



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

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

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

**I. Convene Meeting:**

The Meeting was called to order by Chair McDavid at 3:32 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, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Christopher McDavid, Paul Tarbox, Michael A. Thomas, and Kjell Tollefsen.

Absent: Frederick Leaf and Tatiana Quinzi

Chair McDavid entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Trustee Dziekan stated that he was mistakenly listed as absent in the minutes of the Board Meetings on March 20, 2018 and June 5, 2018. Executive Secretary Darlene Deschaine will make the correction. Motion made by Trustee Tarbox and seconded by Trustee Thomas. Motion passed unanimously with corrections or edits to the minutes.

Chair McDavid welcomed new Board Member Alyssa Kelleher and then called on Commissioner Saadi to administer the oath of office to Ms. Kelleher.

**Commissioner's update:** The Commissioner introduced Chief Stephen Scatena, newly appointed Chief of Safety and Security for the DVA. The Commissioner also introduced Lesbia Nieves, newly hired Director of DVA Residential & Program Services. He stated that Lieutenant Colonial Nieves has served in the Army National Guard for 31 years. Director Nieves stated that her vision for the DVA is to continue working passionately for the rights of veterans and to create an environment safe and secure for the veterans. The Commissioner reported that the DVA hired Air Force Veteran Patrice Olson to serve as the DVA Staff Attorney. The Commissioner also reported that he hired a new Healthcare Center Administrator, Laura Nelson, who will be starting Friday, September 14<sup>th</sup>.

The Commissioner spoke of the events attended and accomplishments of the DVA during the previous fiscal quarter including six Wartime Service Medal ceremonies across the State and an event held in Windsor honoring female WWII Veterans. On June 15<sup>th</sup> a Quilts of Valor Ceremony presented several DVA veterans with homemade quilts. The Commissioner reported that Bud Neal (Vietnam Veteran) of Neal Tree Services and Sandy Ingellis, horticulturist, along with volunteers donated all labor and materials to create a Healing Garden (valued at \$140,000) next to the Healthcare Center for our veterans to enjoy.

The Commissioner reported that the DVA conducted an unclaimed cremated remains military burial ceremony for four WWII Veterans. The Commissioner attended a ceremony in New Britain for the dedication of a Global War on Terrorism monument which took place on 9/11/2018. The Commissioner then spoke of the many upcoming events including the Annual DVA Stand Down Event scheduled for September 21st, the Memorial Dedication for Medal of Honor recipient USAF TSgt. John Chapman on September 30<sup>th</sup> and the AT&T Veterans 3 Mile Charity Run at the DVA Campus scheduled for November 10<sup>th</sup>. The Commissioner also spoke of the Veterans Day ceremonies to be held on and off the DVA Campus and Wreaths Across America to be held on Dec. 15<sup>th</sup>.

## **II. Old Business**

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

Chair McDavid asked Commissioner Saadi to provide an update on the HCC license. The Commissioner explained that the DVA initiated an in-depth review performed by the HCC clinical admissions team in consultation with the State Department of Public Health (DPH), Department of Social Services (DSS) and Office of Policy and Management (OPM) for the long-term clinical care needs of current HCC Veteran Patients and the approximately thirty Veterans pending admission the HCC waiting list. The goal now is to transition the HCC from a Chronic Disease Hospital (CDH) to a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF).

This review resulted in the determination that transitioning the HCC from a CDH to a SNF with specialized beds, would significantly better address the needs of Veteran Patients and the needs of a larger number of Veterans across our State in the provision of long-term clinical care than the DVA's current license.

The DVA is assembling the Healthcare Licensure Transition team which will be led by the HCC Administrator and include key DVA internal assets from the Fiscal Department as well as representatives from DPH, DSS and potential asset augmentation by existing state vendors focusing on current patient assessments.

The transition to a SNF with specialized beds is to be accomplished without reducing the current level of care for existing Veteran Patients and will maintain the additional clinical and operational services not traditionally associated with a community based SNF such as an outside pharmacy, laboratory, full time onsite physician along with many other ancillary programs and services with a Veteran-centric focus.

Trustees questioned the Commissioner on the funding of the HCC and the swiftness of the decision to switch from dual licensure to SNF. The Trustees also questioned the staffing needs of the SNF. The Commissioner explained that transitioning to SNF had been a part of the dual licensing discussion

since December of 2017, and it was determined that the dual license option was no longer feasible. Trustee Nelligan reiterated that an internal assessment determined that the information given to the Commissioner regarding dual licensure being the best course of action was incorrect. The Commissioner explained that currently there are 29 veterans on the waiting list and the HCC has 29 empty beds yet Veterans cannot be admitted as they do not meet CDH admission criteria. The transition from CDH to SNF will allow continuity of care for DVA Residential Veterans and admission of those on the HCC waiting list. The Commissioner also reported that OPM and DAS approved refilling some staff positions but that he continues to engage DAS and OPM to obtain approval to refill other positions.

#### **B. Program Fee Committee Update:**

The Chair recognized Trustee Barry to report on the latest update on the Program Fee Committee. Trustee Barry reported that given the potential transition of Board membership and DVA leadership and that the A-wing renovation will not commence until November or December 2018, to table further decisions on the Program Fee until at least December 2018. Several components of the member's discussions ranged from fee levels to capping the program fee versus assessments.

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

The Chair then 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 last year had a \$600,000 surplus in Personal Services line item. Mr. Clark and Commissioner Saadi were able to persuade OPM to transfer \$170,000 from Personal Services to cover Operating Expenses after OPM first recommended the DVA use the IGW to pay for the operating expenses. Mr. Clark explained that some key positions such as the Director of Safety and Security and Director of Residential Programs & Services have been filled while the positions of Administrator of DVA Healthcare Center and Staff Attorney, are incoming. Mr. Clark reports that more budget details are to follow at the next board meeting in December.

#### **D. Projects Update**

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update including the A-Wing Renovation, 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. The Commissioner explained that the A-Wing Renovation is funded fully by donations so this project is not subject to bonding approvals or State budget appropriations. Trustee Nelligan asked if it was possible to invite outside entities to lease some the empty buildings on campus and have them pay for and upgrade the renovations or to expand on those buildings. Mr. Danao explained that we have tenants currently and they pay for maintenance costs. He further explained that leasing sometimes helps with space utilization however brining some buildings up to code can be costly. Mr. Danao reported on other working projects such as the HCC bedside televisions, energy conversation and multiple information technology upgrades.

Trustee Nelligan recommended forming a subcommittee to address the utilization of space on the Rocky Hill Campus. He further suggested creating an RFP to use buildings for veteran services providers. Commissioner Saadi explained that the DVA is currently engaged in this process with community based non-profits and intends to expand this approach.

### **III. New Business**

#### **A. Cemetery, Headstone Contract & Staffing**

Ryan McKenna, Director of Office of Assistance and Advocacy reported on the new two year contract signed with Czaja Brothers, Inc. for headstone setting services which will address the backlog of the installation of headstones, the current count is approximately 60 headstones to be installed. Mr. McKenna reported that the cemetery expansion project is on scheduled to be completed this year and the cemetery appearance grant project is estimated to be complete in February of 2020. The last large cemetery project is cemetery services Master Plan. The Commissioner thanked Trustees Barry, Benson, Mr. McKenna and Mr. Danao for their work in updating the headstone contract.

Mr. McKenna went on to report that DAS listed the full time Office Assistant position to serve in Cemetery Services and as of September 12<sup>th</sup>, there were over 350 applicants.

#### **B. Public Act 18-47 – OTH Qualifying Condition:**

Commissioner Saadi reported on Pubic Act 18-47, which takes affect October 1, 2018. The Department supported this legislation to address the limited circumstances where military personnel with otherwise honorable service (OTH) records were discharged less than honorably due to misconduct related to a Traumatic Brain Injury, Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) or as a victim of Military Sexual Trauma to be known as a “Qualifying Condition.” A third party licensed professional is required to make the qualifying condition determination on the DVA form which is then submitted to a state agency when applying for a benefit.

The DVA is responsible for the administration of this new law, has developed the required Qualifying Condition Certification forms and the DVA Commissioner has provided notice of the new law to every municipality, State agency and statewide Veteran Service Organization. The Commissioner went on to state that if the veteran is denied the benefit they will have to appeal to the agency that is making the denial. DVA will not appeal for the veteran on this issue. Representative Brian Ohler was one of the key components of this act. Trustee Michael Thomas asked if the certified document be prior or proceeding the OTH. Commissioner Saadi states that the documents predate the OTH, however if the form is not working, then DVA will make the appropriate adjustments. The Commissioner went on to report that the State of Connecticut is one of the first states to present this act.

Trustee Nelligan brought up the fact that a few years ago, the state gave Veteran-owned businesses preference in the state contract bidding process. Trustee Tarbox asked the Commissioner to approach DAS to recognize the Veterans in the bidding process. The Commissioner stated that this is in place, however, if DAS is not recognizing the Veterans that are bidding and giving them the preference to let him know and he will investigate.

Trustee Tarbox asked if there were any politicians asking to come on campus to tour. Commissioner answered that there were no invites extended to political candidates explaining that the state cannot use any state apparatus for the advancement of a political candidacy. The candidates are welcome to visit if invited by a Veteran but they cannot campaign on campus.

Trustee Ron Coveney informed the Board that he will be resigning from the Veterans Council and the Board in order to focus more on his non-profit organization. He states that he's confident in the new leadership of Residential Director of Programs and Services, Leslie Nieves. The Commissioner thanked Ron for his service and that no matter the outcome of this year's elections and decisions he will strive to set the agency on a sustainable path forward with strong leaders that can sustain a change in administration.

Chair McDavid set the next Board meeting for Wednesday, December 12, 2018 at 3:30pm.

#### IV. Closing

There being no further business, Chair McDavid entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Harris and seconded by Trustee Barry. Motion passed unanimously at 5:16 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



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Christopher McDavid, Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 10/5/2018