 million. That is approximately \$10 million less over a 10 year period with the IGW contribution now of 3.2 million. The Commissioner stated that he will explain to the incoming administration that some of the IGW line items should be shifted back to appropriated funds. Trustee Barry asked about the SSMF Administration appropriation being affected by the shifting of these funds. Commissioner explained that is not affected by the shift of funds. Trustee Barry also expressed concerns with the processing of headstone reimbursements which are behind and wants to know what was being done to correct the issue. The Chair called on OAA Director Ryan McKenna to who explained that the loss of a staff member in July slowed the process but that a new fulltime staff person came on in November and the office is catching up on overdue files.

Chairman McDavid asked the Commissioner if there was any way of working on the budget priorities and efficiencies to present to the new administration and legislation as opposed to fixing this issue as we go along. The Commissioner stated that he would reach out to the Board as soon as he had an idea of the proposed budget for FY20-21.

### **C. Projects Update**

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update explaining that the abatement projects on campus is ongoing and is funded by the Division of Construction Services (DCS). The new water line to Patriot's Landing Housing is ready to bid by DEEP and that the Fire Alarm and Suppression System for Patriot's Landing and Sgt. Levitow Road are complete with building 2, 3, 4 and 5 next on the list for installation. He reported that the ADA upgrades for buildings 2, 3 and 4 are

ready to bid by DAS and bid documents are being prepared for the Security and Safety Improvements, which includes building a new gatehouse further from the West Street entrance.

Mr. Danao further reported on the Quality of Life Improvements regarding the A Wing Renovation and that the Building 50 (formerly Fellowship house) renovation and upgrades are going well. The Commissioner stated this renovation will bring the building up to operational capacity for DVA operations as well as DMHAS and Veteran Service Organizations already on campus and expand opportunities to have more Veterans Organizations and providers on Campus. Mr. Danao reported on the cemetery expansion project including 2,000 preplaced vaults which will be concluded in spring 2019 and the appearance project which will be completed in 2020. Trustee Barry then asked if the repaving of the roads in the Middletown Cemetery included on this grant and is it safe to even go back to some parts of the cemetery. Mr. Danao replied that repaving is on the DVA budget and will know after the December 13<sup>th</sup> inspection and also that the ADA project is with DAS and is ready to go out to bid.

### **III. New Business**

#### **A. Governor & General Assembly Transition Update**

Chairman McDavid asked the Commissioner to report on the transition.

Commissioner Saadi reported that the Governor elect's transition team has been in contact with him and that he has provided reports and updates on the status of recent, on-going and future operations and projects at DVA. The Commissioner reported that he was interviewed by the transitions team and has stated his interest in remaining as Commissioner but that the transition team has not made a decision yet. The Commissioner explained that as the Board members are all appointed by the Governor and members of the General Assembly they should express their intentions to their appointing authority.

The Chair then opened the meeting to any other comments. The Commissioner expressed a concern stated to him by Trustee Benson, (who could not be at this meeting) as to whether the Wreaths Across America project at the DVA Cemeteries organized by the Civil Air Patrol is a fundraising event for the Civil Air Patrol and if so, should not some of the funds go to the DVA for the support of CT Veterans or Cemetery Services? The Commissioner asked Ryan McKenna to research the issue. Trustee Barry would like several issues brought up to Wreaths Across America, specifically the high costs of the wreaths at \$15.00 compared to other such programs and determine where any profit goes. The Commissioner stated, through the chair, that any fundraising that is associated with the DVA is looked at very carefully, disclosures would have to be made and that he will report Mr. McKenna's findings to the Board.

### **IV. Closing**

During closing remarks the Commissioner explained that Tom Flowers is seeking volunteers to serve on the Board of the West Haven Fisher House and he also advised the Trustees of the CT Fallen Star Memorial Project led by Congressman John Larson. The Commissioner reported the most recent CT Lawyer magazine recognized the success of volunteer Attorneys at the DVA annual Stand Down and that the most recent CBIA publication recognized that the DVA reduced overtime spending by the largest number of any state agency in the previous quarter. Commissioner then thanked everyone for their service and wished all a Happy Holiday.

The Chair stated that the next board meeting will be determined at a later date. There being no further business, Chair McDavid entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Tarbox and seconded by Trustee Galgano. Motion passed unanimously at 4:51 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



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Christopher McDavid, Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 1/3/19