



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
July 22, 2019**

I. Convene Meeting:

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Michael Thomas at 3:00 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by Trustee Patrick Nelligan.

In attendance were Trustees: Paul Barry, Philip Cacciola, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Heather Sandler, Michael Tetrault, Michael Thomas, Kjell Tollefsen, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis. Also in attendance from the DVA staff, Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Patrice Olson, Tammy Marzik, Laura Nelson, Ryan McKenna, Joe Danao, Lesbia Nieves, and Darlene Deschaine.

Absent Trustees: John Banks, Richard Benson, Juan Cruz and Alyssa Kelleher.

Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion by Trustee Dziekan and seconded by Trustee Barry. Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner's update: Commissioner Saadi reported on recent events and achievements of the CT DVA including the ribbon cutting event at the DVA facility for the C-Wing Quality of Life Improvements, the policy signing of the Laotian Hmong Granted Burial Rights and Team DVA Bike ride to benefit CT Veterans Legal Center for which the DVA team raised \$5,000. The Commissioner also reported on community based donations of supplies to DVA Veterans as well as monetary donations totaling \$5,700.00. Upcoming events include the Cromwell Vietnam Vet Event, the 102nd Army Band Performance & Cookout at the DVA, Homerun for Heroes at Dunkin' Donuts Park, the Rock 4 Vets Concert, the Annual DVA Stand Down Event on Sept 20th and the DVA Women Veteran Health & Wellness Event in Middletown on October 5th.

II. Old Business

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

Chairman Thomas asked Commissioner Saadi for an update on the Healthcare transition. The Commissioner explained that the transition from a Chronic Disease Hospital (CDH) to a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) is near complete and the agency reached two milestones, the first was passing the physical plant inspection by DPH and the second was the Veteran Outpatient Clinic (VOC) passing

all inspections and receiving a DPH license to operate. The DPH is scheduled to conduct the clinical/administrative inspection of the HCC the week of July 29th. The Commissioner asked HCC Administrator Laura Nelson to update the Board on staffing and related matters. Ms. Nelson reported that the DVA has hired additional clinical staff including a Day Supervisor, a Director of Nursing and an Admissions Director who will also assist with memorial services. Ms. Nelson also reported that the HCC census is currently 89 beds filled and 36 beds empty.

B. Fiscal Report:

The Commissioner reported on the State Budget and staffing trends explaining that the Governor's proposed budget adequately funds the DVA. The agency ended FY 2018 with a surplus, which was required to be remitted to the General Fund. Chairman Thomas and Trustee Vogt asked if the remittance of this past fiscal year would affect next year's budget negatively. The Commissioner responded that the DVA has good lines of communication with OPM and the Governor's Office and they understand the surplus was a temporary occurrence and that the approved full funding will be needed in the next fiscal year.

C. Projects Update, Cemetery Admin Update

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a DVA Projects update reporting that the cemetery expansion project is nearly complete and the appearance project is projected to finish in the spring of 2020. In response to questions regarding the "loss" of a DVA contractor Mr. McKenna explained that Berlin Industries, which performs the opening and closing of plots, was bought by TNT Contracting, and that Berlin that will continue to work at the Cemetery. Trustees Barry and Galgano wanted clarification on the DVA policy regarding personal items left on headstones/gravesites of the veterans. Mr. McKenna explained that DVA policy which was updated by Commissioner Saadi and Mr. Danao explained that due to the construction at the Cemetery some personal items will need to be removed even if compliant with the Cemetery policy. Mr. Danao reported that the Patriot's Landing Homes will soon be connected to the MDC water system eliminating the ongoing water interruptions as a result of being on the "old" DVA water loop. Trustee Barry asked for an update on the backlog of the reimbursement of headstones. Ryan McKenna explained that there have been delays due to prior staffing issues however, office procedures have been updated and he will keep the BOT informed of progress on the issue.

Chairman Thomas then asked for a point of personal privileged and he and Commissioner Saadi presented former BOT Chair Christopher McDavid with a certificate of recognition for his service as BOT Chair for the prior three years.

D. Semi-Private/Independent living Program

Commissioner Saadi reported on the newly opened Semi-private/Independent Living Program (SSLP) with 12 double occupancy semi-private rooms for Veteran Residents. The residents are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of this wing. The Commissioner and staff did an inspection mid-July and everything was in order, neat and clean. The veterans are satisfied with this living arrangement. The Commissioner went on to report that the three rooms in B-Wing will be updated as well following the SSLP model. B-Wing will accommodate 6 Resident Veterans and the Veterans will be assigned to clean their space one day a week.

III. New Business

A. Committee Chairs Appointed

Chair Thomas appointed the following Committees and Chairpersons: Trustee Galgano Chair Governance Committee; Trustee Tollefson Chair Medical Licensing Committee; Trustee Sandler Chair Female Veterans Committee; Trustee Works-Dennis Chair Campus Building & Grounds Committee; Trustee Barry Chair Cemetery Building & Grounds Committee; Trustee Vogt Chair Media & Community Relations Committee; Chair Thomas Chair Legislative/Political Committee.

B. Commissioner Military Duty Update

Commissioner Saadi reported that he will be away on Military Active Duty from late September to April. During his leave of absence he will remain Commissioner of DVA and will be in contact with the DVA staff via regular conference calls and periodic in person staff meetings at least twice per month. He will report a final leadership structure to the BOT once approved by the Governor.

IV. Closing

Chairman Thomas discussed the need to meet again before the Commissioner leaves on military duty, the next meeting will take place on September 18th, 2019 at 3:00. There being no further business, Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made and passed unanimously at 4:05 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Michael Thomas, Chairman
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 9/11/19