



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
August 26, 2020**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting (conducted via Teleconference) was called to order by Chairman Thomas at 3:00 PM.

In attendance: John Banks, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Mark Spranzo, Michael Thomas, Kjell Tollefsen, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent: Paul Barry, Alyssa Kelleher

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Michael Clark, Joseph Danao, Darlene Deschaine, Tammy Marzik, Leslie Nieves, and Ryan McKenna.

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

Chairman Thomas stated that this meeting would primarily cover the topics on the agenda provided. Chairman Thomas then asked for Commissioner Thomas Saadi to brief on DVA achievements and events.

Commissioner Saadi spoke briefly about the donations received during the pandemic, these included 45,000 bottles of water for use at Stand Down and other DVA Veteran events. Commissioner Saadi reported that he presented Quilts of Valor to several Veterans in the Residential Facility as well as presenting Veteran Council President Mark Spranzo with a Citation from Governor Lamont and a Certificate of Appreciation from the DVA. On July 21st the CT Air National Guard assisted DVA Staff with a full PIT Count within the Residential Facility. On August 15th Commissioner Saadi served as the Master of Ceremonies for the Danbury Veterans Council commemoration of 75 years since the victories in World War II.

The upcoming events include Stand Down Virtual Sessions on Thursday, September 24th and Stand Down in person events on Friday, September 25th to take place at several locations, Bridgeport, Danbury, Rocky Hill and Norwich. On November 7th there will be a Patriots Park Race in Coventry and on November 11th there will be a 2:00 pm ceremony at the Middletown State Veterans Cemetery as well as a 3:00 pm ceremony at the DVA campus.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

A. COVID-19 Response & Recovery

Commissioner Saadi reported on the DVA website links that provide information to the public regarding COVID-19 Mitigation Protocols as well as the updates sent out daily to the DVA Stakeholders. Currently there are no veteran residents or veteran patients that have tested positive. One staff member in the HCC tested positive, who then returned to work consisting with CDC and DPH guidelines to work at the facility. Due to this employees testing positive 16 veteran patients were placed into isolation, however, they are in the green zone and have all tested negative. Commissioner Saadi stated the agency has plenty of PPE and supplies.

B. Budgeting and Staffing

Chairman Thomas recognized Fiscal Manager Michael Clark from DVA's Fiscal Office who gave an update on the budget and staffing trends. He reports that the DVA has a budget of 25.5 million dollars and the DVA came \$286,000 under budget. The biggest expense for this quarter was funding for additional staffing and overtime due to the pandemic. Mr. Clark reported that he used a supply chain management model to set up the inventory of testing kits, schedule of testing staff and vets as well as building services of staff.

C. Projects Report

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update which include the Cemetery Appearance project, the Cemetery Expansion and the Cemetery Services Master Plan, all of which are completed. On the Rocky Hill Campus the abatement projects started in Buildings #5 and #60, with a no start date on Building #51. The ADA Upgrades are 40% complete in Buildings #2, #3 and #4. The Campus Security System is in the planning phase, the DVA Water Improvement Project is in the programming phase and the DVA Energy Efficiency Project was awarded a DEEP Grant for \$270,000. Quality of Life Improvements include the D-Wing Renovation which is 70% complete. A-Wing Renovation is setting up an isolation wing which is 30% complete. The next bond meeting is scheduled for September 25, 2020 and the new request is \$215,000 for minor capital repairs.

D. Cemetery Property Acquisition

Commissioner Saadi reported on the Cemetery Property Acquisition. Currently DVA is awaiting completion of property appraisals (two) being conducted by DAS vendors and some bonding funds need to be identified and available for allocation to purchase property. The Commissioner went on to state that if the appraisals are within an acceptable range discussions can begin, additional bonding will need to be identified and informational updates must be discussed with the Lt. Governor and the Legislature.

III. New Business

A. Storm Isaias Recovery

Commissioner Saadi reported the DVA activated its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) on Monday August 3rd to prepare for Storm Isaias. As a result of the storm, many trees were uprooted and

power lines downed causing loss of public utility power to the Campus and several buildings sustained roof and other damage. DVA's emergency generators kick in powering the Campus. After operating on DVA's emergency generators and a supplemental generator from Eversource, utility power was restored on Tuesday August 11th. The DVA is in the process of repairing roofs and addressing other urgent repairs, conducting detailed damage assessment and developing plans for long-term repairs and the strengthening of infrastructure.

B. Stand Down 2020

Director Lesbia Nieves reported that Stand Down 2020 will be held on two days beginning Thursday, September 24th, with a brief kickoff ceremony at 9:00 am at the DVA Rocky Hill Campus, followed by online informational sessions and webinars conducted by the DVA and other agencies and community service providers. Veterans will be able to register, beginning on 9/1/2020, for events for the portions that they are interested in participating to include attendance to the second day event at various distribution locations. On Friday, September 25th from 8am to 3pm the DVA will coordinate distribution of personal need items to Veterans by Veteran Service Organizations and community based non-profits at four locations. All four sites will have COVID-19 testing and flu shots.

C. BOT Wreaths Across America – COL Gates Cemetery Ceremony

Chairman Thomas asked Trustee Vogt to report on the Wreaths Across America event. Trustee Vogt reported that the subcommittee has prepared a solicitation letter regarding raising funds for the Colonel Gates wreaths for this year's event. Trustee Vogt recommends submitting the letter to various businesses such as PWA, EB and any other large businesses that the board could recommend. All monies for this event must be submitted by November 30th to the Wreaths Across America main branch in Maine.

IV. Closing

Due to time constraints Chairman Thomas suggested that the board meet soon to address Cemetery issues and set a date for the next board meeting. Motion was made and passed unanimously at 4:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Michael Thomas, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 9/21/20