

# Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs



## Board of Trustees Annual Report for 2019

Michael Thomas  
Chairperson

Patrick Nelligan  
Vice-Chairperson

July 14, 2020



*“Serving Those Who Served”*



July 14, 2020

Dear Governor Lamont and Members of the Veterans Affairs Committee:

We are pleased to submit this report in accordance with C.G.S. §27-102n(i). The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Board of Trustees (Board) continues working hard to serve Connecticut's Veterans through the oversight of and collaboration with the DVA along with local, state and federal agencies, Veteran Service Organizations, community partners and volunteers to ensure the delivery of Veterans programs and benefits in accordance with state and federal law and best practices in a sustainable manner.

The Board was restructured pursuant to Public Act 15-197, codified in C.G.S. §27-102n, which expanded and reorganized the Board and provided greater oversight of some aspects of the DVA. The new law also required, for the first time, that the DVA provide comprehensive quarterly reports to the Board on more than a dozen areas of DVA operations. In addition to providing these quarterly reports the DVA also provides all Veteran Residents with a semi-annual report on the revenue and expenditures of the DVA Institutional General Welfare Fund and the opportunities to submit suggestions for the use of the IGW.

The Board fulfilled its duties during 2019 through active engagement in the oversight of both operational issues and policy changes at the DVA with regular Board meetings and briefing by DVA Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi and DA Staff as well as the work of multiple ad hoc subcommittees. Board members regularly contacted State Legislators and other elected officials to provide input on issues impacting Veterans at the DVA Rocky Hill Campus and across the State.

The Board worked with the DVA to improve the DVA Residential Program through implementation of updates to major policies including the new Semi-Private Living Program, enhanced case management and the continuation of the legal assistance program. The Board closely monitored the successful transition of the DVA Healthcare Center to a Skilled Nursing Facility and has been active policy updates for the State Veterans Cemetery.

While not within the statutorily mandated reporting period, it is important to highlight the strong collaboration between the Board and Commissioner Saadi in the DVA's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included regular conference calls and written updates, often daily, by the Commissioner to Board members and the rapid response to questions and concerns by Board members with full transparency on DVA COVID-19 mitigation efforts.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael Thomas  
Chairperson  
Veteran, United States Navy

Patrick Nelligan  
Vice-Chairperson  
Veteran, United States Army

# **DVA Board of Trustees Annual Report for 2019<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

This report is submitted in accordance with C.G.S. §27-102n(i), which requires, in pertinent part, that the DVA Board of Trustees (Board) report on the progress in fulfilling its mission based on programmatic outcomes and provide recommendations, if any, for improving the delivery of services to veterans and the addition of new programs. The Board's statutory mission is to review and comment on the DVA Budget and major policy and programmatic changes and to review agency regulations prior to adoption by the Commissioner relating to:

- a. Admission and discharge or transfer of Veterans.
- b. Fee schedule for programs, services and benefits.
- c. Participation of eligible family members in programs or services.

Throughout 2019 the Board has fulfilled its statutory mission through active engagement with the DVA leadership and oversight of DVA operations, policies and programs. This highly collaborative process is consistent with Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi's leadership philosophy of empowering the Board through transparency and bilateral engagement with the Board related to the full spectrum of DVA programs and operations.

At the Board's regular quarterly meetings Commissioner Saadi and DVA Senior Staff have provided comprehensive and detailed PowerPoint briefing updates regarding the agency budget, staffing, facilities, projects, legislation and policies along with proposals for expanded and additional programs as well as existing and anticipated challenges, fiscal and operations, impacting the DVA and Veterans programs across the State.

In addition to the briefings provided at each DVA Board meeting the DVA provides quarterly written reports to the Board with information necessary for the Board to fulfill its mission. These reports include, among other things, program and policy updates, data and performance measures in the following areas:

- (1) Budget revenues and expenditures.
- (2) Staffing levels.
- (3) Facilities and fleet management.
- (4) Current and planned projects.
- (5) Residential Facility and Patriot's Landing Family Housing applications for admission including number of Veterans admitted, reasons for denials or withdrawals of applications for admission and overall monthly occupancy rates in residential programs.
- (6) Summary of voluntary and involuntary discharges from Veterans from the Residential Program and reasons for discharge (e.g. community based transitional housing, independent living, disciplinary actions, etc . . .)
- (7) Summaries of Healthcare Center patient census, clinical services and any incident rates.
- (8) Summary of programs overseen by the Office of Advocacy and Assistance and caseload figures for veterans' service officers.

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<sup>1</sup> For reasons explained in Chairperson's cover letter this report is delayed in submission.

- (9) Cemetery and memorial services including burial statistics.
- (10) Results of any federal and state inspections.
- (11) Summaries by type, frequency and resolution, of concerns raised by Veteran Residents of the petitions and complaints filed by Veteran Residents and relatives or authorized representatives of such Veteran Residents.
- (12) Additional reports which have included updates on the Bed Bug eradication program, results of client surveys, and the status of transitioning the Healthcare Center to a Skilled Nursing license.

In providing this information and in responding to inquiries by Board members on a myriad of issues, the DVA leadership and staff exhibit openness and transparency which contributes greatly to the ability of the Board to effectively perform its statutory mission.

Organizationally this report summarizes the Board's activities and provides recommendations for each of the DVA's four core functions, addresses whether the DVA implemented previous recommendations and concludes with general recommendations for the DVA overall.

## **Board Activities and Recommendations for DVA Core Functions**

### **I. Residential Programs and Services**

#### **a. Board activities**

The Board has been actively engaged in many major program and policy updates implemented during 2019 including the Residential Program. These activities include assisting with the development of procedures and policies for the operation of the DVA new Semi-Private Living Program as explained in greater detail below.

The Board continued its ongoing review of the Residential Program Fee after the Program Fee Sub-committee and the Board determined in Dec 2018, that the existing policy of payment of 30% of adjusted income after four months of residency, was operating well and recommended no changes at that time. However, the Board did recommend reviewing the Program Fee policy when planned semi-private rooms are available to Veteran Residents on a limited basis pursuant to a planned pilot program. The Board initiated the review and did not recommend a multi-tiered system in which Veterans in communal living pay one fee and those in semi-private living pay a different fee. Instead the Board encouraged the expansion of the Semi-Private Living Program and asked for the DVA to consider a single reduced Program Fee once the majority of wings are transitioned to Semi-Private living.

In 2019 Board members were actively involved with DVA Stand Down, an annual event on Campus that brought together 125 federal, State and local agencies and social service organizations to provide more than 1000 Veterans with services such as medical and dental screenings, employment and educational assistance, legal and motor vehicle help, state and federal Veterans Affairs benefits information and housing referrals. The value of Stand Down for the state's Veteran community can be seen both in the increase in the number of services provide to veterans and in the increase in the number of Veterans attending Stand Down. In 2016, approximately 70 organizations participated and approximately 800 Veterans attended Stand Down and in 2019, the number of participating agencies was 125 with more than 1000 Veterans attending.

#### **b. Implementation of Prior Recommendations:**

There were three major recommendations of the Board in its report issued in 2019 and the DVA has successfully achieved each as follows:

1. **Board recommendation:** The DVA should provide continuum of care for those Veteran Residents who are aging in place and unable to either secure housing or function in a community based setting.

**DVA Action:** In 2019 the DVA successfully transitioned its Healthcare Center (HCC) from a chronic disease hospital to a skilled nursing facility. This change provides Veteran Residents who are aging in place with the opportunity to receive long-term skilled nursing care commensurate with their physiological and functional needs. The transition of the HCC to a skilled nursing facility is discussed in greater detail in section II of this report.

2. Board recommendation: The DVA should move forward with plans for a Semi-Private Living Program (“SPLP”) in the Residential facility and in doing so require, consistent with Federal State Veteran Home rules, that Veteran Residents contribute to the upkeep of their living space and common areas.

DVA Action: In June 2019 the DVA implemented major improvements in the Residential Facility which included a Semi-private Living Program” in Residential C-Wing with 12 double occupancy semi-private updated rooms for Veteran Residents replacing the 4 person communal rooms. The updates include new floors, painting, privacy walls, furnishings, lighting and artwork. In addition to updated accommodations, the SPLP is intended to promote team work among Veteran Residents, build individual capacity to accomplish goals and promote a greater level of independence and self-reliance in support of Veterans securing community based education, employment and housing opportunities. Later in 2019 the program was expanded to part of B-wing with three more rooms and the DVA has plans to expand the program to another full residential wing in 2020. These improvements were accomplished without additional appropriations through the DVA’s dynamic leveraging and maximizing donations, in-kind contributions, volunteers and in-house staff.

3. Board Recommendation: There should be enhanced recreational activities including additional off Campus trips including out of State tourist type destinations such as Washington, D.C., New York City and Boston.

DVA Action: In 2019 DVA expanded outdoor physical recreation programs such as equine therapy (**really? I thought we were not doing this...**), organized walks, rowing and kayaking and, for the first time in many years conducting a multiday recreational trip. The trip was to Washington DC from October 18-21, in which 25 Veteran Residents took part, many of whom wrote thank you cards and notes to Commissioner Saadi and Residential Director Lesbia Nieves thanking the DVA for a wonderful experience.

**c. Recommendations**

1. The DVA should have procedures in place and make facility improvements to avoid the suspending of HCC admissions during future health emergencies (including a COVID-19 resurgence in Connecticut) as it is often those most in need of the healthcare services that the DVA provides who are disproportionately negatively impacted during a health emergency.
2. While the DVA did operate a temporary COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Unit (IRU) within the Residential Facility, the Board recommends the establishment a long-term IRU in a currently unoccupied residential wing. This will allow for the temporary wing to transition to Semi-Private Living as was planned prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Implementing this recommendation will, as has been discussed between the Board and Commissioner Saadi, allow the DVA to maintain regular admission process during a future pandemic and will also assist in mitigating the spread of infectious disease with fewer Veterans in shared living space.
3. Continue to Expand the Semi-Private Living Program within the Residential Facility.

4. Enhance engagement with Veteran Residents who are struggling with their Individual Treatment Programs and active intervention with Veteran Residents who are failing in the performance of the required Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and require a higher level of care not available within the Residential program. Such an approach is in the best interest of the Veteran as the goal of the DVA is to help move Veterans to a better quality and more productive life through supportive programs and services that match the physical and mental health needs of the Veteran.

## **II. Healthcare Center**

### **a. Board activities**

The Board was actively engaged throughout 2019, in the process of the DVA transitioning of the Sgt. John Levitow Healthcare Center (HCC) from a chronic disease hospital to a state licensed and Center for Medicaid & Medicare Systems (CMS) certified long-term care skilled nursing facility. The Board conducted oversight of this transition process through the DVA quarterly reports, Board meetings and conference calls and multiple site visits by Board members who provided helpful guidance to the DVA. The Board members advocated for maintaining the additional clinical and operational services at the DVA Campus, not traditionally associated with a community based skilled nursing facility, such as an onsite pharmacy, onsite physician services and in the Residential Facility, an outpatient clinic.

This highly involved and lengthy process involved the complete restructuring of HCC staffing, the rewriting of nearly all HCC policies and procedures as well as many physical upgrades and repairs to the HCC. This transition better addresses the needs of existing Veteran Patients, provides a continuum of care to Residential Veterans who are no longer able to care for themselves and better serves the needs of a large number of Veterans across our State in the provision of long-term clinical care.

### **b. Implementation of Prior Recommendations:**

There were two major recommendations of the Board in its report issued in 2019 and the DVA has successfully achieved each as follows:

1. **Board Recommendation:** The DVA should move expeditiously with the transition of the HCC to a skilled nursing facility and as soon as possible begin the admission process for Veterans on the HCC waiting list.

**DVA Action:** As explained above, DVA has successfully completed the transition of the HCC to a licensed skilled nursing facility and, while temporality delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has opened the regular admission process to Veterans in Connecticut.

2. **Board Recommendation:** The DVA must focus on staff restructuring to provide greater direct clinical care to Veteran Patients and reduce costs through the streamlining of administrative and non-direct care overhead. This restructuring should include retraining HCC staff to provide the highest standard of care through the implementation of best practices and use of new technology.

DVA Action: Integral to the transition to skilled nursing process is the ongoing training and retraining of HCC staff and the onboarding of new staff with experience in successful community based skilled nursing facilities. Such training will remain on an ongoing process in order to both comply with regulatory requirements and maintain adherence to industry best practices, especially in a COVID-19 environment.

### **c. Recommendations**

1. While the DVA established a COVID-19 Isolation Recovery Unit in the HCC, it is not operationally practical to restrict use of an entire medical wing in that manner. Therefore, the DVA should consider physical upgrades or use of new equipment to establish negative pressure rooms for use in the future to address the care of COVID-19 positive patients.
2. The DVA should have procedures in place and make facility improvements to avoid the suspending of HCC admissions during future health emergencies (including a COVID-19 resurgence in Connecticut) as it is often those most in need of the healthcare services that the DVA provides who are disproportionately negatively impacted during a health emergency.
3. The DVA should initiate the phasing out of Veteran Patients smoking, consistent with best practices, which will enhance the health of Veteran Patients and of the DVA staff who are required to escort Veteran Patients while they are smoking. This may be a gradual process by which current Veteran Patients are provided smoking cessation support and new admissions are not permitted to smoke.

## **III. Office of Advocacy and Assistance**

### **a. Board activities**

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OA&A) employs Veteran Service Officers, all combat deployment Veterans, who provide representation to Veterans and eligible dependents in their claims for Federal pensions and benefits. OA&A is also responsible for determining eligibility for the Veteran flag on the state driver's license or identification card, certifying Veteran Owned Micro Businesses for state contract bidding, administering the Municipal Veterans Representative Program, validating Veterans as eligible for pretrial diversionary programs and for determining eligibility for the issuance of the CT Wartime Service Medal. The Board's activities related to OA&A in 2019 focused on legislative issues regarding Veteran programs and services and advocating for additional funding and support for the DVA. Board members also asked lawmakers to carefully consider imposing new mandates on the DVA without additional funding as to do so would negatively impact the delivery of existing programs and services. Board members also actively promoted the services of OA&A to Veterans and Veteran Service Organizations across the State.

### **b. Implementation of Prior Recommendations:**

There were two major recommendations of the Board in its report issued in 2019 which the DVA has addressed as follows:

1. Board Recommendation: While the DVA has fulfilled its responsibilities in administering a growing number of programs and the promulgation of new reports over the past several years, additional staffing in OA&A is recommended in order to ensure the timely provision of services to our State's Veterans.

DVA Action: In late 2019 the Commissioner tasked the OA&A Director with developing a staffing plan to address the increased administrative duties of OA&A. That plan, which includes adding the position of Veteran Service Officer Supervisor and consolidating Cemetery and Memorial Service staff at the State Veterans Cemetery, has been approved by Commissioner Saadi and is pending implementation based on available funding.

2. Board Recommendation: That members of the General Assembly should avoid imposing new reporting mandates on DVA without first reviewing existing requirements to determine whether existing reports can be consolidated and/or altered to address the informational needs sought.

DVA Action: Commissioner Saadi has openly communicated this concern to lawmakers in formal hearings and informal conversations. In doing so, Commissioner Saadi has offered alternative means to address Legislator's valid concerns with the provision of information and data on Veterans programs and services to elected officials and their constituents. The DVA has also continually updated its website to provide an increasing amount of information in a user-friendly format to help facilitate the connecting of Veterans with the many available programs and services.

### **c. Recommendations**

1. OA&A will need to develop new methods to conduct outreach in a COVID-19 environment taking into consideration that many of its potential clients are not regular users of web based virtual means of communication. This may include traditional mailings either by the DVA to target constituencies, regular outreach to community partners asking them to disseminate information to their networks, working with state and federal agencies to make OA&S services information available to points of client services.

## **IV. Cemetery and Memorial Services**

### **a. Board activities**

OA&A is responsible for overseeing DVA Cemetery and Memorial Services which administers three state Veterans' cemeteries. The first, and oldest, is located in Darien and closed to new burials in 1980 when reaching capacity; the second is the Colonel Gates Cemetery located in Rocky Hill which is reserved for Veteran Residents and Veteran Patients of the DVA (the DVA receives no federal funds for this cemetery); and the third is the federally recognized State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown for which the DVA receives federal funding for capital improvements.

In 2019 the Board Chairperson appointed a sub-committee on Cemetery issues. The sub-committee actively engaged with DVA throughout 2019 in developing solutions which addressed concerns relating to sustaining maintenance and upkeep of the Cemetery and regarding the need to increase long-term burial/internment capacity at the Cemetery. These and other issues were

identified in the Veterans Cemetery Master Plan report commissioned by the DVA and issued in February 2019. Among the recommendations were options for property acquisition to address the increase in annual burial rates over the past ten years which have resulted in the projection of the Cemetery reaching internment capacity in approximately seven to nine years. Also included in the Cemetery Master Plan report and in best practices guidance by the National Cemetery Administration, were recommendations for the consolidation of Cemetery and Memorial administrative and grounds staff at the Cemetery, construction of additional administrative and operational buildings including a committal shelter, secure equipment storage areas and a breakroom for Cemetery staff.

The Board was updated regularly on two major capital projects at the Cemetery with the first being the addition of 2000 preplaced burial vaults and extensive drainage and irrigation upgrades in an area of the Cemetery previously deemed unusable. The second is the Appearance and landscaping project which resulted in the cleaning and realignment of more than 10,000 headstones and the re-sodding and paving of much of the Cemetery.

**b. Implementation of Prior Recommendations:**

There were two major recommendations of the Board in its report issued in 2019 which the DVA has addressed as follows:

1. Board Recommendation: With extensive appearance improvements and the internal addition of 2000 preplaced burial vaults at the Veterans Cemetery there are increased maintenance and upkeep obligations requiring additional funding. Possible source of funding is the federal plot allowance funds which currently deposited into the State's General Fund. The General Assembly should consider allocating these funds to a dedicated budget line item for the perpetual care of the Veterans Cemetery. This would provide needed funds for current and long-term maintenance and improvements at the Veterans Cemetery in Middletown

DVA Action: Although not able to obtain funding for approval of additional staff positions at the Cemetery, the DVA was able to identify operational funds in order to contract for some essential services in order to maintain regular Cemetery operations. Commissioner Saadi stood up an internal working group tasked with developing a sustainable plan to address long-term maintenance through a combination of staff relocation and contracted services. This approach, which includes moving two administrative personnel from the main DVA Campus to the Cemetery, is expected to be implemented in the fall of 2020 subject to compliance with applicable collective bargaining agreement provisions.

2. The State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown will reach burial capacity within ten years. Therefore, the DVA must immediately initiate the process of securing additional land for either the expansion of the Veterans Cemetery in Middletown or for a new State Veterans Cemetery. The recommended course of action is the acquisition of land adjacent to the existing cemetery which will avoid the need for staff to maintain an additional cemetery. Acquisition of the land for the Middletown Cemetery will require a financial commitment from the state as federal Cemetery Administration funding is not available for the purchase of land to expand the cemetery.

### **c. Recommendations**

1. The DVA should continue with consolidating Cemetery and Memorial Services staff and Cemetery staff at the State Veterans Cemetery. As part of this consolidation, the DVA should expeditiously secure additional property for administrative offices and secure storage of equipment from the CT Valley Hospital which can be accomplished without the need for property acquisition funding.
2. Staff at the Cemetery, including those under the proposed consolidation, should have unity of supervision. Currently Cemetery and Memorial Services administrative staff report to the OA&A Manager while Cemetery grounds staff report to three persons depending on the subject matter. For scheduling burials staff reports to the OA&A Manager, with regard to regular and emergency maintenance matters staff reports to the DVA Facilities manager and for major capital projects they report to the DVA Director of Projects and Operations. This has created confusion in the carrying out of day to day operations and long-term matters. Instead all Cemetery personnel should report to the OA&A manager and by exception only for specific projects report to other DVA supervisors.

### **V. COVID-19 Mitigation Efforts**

The DVA implemented early and effective COVID-19 Mitigation Protocols across the agency's Core Function areas to mitigate the risk of exposure and spread of the virus to and among Veteran Patients, Residents and staff. Commissioner Saadi provided briefings to the full Board, which maintained a regular meeting schedule via virtual meeting platforms. Additionally, Commissioner Saadi held regular weekly calls with the Board Chair and Vice-Chair reporting on the DVA's COVID-19 status and regular operations.

Since the first week of March, the DVA has maintained a proactive approach to mitigating the risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19 through a broad range of temporary COVID-19 mitigation protocols. These included restrictions on visitors to the DVA Campus, restrictions on travel by Veteran Residents and Patients, establishing COVID-19 Isolation Recovery Units in the Residential Facility and Healthcare Center, conducting daily health screenings of Veterans and staff and temporarily suspending new admissions to the Residential and Healthcare programs. Travel by Veteran Patients was limited to medical appointments, humanitarian circumstances and those working essential jobs.

For Veterans returning from off Campus hospitalization, there is enhanced medical screening, verification from the transferring facility that the Veteran has been screened and tested negative for COVID-19. Additionally such Veterans are subject to a protective isolation period. Throughout the pandemic, the DVA maintained a robust supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff and Veterans and continues to do so in order to handle a COVID-19 surge. The DVA worked closely with the Federal VA Healthcare System in CT to increase the DVA's COVID-19 testing capacity, share best practices and coordinate the delivery of medical care to DVA Veterans which included increased access to telehealth services.

These measures, among many others, resulted in a COVID-19 infection rate far lower than many other congregant living and skilled nursing facilities for Veterans and in the community at

large. The Board commends the Leadership and staff at the DVA for making the health and safety of our Veterans their first priority.

As of the date of this report, the DVA Healthcare Center had no COVID-19 positive Veteran Patients and no Veteran Patients had tested positive for COVID-19 in the prior two months. In the DVA Residential Facility all Veterans were tested in June with only one Veteran out of one-hundred and twenty Veteran Residents testing positive for COVID-19. The DVA continues regular health screenings of Veteran Residents and Patients. To date, the DVA has tested two hundred and twenty-three Veteran Residents and Patients (most tested multiple times) for COVID-19 with twenty-five testing positive. Of the twenty-five Veteran Residents and Patients who tested positive, twenty-two have recovered from the virus. One Veteran Resident and two Veteran Patients passed away in late April and early May due to COVID-19 complications. Four DVA staff members tested positive for COVID-19 and all have recovered and returned to work with no staff members testing positive for the virus in more than two months

## **VI. General Recommendations**

In addition to the specific core function recommendations above, the Board recommends the following:

1. In the wake of budget reductions over the past decade and the fiscal impact of the response to COVID-19 pandemic, the DVA is not able to absorb further budget cuts without a commensurate reduction in its capacity to provide quality services to our State's Veterans. As such, the Board recommends stable funding for the DVA and urges members of the General Assembly to exercise restraint when considering adoption of unfunded mandates for new programs, services or reporting requirements for the DVA.
2. The DVA should continue to enhance its programs and services through partnerships, especially with community based non-profits, using the successful partnership with Easterseals Rally Point as a model. This can be accomplished by providing low cost operational space on Campus in exchange for the provision of care and support to DVA Veterans and Community Based Veterans thereby enhancing programs and services without additional costs to the State.
3. The DVA should develop non-appropriated funding sources to support the perpetual care and maintenance of the State Veterans Cemetery which may include providing the opportunity for individual donations and fundraising by the Board through the Wreaths Across America program.

## **VII. Board Minutes**

Attached hereto are the minutes from each Board's meeting during 2019 and those that took place during the COVID-19 Pandemic, which demonstrate the activities of the Board in carrying out its mission and the transparency of the DVA in providing the Board with detailed information regarding operations, programs and services.

**Department of Veterans Affairs**

**Board of Trustees**

**Meeting Minutes**

**March 19, May 1, May 29, July 22, September 18, 2019,**

**January 3, 2020**

**March 27 & June 11 2020 (COVID-19 related)**



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
March 19, 2019**

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

**I. Convene Meeting:**

In the absence of an appointed Chairperson the Meeting was called to order by Commissioner Saadi at 3:34 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by DVA Residential Director Lesbia Nieves followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance: Mark Altieri, Paul Barry, Philip Cacciola, John Banks, Robert Cheslock, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, and Kjell Tollefsen. Also in attendance from the DVA staff, Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Patrice Olson, Laura Nelson, Ryan McKenna, Joe Danao, Lesbia Nieves, Tammy Marzik and Darlene Deschaine.

Absent: Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Paul Tarbox, and Michael Thomas.

A motion was entertained and passed by the Board to appoint Board Member Pat Nelligan as the Acting Chairman until such time Governor Lamont appoints a new Chairperson. Acting Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Dziekan and seconded by Trustee Leaf. Motion passed unanimously with no corrections or edits to the minutes.

**Commissioner's update:** The Commissioner reported on recent events and achievements of the CT DVA. The Commissioner attended many events throughout the state including several Wartime Service Medal. The Commissioner also reported that the DVA hosted several visits and campus tours by state with State Legislators as well as a visit from Representative Carpino assisting school children in the distribution of Valentine's Day cards to veterans at the Healthcare Center. Governor Lamont visited the DVA and met with senior staff and toured the Campus. In a follow up email, the Governor's staff requested additional information regarding the DVA's funding and planned projects. The DVA also hosted a tour with dignitaries from the Ukrainian Delegation, which included the newly appointed Ukrainian Ministry of Veterans Affairs. The Commissioner reported on some of the upcoming events which include the Dedication of Camp Nett on March 25<sup>th</sup> in Windsor Locks, the Easterseals 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Crystal Ball being held on March 30<sup>th</sup> and the Opening Day game of the Yard Goats on April 5<sup>th</sup> at which a stadium chair will be donated and dedicated in honor of our country's POWs. The Commissioner reported that he will be participating in several Memorial Day Parades and Memorial Day Events throughout the state.

The Acting Chair recognized Trustees Dziekan and Leaf who questioned the status of the Governor's appointees to the Board of Trustees. The Commissioner reported that there are a total of 18 positions on the Board of Trustees of which the Governor appoints 10 members including the Chairperson. There are currently 6 Legislative Appointments made and a Veteran representative from the Healthcare Center and one from the Residential facility. The Commissioner assured the Board that he has been in contact with the Governor's Office urging the reappointment of those wishing to stay on the Board and to appoint several new trustees with a focus on women Veterans.

## **II. Old Business**

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

Acting Chair Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi for an update on the Healthcare Transition process who then explained that the DVA continues the process of the transition through internal DVA assets and the support of other state agencies. The Commissioner reported on updates to the B-Clinic (Residential outpatient clinic) which will transition to a regular single shift during the week and a half shift on Saturdays. This approach will provide the level of care needed to Residential Veterans while continuing to work with them to build their capacity to be more independent and self-reliant. The Commissioner reported that Dr. Ramano, attending physician at the HCC, has decided to leave the DVA to join another state agency, however, the DVA a plan in place through a partnership with UConn Health for a Medical Director and multiple attending physicians to provide care at the HCC. As part of the license transition the Commissioner explained that the DVA was able to avoid outsourcing the pharmacy and rehabilitative services departments, while laboratory work will be performed through the expansion of an existing agreement with Quest laboratories. The Commissioner reported that OPM approved many new staff positions which include the hiring of up to 12 additional CNAs, a Director of Nursing, an additional Social Worker and Recreational Rehabilitation staff. Overall this will result in the increase from 3.5 to 4.0 hours of patient care per day.

Trustee Barry voiced his concerns regarding the reduced hours of the B-Clinic and the safety and health of the veterans, especially those veterans that may forget to take their meds or may fall through the cracks. In response Director Nieves assured the Board members that the social workers and the Veteran Residents have been working closely to update their treatment plans to ensure overall health and wellbeing. Trustee Benson asked why the lab work couldn't go the DPH lab that is situated next to the Department of Veterans Affairs. HCC Director Laura Nelson stated that the state laboratory is a forensic lab and does not conduct the testing that DVA requires whereas, Quest Laboratories sends out phlebotomists, does the lab work DVA needs and is a state approved contractor with the State of CT.

### **B. Fiscal Report:**

The Commissioner reported on the Budget and staffing trends stating that the overall recommended 2019-20 budget appropriated funds comes to \$23 million, of which \$500,000 plus goes to Soldiers, Sailors, Marine Fund. The IGW Contribution is \$3 million, with a DVA total budget of \$26 million. The IGW Contribution goes towards the Veterans Therapeutic Program, Pharmaceuticals and other support programs directly for veterans. The Commissioner went on the state that the \$2 million that was removed two years ago was restored last year and is not cut this year. The majority of the money is funded through program fees and spend down. The IGW Contribution funds does not go towards salaries, benefits or capital structure. As pointed out by Acting Chair Nelligan if anyone wants to contribute towards the

State of DVA, the IGW Contribution fund is recommended as it has six donation funds to which anyone may contribute.

### **C. Projects Update**

Commissioner Saadi provided some general information on the water main break which occurred the week of March 18<sup>th</sup>. Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update including the Fire Alarm Project and the Cemetery projects. The cemetery expansion plan is 99% complete and at the moment the appearance project is on a weather hold due to the very wet conditions and will continue once the grounds have dried. Mr. Danao went on to report that the Fire Alarm replacement in Residential is nearly complete and the Healthcare Center replacements have begun.

The Commissioner asked OA&A Director, Ryan McKenna, about the Cemetery Master Plan and the plan to hold informational sessions around the State. Mr. McKenna stated that the ideal plan is to hold a session on the DVA Campus, one in Western CT and one in Eastern CT to get the word out to the public. Mr. Danao stated that to continue with the Cemetery Master Plan an environmental process must go through before proceeding further, delivering this project publically is required. Trustee Barry said that when the informational sessions are scheduled it is important to invite Funeral Directors. Commissioner Saadi stated that the announcements regarding these sessions will be sent out to the Board of Trustees, Statewide Veteran Service Organizations, Municipal Veteran Reps as well as the CT Funeral Directors Association.

### **III. New Business**

#### **A. C-Wing: Semi-private and semi-independent living model.**

Acting Chair asked the Commissioner to report on the restructuring plan.

Commissioner Saadi reported that A-Wing renovation has been put on a temporary hold due to financial constraints. The Commissioner then explained that with the input from DVA Residential Staff the DVA has developed an alternate plan to reconfigure C-Wing to provide semi-private/independent living model without the cost of construction. The existing rooms will provide living quarters for two individuals rather than four, with privacy walls, new paint, polished floors, and cleaned lockers. Director Nieves explained that that Veterans would have basic upkeep responsibilities one day per week such as cleaning rooms, common hallway and the bathrooms on their Wing. A DVA staff cleaning crew would perform a deep clean once a week. Director Nieves went on to say that priority would be given to those Veterans that are working or attending school. Director Nieves stated that, overall, she did receive positive feedback from the veterans and a survey will be conducted soon regarding this matter. The goal is to provide a positive more self-reliant environment for our veterans. In response to questions from Trustees the Commissioner explained that this agency cannot legally impose a time limit on residency. The timeframe for this project is to have it in place by June or July.

Acting Chair Nelligan opened the meeting up to questions and further new business. Trustee Benson was concerned that with much of DVA funding going to staffing of the HCC that funding was being denied to other areas of the agency such as Veteran Services Officers. Director McKenna addressed the staffing concerns by stating that the DVA currently has seven Veteran Service Officers assigned to the 5 districts and recently hired a new office assistant for Cemetery and Memorial Services. The Commissioner added that no staffing or projects were being reduced or neglected based on HCC staffing

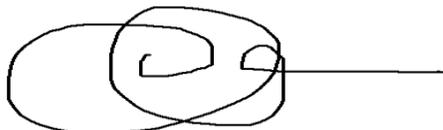
however, the DVA has been prioritizing the allocation of resources to meet HCC license transition deadlines. Trustee Benson raised a concern brought up at the last Board of Trustees meeting regarding the funding of Wreaths Across America. Director McKenna informed the Board of Trustees that a draft was provided to the former Chairperson but that he does not believe it was mailed to Wreaths Across America. A motion was made by the board and passed that a letter will be written by Acting Chairman Patrick Nelligan and mailed out promptly to Wreaths Across America mainly to find out how the fundraising is done.

The Commissioner reported on the DVA's compilation of a variety of Federal and State mental health resources for Veterans and their employers on the DVA website. The Commissioner also reported that he has reinstated a policy to conduct random inspections of the Veteran's facilities due to the uptick of contraband violations over the previous few months. This was communicated to Veteran Residents at a town hall meeting.

#### **IV. Closing**

The Chair stated that the next board meeting will be held on May 1, 2019 at 3:30 pm. There being no further business, Acting Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Benson and seconded by Trustee Leaf. Motion passed unanimously at 4:56 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'P' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

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Patrick Nelligan, Acting Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 1 April 2019



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
May 1, 2019**

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

**I. Convene Meeting:**

In the absence of an appointed Chairperson the Meeting was called to order by Commissioner Saadi at 3:32 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by Patrick Nelligan followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance: John Banks, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Peter Galgano, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Heather Sandler, and Kjell Tollefsen. Alyssa Kelleher attended via phone. Also in attendance from the DVA staff, Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Patrice Olson, Laura Nelson, Ryan McKenna, Steve Scatena, Joe Danao, Lesbia Nieves, Tammy Marzik and Darlene Deschaine.

Absent: Paul Barry, Richard Dziekan, Steven Harris, Michael Tetrault, and Michael Thomas.

The Acting Chairman asked all appointed and reappointed Trustees to stand for the oath which was administered by DVA Staff Attorney Patrice Olson who then distributed introductory packets and information to newly appointed Trustees, Juan Cruz and Heather Sandler. The Commissioner stated that Attorney Olson would be available to brief them on the statutory obligations as a Trustee. Acting Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Trustee Benson asked that the minutes be amended as he was mistakenly not on the attendance roll for the March 19, 2019, meeting. Motion by Trustee Leaf and seconded by Trustee Tollefsen to amend the minutes which passed unanimously.

**Commissioner's update:** The Commissioner reported on recent events and achievements of the CT DVA including attending many events throughout the state the Military Department rededicated of Camp Hartell and the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Easterseals Crystal Ball to benefit Veterans Rally and two Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day events on March 30<sup>th</sup>, in Hartford and in Danbury. On April 9<sup>th</sup> DVA OAA participated in the Heroes for Hire event at the Pratt & Whitney stadium in East Hartford. The Commissioner reported that on April 11<sup>th</sup> the Hartford Yard Goats kicked off opening day with a ceremony to dedicate a POW/MIA remembrance seat at the stadium. On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Commissioner recognized WWII Veteran, DVA HCC patient Marye Kraemer on her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. The upcoming events that the Commissioner reported on included Yard Goats Military Appreciation Game being held

May 18<sup>th</sup>; the Jewish Federation WWII Veteran Event tentatively scheduled for May 19<sup>th</sup>, the CT Veterans Memorial 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Memorial Day Ceremony on May 24<sup>th</sup>. The Commissioner explained that a DVA team is participating in the CT Veterans Legal Center, "Ride for Veterans." On July 23<sup>rd</sup> the DVA is hosting a cookout on Campus for the veterans and the 102<sup>nd</sup> Band will be performing at this event, and the DVA Annual Stand Down is on September 20<sup>th</sup>.

Commissioner Saadi updated the Board that the Governor has two remaining appointments to the Board as well as an appointment of the Board Chairperson. Acting Chair recognized Trustees Dziekan and Leaf who questioned the status of the Governor's appointees to the Board of Trustees. The Commissioner reported that there is a total of 18 openings on the Board of Trustees in which the Governor can appoint up to 10 members including the Chairperson. There are currently 6 Legislative Appointees, 1 Veteran voted in by the Healthcare Center and 1 Veteran voted in by the Residential facility. The Commissioner assured the Board that he has been in contact with the Governor's Office and will continue to update the members when he receives any new updates.

## **II. Old Business**

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

Acting Chair Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi for an update on the Healthcare Center (HCC) transition process who explained that the DVA continues the process of transitioning the Chronic Disease Hospital (CDH) to a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) which includes standing up an independently licensed outpatient clinic in the Residential Facility. The Commissioner reported that this process involves significant training and retraining of HCC staff and the updating of numerous HCC and DVA policies and procedures. The Commissioner asked Healthcare Center Administrator Laura Nelson to update the Board on this process and she reported that the process is 87% complete and inspections will begin next week. Administrator Nelson reported that former DVA physician, Dr. Romano voluntarily transferred to join another state agency. Currently the DVA has multiple attending physicians pursuant to a MOA with UConn Health which is been working "very well."

In response to a question from Trustee Benson, Administrator Nelson reported that the UConn Doctors are at the HCC daily and are on call 24 hours a day. Commissioner Saadi further explained that the number of physician rotations will increase in June. Acting Chair Nelligan asked Administrator Nelson if telemedicine, the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients is being implemented. Administrator Nelson reported that telemedicine is not part of the current transition but is being considered for future implementation. In response to a question from the Commissioner, Administrator Nelson reported that the outpatient clinic is being renovated and updated.

### **B. Fiscal Report:**

The Commissioner reported there is no change in the numbers as last reported in March except that the DVA has approximately a \$550,000 salary surplus due to vacancies, however, the DVA has reported a deficiency in the its operating expenses line time of approximately \$270,000. The Commissioner reported that the DVA has requested authorization from OPM to transfer approximately half of the \$550,000 from the salary surplus to the cover operating expenses with the remaining amount of the salary surplus going to the state's General Fund. Most of the OE deficiency is based on temporary and onetime increase in energy and utility use and costs including a two water main breaks

on campus and a pipe burst in Building 5. The DVA is in the process of consolidating operations and leaseholds from multipole buildings to building 50 which will reduce energy use and other utility costs.

### **C. Projects Update**

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update including the information on Cemetery projects, the asbestos abatement project and the status of bond allocation requests. The cemetery appearance project is half way complete with an estimated completion date in spring of 2020. The Cemetery Services Master Plan is complete and public hearings will be held across the state in May. Mr. Danao went on to report that the abatement projects in B-Wing is complete and others are ongoing campus wide. Patriot's Landing Homes will have the main water line replaced which will take Dinosaur State Park off DVA water supply. Mr. Danao went on to report that the two 400-gallon hot water tanks and A/C units in the HCC need to be replaced. Acting Chair Nelligan asked Mr. Danao if solar panels would be an option to investigate for future energy savings. Mr. Danao answered that, at this time, this is not an option as the electrical structure on the campus could not support the solar panels. Mr. Danao went on to state that the best solution in saving energy costs would be to switch over to gas on demand.

### **D. Semi-Private/Independent living model**

Commissioner Saadi introduced Residential and Program Director Leslie Nieves to present the Semi-Private Independent living model. Director Nieves reported that the DVA is in the process of renovating C-Wing in the Residential Facility and establishing a new Semi-private/Semi-independent Living Program with 12 semi-private rooms that will also provide a common area. Priority will be given to Veteran Residents who are working of Campus or attending school or trade certification program. All participants must be able to perform the ADLs and participate in minor cleaning and upkeep of the wing. The intent is to promote greater independence and self-confidence and better prepare Veterans to transition to community-based employment and housing. If this concept works, it could be a model for other wings of the residential facility. The Commissioner went on to state that A-Wing is gutted, however, due to the lack of funding this project is still on hold.

### **Other Old Business**

Trustee Benson asked whether the Civil Air Patrol has responded to a letter from the Board the fund raising through of Wreaths Across America. Acting Chair Nelligan stated that he has not received a response and stated that he would follow up by phone.

## **III. New Business**

### **A. Legislative Update**

Acting Chair Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi to report on the next item on agenda regarding the legislative update. The Commissioner reported on a new bill, HB 7064 which will update the name of the Municipal Veterans service contact person to "Municipal Veterans Representative" and would allow volunteers to service as said Municipal Veterans Representatives in addition to Municipal Veterans Commissions and Employees. This program is administered by the DVA in connecting Veterans to programs and services. There is no fiscal impact to towns and may effectuate greater

connection of Veterans to programs and services using qualified volunteers. The Commissioner went on to state that there is opposition to this bill and some towns are concerned that volunteers won't be as well versed or committed to helping the veterans in need. The Commissioner stated that he recently responded to a state representative concerning this issue and stated that most of these volunteers are better versed in Veterans rights and needs than a paid employee. The Commissioner went on to state that he's drafting up some language to clarify some of these concerns.

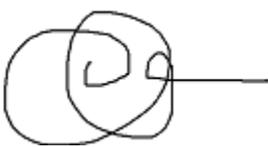
Acting Chair Nelligan asked if there was any type of tally on cases in any given year from the participating cities towns and Ryan McKenna answered that we don't currently have a tally, however, we can ask the towns for this information. This can be done the next time we send out our annual request for data from the towns. The Commissioner stated that the other bill DVA is working on is the definition of the two-year requirement of being admitted into DVA.

The Chair recognized Phil Cacciola who stated that he's been to the State Cemetery and stated that it looks great. He also wanted to update the board on the upcoming events in Middletown including the placing of flags on graves the Saturday before Memorial Day, Wreaths Across America, and the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony of the Shephard Homes on May 21<sup>st</sup>. This is a housing facility for veterans which currently accepted 26 veterans that have been placed. There is a total of 32 individual homes and it is subsidized by Section 8 housing. Home Depot donated all the appliances for this housing project.

#### **IV. Closing**

The Commissioner reminded the board that the Cemetery Master Plan Meeting will take place at 5PM after the BoT meeting. The Commissioner asked the new board members to tell the Board about themselves. Trustee Heather Sandler is as Navy veteran, a 2010 UConn graduate and a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the Veterans Administration. Trustee Juan Cruz is an Army Veteran who works for the Department of Homeland Security. The Acting Chair stated that the next board meeting will be held on July 10, 2019 at 3:30 pm. There being no further business, Acting Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Leaf and seconded by Trustee Galgano. Motion passed unanimously at 4:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



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Patrick Nelligan, Acting Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 7 May 2019



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
May 29, 2019**

**I. Convene Meeting:**

The meeting was called to order by newly appointed Chair Michael Thomas at 3:30 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by Trustee Paul Barry followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance were Trustees: John Banks, Paul Barry, Philip Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Alyssa Kelleher, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Michael Tetrault, Michael Thomas, Kjell Tollefsen, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis. Also in attendance from the DVA staff, Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Patrice Olson, Laura Nelson, Ryan McKenna, Steve Scatena, Joe Danao, Lesbia Nieves, and Darlene Deschaine.

Absent Trustees: Richard Benson, Steven Harris and Heather Sandler.

New Trustees, Sherri Vogt, Dawn Works-Dennis and Veterans Council President Michael Tetrault, and the Chairman Thomas were administered the oath of office by DVA Staff Attorney Patrice Olson. The Chair then appointed Trustee Nelligan as Vice-Chair of the Board who was sworn in by Attorney Olson. Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion by Vice-Chairman Nelligan and seconded by Trustee Galgano. Motion passed unanimously with Trustee Vogt abstaining as she did not have an opportunity to read the minutes.

Commissioner's update: Commissioner Saadi reported on recent events and achievements of the CT DVA. The Commissioner attended many events throughout the state including the ribbon cutting dedication ceremony at Columbus House on May 20<sup>th</sup> and many Memorial Day Ceremonies and parades over the previous 2 weeks in Hartford, New Britain, Saybrook, Bristol, Simsbury, Woodbury and Waterbury. The upcoming events include the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Quinebaug Valley Community College Stand Down on June 8<sup>th</sup>, the CT Veterans Legal Center, "Ride for Veterans" which will have participants from the DVA including the Commissioner. On July 23<sup>rd</sup> the DVA will host a cookout on campus for Veteran Residents along with a performance by the 102<sup>nd</sup> CT Military Band and September 20<sup>th</sup> the CT DVA Annual Stand Down Event will be taking place.

**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 process from a Chronic Disease Hospital (CDH) to a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) is near complete and that the Veteran Outpatient Clinic (aka “B-Clinic”) will be a separately licensed clinic, with upgraded facility and equipment, within the Residential facility opened a full shift 6 days a week. The Commissioner asked Hospital Administrator Laura Nelson to update the Board on this process of inspections being held by DPH. Ms. Nelson reported on the percentage of being at approximately 87% compliant with meeting federal and state regulations, the facility is gearing up for an inspection on June 17<sup>th</sup> of the B-Clinic. Ms. Nelson reported that the physical inspection for HCC is scheduled for June 26<sup>th</sup> & June 27<sup>th</sup>.

Trustee Barry asked if any of the 40 open beds are opened primarily to DVA Veteran Residents. The Commissioner reported that DVA Veterans will have priority. Trustee Vogt asked if beds are still held open for respite care and the Commissioner responded in the affirmative.

#### B. Fiscal Report:

The Commissioner reported on the State Budget and staffing trends explaining that the Governor’s proposed budget adequately funds the DVA. However, he explained that due to unforeseen circumstances, particularly related to increased expenses for electricity, natural gas, fuel, and water there is an over run in DVA operating expenses and that the DVA has asked that OPM transfer approximately half of the \$550,000 salary surplus to cover the overage. The Commissioner explained that there were two water main breaks on campus, as well as a pipe burst in the old hospital and that the DVA is in the process of moving assets from Building 5 to Building 50, impacting operating expenses. The Commissioner stated that Veteran Service organization and other tenants now in three locations will be consolidated in building 50 which will help reduce operating expenses. Easterseals Rally Point, over the next few months, will be occupy multiple buildings on Levitow Drive and will be responsible for their own heating expenses.

#### C. Projects Update

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a DVA Projects update reporting that the cemetery appearance project is nearly complete and the appearance project is projected to finish in the spring of 2020. Mr. Danao reported that the abatement projects in B-Wing are complete and that Patriot’s Landing Homes will soon be connected to the MDC water system. The estimated completion date for the Fire Alarm and Suppression System is the Fall of 2019. Mr. Danao also reported that the DVA is awaiting state bond allocation to match \$1.6 million Federal Grant for ADA Upgrades to Buildings 2, 3 and 4 as well as bond allocation request for Minor Capital Repairs such as Asbestos Mitigation and waterline repairs. The next bond meeting is scheduled for June 28<sup>th</sup>.

#### D. Semi-Private/Independent living model

Commissioner Saadi introduced Residential and Program Director Leslie Nieves to give an update on the Semi-Private Independent living model. Director Nieves reported that the rooms are repainted, floors polished and privacy walls will soon be installed. She reported that Bob’s Store is donating all the new furniture including couches, recliners and rugs. The Veterans living in the updated wing will be part of a new program in which they will participate in the basic maintenance and upkeep of the

wing, 6 days per week, consistent with Federal VA State Veterans Home rules. Each 7<sup>th</sup> day DVA custodial staff member will conduct a deep clean. There will be a ribbon cutting event on June 25<sup>th</sup>. The Commissioner stated that A-Wing is gutted and ready for renovations when the DVA is able to secure some additional grant funding, until then the project is on hold.

### **III. New Business**

#### **A. Legislative Update**

Chairman Thomas asked Commissioner Saadi for a legislative update. The Commissioner explained that HB 7064, will update the name of the Municipal Veterans service contact person to “Municipal Veterans Representative” and allow volunteers to service as said Municipal Veterans Representatives in addition to Municipal Veterans Commissions and Employees. The bill has passed the house and is now in the Senate. The Commissioner reported on SB 861, which will clarify the definition of “service in time of war” and formally removed the two year state residency requirement for admission to the Residential Facility and Healthcare Center. This bill is pending action in the House.

### **IV. Closing**

Chairman Thomas discussed the goals for the coming year including the continuation of successful work of previous years with the DVA and Commissioner Saadi; establish standing Committees to work on various issues ranging from healthcare to legislative initiatives and to set long term goals for the Board. The list of Standing Committees will be emailed to each Trustee so they may indicate the preferred Committee assignments.

Chairman Thomas asked Commissioner for his closing remarks, Commissioner suggested that if a Trustee cannot attend a Board Meeting that they may call in with prior approval by the Chair, but only in rare circumstances. The Commissioner asked Director Nieves to report on the upcoming DC trip for approximately 30 DVA Veteran Residents. She reported that the trip is scheduled for October 18<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>, focusing on Military monuments and historic sites. More information will be emailed to the Trustees and any trustees interested in serving as chaperons should contact Director Nieves. Chairman Thomas stated that the next board meeting will be on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at 3:30 pm. There being no further business, Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made and passed unanimously at 4:48 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Michael Thomas, Chairman  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 6/13/19



**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 102<sup>nd</sup> 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 29<sup>th</sup>. 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 18<sup>th</sup>, 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



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
September 18, 2019**

**I. Convene Meeting:**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Michael Thomas at 3:04 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by Chairman Thomas.

In attendance were Trustees: John Banks, Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Peter Galgano, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Michael Thomas, Mark Spranzo, Kjell Tollefsen, and Dawn Works-Dennis. Also in attendance from the DVA staff, Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Patrice Olson, Michael Clark, Tammy Marzik, Joseph Danao, and Darlene Deschaine.

Absent Trustees: Richard Dziekan, Juan Cruz, Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Heather Sandler and Sherri Vogt.

New Trustee, Mark Spranzo was administered the oath of office by DVA Staff Attorney Patrice Olson. Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion by Trustee Tollefsen and seconded by Trustee Cacciola. Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner's update: Commissioner Saadi reported on recent events and achievements of the CT DVA including recognizing and honoring five WWII veterans that served in France, attending a rock concert in Bristol to benefit DVA Veterans, participating in a Veterans bill signing ceremony by Governor Lamont and a Ribbon Cutting event expanding the Semi-Private Living Program to the B-Wing of the Residential facility. Upcoming events include the Annual DVA Stand Down Event on Sept 20<sup>th</sup>, the Annual AT&T 3 Miler on November 9<sup>th</sup> and various Veterans Day Ceremony on November 11<sup>th</sup>.

**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 HCC is now a licensed Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) and is now admitting Veterans. The final phase for certification is CMS/Medicaid/Medicare certification. The inspection for this certification should take place in September or October. The Veteran outpatient clinic (VOC) is operating six days a week and will phase to a 5 day schedule by first or second week of

October as previously planned. Chairman Thomas asked how many veterans use the VOC on the weekend, the Commissioner stated that there are seven veterans utilizing services on Saturday who are currently being educated by the clinicians to self-administer their medications with a pillbox and instructions. Each of these Veterans will be continuously monitored to ensure their health and wellbeing.

#### B. Fiscal Report:

Michael Clark reported on the State Budget and staffing trends explaining that DVA Operating Expenses line item has been reduced and the DVA's reliance on the IGW continues. Currently the IGW generates approximately 2.5 million a year in revenue, which is lower than several years ago due to the lower census in the Residential facility and Healthcare Center, however these are expected to increase based on the new HCC SNF license and updated residential wings. The Commissioner pointed out that the Lamont administration has supported two major bonding projects for the DVA.

#### C. Projects Update, Cemetery Admin Update

Projects and Operations Director Joseph Danao provided a DVA Projects update reporting that the Lamont administration has approved \$1.2 million in bonding to match the Federal \$1.6 million in grants for the agency's ADA improvements planned for buildings 2, 3 and 4. Currently the DVA is working \$13.1 million in federal grants and state bonding for two projects at the State Veterans Cemetery and the three projects at the DVA main Campus in Rocky Hill. The cemetery expansion project is complete and the appearance project is projected to finish in the spring of 2020. Other projects on site to report on include the abatement projects for building 5, the replacement of the water line to the Patriot's Landing Homes has been completed and the Fire Alarm and Suppression System which is estimated to be completed by end of the October 2019. Mr. Danao reported that the HCC's two 400 gallon water tanks were replaced and went live on September 17<sup>th</sup> and the buildings on Levitow Lane are ready for Easter Seals Rally Point occupation.

#### D. Wreaths Across America/Civil Air Patrol Update

Chairman Thomas then reported on the Wreaths Across America transparency issue explaining that he has inquired of Joe Sanborn of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), through e-mails and telephone calls, for an accounting of how much money CAP raises through use of the Veterans Cemetery, where those funds go and whether some amount may be dedicated to Cemetery perpetual care. Mr. Sanborn has not been responsive and more senior CAP officials are now involved and explained to Chair Thomas that a stakeholders meeting needs to take place before this information can be provided. Significant discussion followed during which Trustee Barry stated that going forward CAP should disclose on all written materials that the event is a fundraiser for CAP. There was discussion related to terminating CAP's use of the Cemetery for the WAA event which the Commissioner and Chair opposed explaining that discussions with CAP should continue and the planned event should go forward however, the Board should consider possibly taking over the event for next year unless the outstanding matters can be resolved. Several Trustees expressed their concern that money is being raised through the use of Veterans graves and so some of that money should go to the care of those graves.

### III. New Business

#### A. Transportation Task Force – Request for BOT Input

Commissioner Saadi reported that the General Assembly has established Transportation Task Force that will focus on issues regarding seniors, the disabled and veterans. The Commissioner asks that the board to provide him with a written report of the top three to five transportation issues affecting Veterans along with recommended solutions. This should be submitted to the Commissioner not later than October 30, 2019. The information will be reviewed and compiled with other reports from participating agencies and constituencies into a comprehensive report with recommendations to be provided to the General Assembly in January 2020. Chairman Thomas has asked the board to begin a dialogue regarding this report.

#### B. Commissioner Military Update

Commissioner Saadi has volunteered for an active duty mobilization with a tentative report date of October 16, 2019. 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. The daily operational staff structure has been approved by the Governor's Office pursuant to which Fiscal Manager Michael Clark and Projects and Operations Manager Joseph Danao will oversee day to day operations. Tammy Marzik will be handling Legislative and press matters, Joseph Danao, Ryan McKenna and Leslie Nieves will attend veteran events on behalf of the Commissioner. Darlene Deschaine will continue to be the initial point of contact for any inquires.

#### C. Semi-Private Living Program Expanded

Commissioner Saadi reported on the expansion of the Semi-Private Living Program (SPLP). Based on the success of the Pilot program in C-Wing the DVA recently expanded the program to three rooms of B-Wing. The intention is to expand the program to an additional 12 rooms in D-Wing in the Spring of 2020.

### IV. Closing

Chairman Thomas suggested meeting either December 11<sup>th</sup> or December 13<sup>th</sup> at 3:00, depending on the Commissioner's military schedule. There being no further business, Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made and passed unanimously at 4:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Michael Thomas, Chairman  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 10/10/19



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
January 3, 2020**

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

**I. Convene Meeting:**

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

Pledge of allegiance was led by Heather Sandler followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance: Paul Barry, Philip Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Frederick Leaf, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Mark Spranzo, Michael Thomas, Kjell Tollefsen, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent: John Banks, Richard Benson, and Patrick Nelligan.

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Shumei Chu, Joseph Danao, Darlene Deschaine, Tammy Marzik, Ryan McKenna, Laura Nelson, and Jane Siegel.

Commissioner Saadi, who took a day of military leave to work at the DVA, introduced the DVA's new staff attorney Jane Siegel, a military spouse, who then administered the oath of office to newly appointed Trustee, Sharad Samy.

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

**Commissioner's Achievements & Events:** The Commissioner spoke briefly about the events that took place on campus which included hosting the VA Committee Co-Chairs Rep. Borer and Sen. Maroney at the campus, volunteers from Eversource provided a Day of Caring by doing fall clean up and landscaping on campus as well as in Colonel Gates cemetery. Commissioner Saadi was part of a delegation to West Point, and presented a Wartime Service Medal to WWII Veteran and longtime State Representative, John Mordasky. In September a ribbon cutting event for Easter Seals Rally Point took place on campus which included Lt. Governor Byseiwicz and several members of the Legislature. In October four unclaimed cremated Veterans remains were buried in the Middletown State Veterans Cemetery with full honors. October 5<sup>th</sup> DVA hosted the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Women Veteran Health & Wellness brunch attended by more

than 60 women veterans with providers such as dieticians, mindfulness activities and veteran benefit information. In November the DVA hosted the Annual AT&T 3 Miler event with proceeds totaling \$4,000. On December 6<sup>th</sup> the DVA conducted the CT Veterans Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony at the LOB with 10 inductees receiving this honor including Board of Trustees Vice-Chair Pat Nelligan. December 12<sup>th</sup> was the Annual Holiday Extravaganza on campus. The upcoming events include a Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Ceremony at the State Capitol, Yard Goats Military Appreciation Game, the Annual Stand Down, the Annual AT&T 3 Miler and Veteran's Day Events.

## **II. Old Business**

### **A. Licensure Transition**

Commissioner Saadi asked Healthcare Center Director Laura Nelson to update the board on the HCC License Transition. She explained that the DVA has completed all steps in the transition of the Healthcare Center (HCC) from a Chronic Disease Hospital (CDH) license to a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) and is awaiting final inspection and certification by the Centers of Medicare Medicaid Services (CMS). Director Nelson stated that the HCC is ready for the inspection. Commissioner added that the Veterans Outpatient Clinic has been operating well on a five-day schedule for the previous three months.

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

Shu Mei Chu from DVA's Fiscal Office gave an update on the budget and staffing trends. She explained that the DVA's Operating Costs are tight but on budget and the DVA is on target with a balanced budget that includes IGW contributions toward agency programs for Veterans. Ms. Chu added that the DVA has a small quarterly deficiency which will be addressed in the next quarter.

Trustee Barry asked if the \$60,000 increase for headstones is going towards the installation of the headstones. After some indecisive discussion Commissioner Saadi said he would get clarification off line.

### **C. Projects Update**

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update which included the near completion of the Middletown State Veteran Cemetery Expansion project and the Cemetery Appearance project projected for completion in Spring 2020.

The Cemetery Services Master Plan is complete and moving forward is important to address the space issue at the Cemetery. In response to Chair Thomas' question as to how much time before the cemetery will be full, Director Danao answered approximately ten years. However, the agency will have to watch and closely monitor this matter as Connecticut has the fourth highest veteran population over 60 years old in the nation. Trustee Barry stated that he and other members of the Board are concerned with how long the procurement process for land can take and that the DVA needs to be more proactive. Commissioner Saadi explained that he began the process several months ago of opening discussions to secure one or both pieces of property adjacent the cemetery. The first is owned by Calvary Cemetery (St. Mary's Parish) and the other by CT Valley Hospital CVH). He added that unfortunately the Parish is asking \$1.3 million for the property which he states is excessive. The Commissioner asked to speak directly with the parish priest and the council members, however, that request was denied and he was

referred to the Parish real-estate broker. Commissioner Saadi contacted Lt. Governor's office and she is supporting DVA efforts. CVH is willing to discuss a land transfer however, there is a leaking water main under the property at issue so the transfer cannot occur until that is fixed. There are no capitol funds at this time to fix the water main. The third piece of property is privately owned and DVA has not yet contacted the owners. Commissioner stated that the DVA will keep the multiple options open for consideration.

Trustee Barry asked to put a motion forward to adopt the Cemetery Master Plan to give it more political teeth, the motion was unanimously adopted by the Board.

Director Danao also updated the Trustees on the Rocky Hill Campus renovations stating that the Abatement Projects are complete, including replacement of Boiler #4 and the walls in Building 5. The Fire Alarm and Suppression System is at the punch-list phase and the ADA Upgrades for Buildings 2, 3 and 4 are awaiting construction contract awards. He reported that D-Wing upgrades have been directed by Commissioner Saadi with a completion date of May of 2020.

Director Danao reported that DVA Bond Allocation Requests underscoring the need for the \$465,000 Bond request for minor capital repairs, which includes paving, removal/replace indoor transformers, fire system repairs, road repairs/study, and emergency repair funding. Other working projects include building 50 renovations, digital transformation known as the DVA "Pen/Pencil to Keyboard" project and the Cemetery Services Compliance Audit.

#### D. Wreaths Across America Update

Chair Thomas reported on the Wreaths Across America event that was held on December 14, 2019, stating that with the assistance of DVA staff and volunteers the event went very well. He highlighted the work of OAA Director Ryan McKenna and Chief Stephen Scatena in reorganizing traffic flow, parking and staging which contributed to the success of the event. An after action review will be held soon to close out last year's event and he will report back to the Board. There will be an ad hoc group from the Board to move forward with the Wreaths Across America project in some form.

#### E. Transportation Task Force

Commissioner Saadi asked for input from the Board members as to Veterans' transportation concerns to submit to the Transportation Task Force. Commissioner Saadi recommended members send their input to Chair Thomas to aggregate the information and forward to the Commissioner to present to the Task Force. Deadline for these recommendations has not been set, however, the Task Force is taking recommendations not later than the end of January 2020. Chair Thomas went on to address the Board and state that he would like to have these recommendations sent to him no later than January 17<sup>th</sup>.

Chair Thomas asked if there were any other questions to address before going onto new business. Trustee Spranzo was concerned about the lack of activity regarding the issues being addressed after the Commissioner's walk through. The Commissioner went on to explain to the Board that he conducted a personal walkthrough of the campus and drafted six reports setting forth concerns and issues with the buildings and grounds with recommended responses/remediation efforts. The Commissioner has been sending out the reports to senior DVA staff. To expedite these tasks a new electronic work order ticket system was implemented. The Commissioner will continue to follow up on this matter.

### **III. New Business**

#### **A. Semi-Private Living Program:**

Commissioner Saadi reported that the Semi-Private Living Program (SPLP) has been operating well in Residential C-Wing and B-Wing with 5 double occupancy semi-private updated rooms. In addition to updated accommodations the SPLP promotes team work among Veteran Residents who are responsible for basic maintenance and upkeep of the wing. This helps build capacity to accomplish goals and promote a greater level of independence in support of Veterans securing community based educational, employment and housing opportunities. The Commissioner reported that he has directed the expansion of the program to another wing of the Residential Facility (D-Wing) in the spring of 2020.

#### **B. Building 50 Reoccupation:**

Building 50 (formerly known as "Fellowship House") has been under renovation by the DVA and in the next few weeks tenant organizations and some DVA operations will relocate to Building 50. The consolidation of Veteran Service organizations, no-profit providers and DVA services into this updated facility is a big step forward in creating an improved environment for our Veterans and those providing the programs and services.

#### **C. Chairman Report:**

Chair Thomas spoke of the Wreaths Across America issue, stating that it comes down to money and that one particular unit of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) has been making a large profits over the years by utilizing the Veterans Cemetery in Middletown. The Board has been concerned that CAP is overly reliant on the WAA program and offers nothing to DVA for Cemetery upkeep. Chair Thomas is in discussion with CAP, which are complex and Chair Thomas will keep the Board updated.

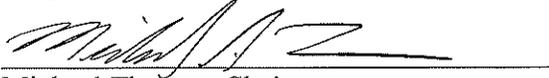
Commissioner Saadi reported that during his quasi-leave of absence for six months of Active Military Duty he has been keeping in touch with senior through frequent conference calls, as well as holding calls with Board leadership, legislators and others related to DVA operations. He is also using military leave days to work at the DVA at least one day every two weeks. The Commissioner then had Director Danao distribute the updated five-year facilities capitalization plan to Board members.

Chair Thomas surveyed feasible dates with the Board and set the next Board meeting for Friday, March 27, 3:00 pm. Chair Thomas asked the Board to consider meeting every two months instead of quarterly. He will take a poll of the members and report back in March.

### **IV. Closing**

There being no further business, Chair Thomas entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made and passed unanimously at 4:29 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Thomas", is written over a horizontal line.

Michael Thomas, Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 1/25/2020



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
March 27, 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 were Trustees: John Banks, Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Juan Cruz, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Frederick Leaf, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Mark Spranzo, Michael Thomas, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent Trustes: Phil Cacciola, Richard Dziekan, Patrick Nelligan and Kjell Tollefsen.

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Darlene Deschaine, Tammy Marzik, and Leslie Nieves.

Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Leaf and seconded by Trustee Galgano. Motion passed with one abstain from Trustee Benson who requested another copy of January 3<sup>rd</sup> minutes sent to him. No other corrections or edits to the minutes.

Chairman Thomas stated that this meeting would focus on the DVA response to the COVID-19 health emergency including updates on policies, protocols and procedures to protect the health, safety and welfare of the Veteran Residents, Veterans Patients and DVA Staff. One exception would be to address Trustee Benson's request to discuss the Cemetery Master Plan. Trustee Benson withdrew that request and stated he would approach the issue at a later date. Chairman Thomas then asked Commissioner Thomas Saadi to provide a COVID-19 update.

Commissioner Saadi explained that he remains on active military duty in NY and is subject to DoD travel restrictions, however he is in daily contact with DVA managers and staff, including on weekends, and DVA senior managers and he are on the daily Governor's Unified Command calls and tele-meetings with state and federal agencies to ensure safe and continuous DVA operations.

Commissioner Saadi reported that the DVA has been taking a proactive approach to mitigating the risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19 since early March and has implemented a broad range of temporary COVID-19 mitigation protocols. These include restrictions on visitors to the DVA Campus, restrictions on travel by Veterans Residents and Patients, establishing an isolation/quarantine unit in the

Residential Facility, conducting daily health screens of Veterans and restrictions on admissions to the Residential and Healthcare programs. The travel by Veteran Patients is limited to medical appointments and humanitarian circumstances. For any Veterans returning from off Campus hospitalization are subject to enhanced medical screening, verification from the transferring facility that the Veteran has been screened and tested negative for COVID-19, additionally such Veterans are subject to a 14 day isolation. Residential Veteran off Campus passes have been limited to 10 residents per day with a four hour time limit for each pass. Upon the return to Campus the Veteran is subject to inspection of bags and vehicles and an enhanced medical screening. Those Veterans who leave Campus without a pass or who present an increased risk of exposure to COVID-19, are subject to 14 day isolation on Campus. The DVA is providing required personal protective equipment (PPE) to staff and Veterans.

Commissioner Saadi reported that movement on Campus has been restricted and that Residential Veterans may not visit the HCC and vice versa and all off Campus recreational activities have been suspended however, DVA staff is implementing on campus recreation that is social distancing compliant.

Chairman Thomas asked about the inventory of the DVA's PPE to which Commissioner Saadi reported that he DVA has at least a sixty day supply of PPE and, as the burn rate is expected to increase, the DVA is reaching out to current vendors and has submitted requests through WEBEOC for additional supplies to ensure a ninety day supply that is able to handle a COVID-19 surge. Commissioner Saadi reported that he has been in close contact with Federal VA Director Al Montoya and recently had a conference call that included Joseph Danao, Chairman Thomas and Vice-Chairman Nelligan. The call focused on sharing best practices and coordination of efforts in support of Connecticut's Veterans.

Commissioner Saadi reported that while the DVA is responding to COVID-19 regular operations continue including the ADA construction project and other Campus improvements. In closing the Commissioner asked that Trustees help support our Veterans mental health by reaching out to them through email and phone calls, and continue to think outside the box and come up with recreational activities that follow social distancing protocols.

Chairman Thomas asked Trustee Spranzo for his input on the COVID-19 protocols and procedures from the Veteran perspective. Trustee Spranzo stated that his main concern is the mental health of the Veterans with the travel restrictions and suspension of most recreational activities. Commissioner Saadi stated that Director Nieves, Trustee Spranzo and former Veteran Resident President Ron Coveney would work closely together to come up with other recreational activities and travel options.

Chairman Thomas then thanked the DVA staff for their work, energy and continued efforts in keeping up with the challenges during this pandemic.

## II. Closing

There being no further business, Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made and passed unanimously at 3:59 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Michael Thomas, Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date April 17, 2020



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
June 11, 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, Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Mark Spranzo, Michael Thomas, Kjell Tollefsen, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent: Richard Dziekan.

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Michael Clark, Joseph Danao, Darlene Deschaine, Tammy Marzik, Ryan McKenna, Laura Nelson, and Jane Siegel.

Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Harris 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. Trustee Benson requested discussion on the Cemetery Master Plan and Wreaths Across America. Chairman Thomas responded that both topics would be discussed on the agenda. 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 kindle tablets, televisions, iPads, many personal need items for the comforts of the Veteran Residents and Veteran Patients. The IT items assisted Veterans in connecting with family, friends and needed services including telehealth. Commissioner Saadi reported that on May 5<sup>th</sup>, the founder & CEO of K&J Tree Service, visited the DVA Campus to thank and display a large flag to honor DVA front-line staff and DVA campus veterans and that the Commissioner, Governor Lamont, Lt. Governor Bysiewicz and Major General Evon conducted the Wall of Honor Ceremony on the Thursday before Memorial Day at the LOB and also conducted the annual Memorial Day Ceremony at Middletown Veterans Cemetery. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> the Healthcare Center's Annual Memorial Ceremony was held and the American Red Cross joined to extend thanks to the First Line Staff and to DVA veterans, all of which complied with social distancing and mask guidelines. On May 26<sup>th</sup> DVA's Residential Facility held their annual Memorial Day Ceremony.

The upcoming events include a DVA Residential Flag Day Ceremony on June 15<sup>th</sup>, Stand Down on or about September 25<sup>th</sup>, which will be a blend of virtual and in person events. November 7<sup>th</sup> will be the Annual AT&T 3 Miler and for Veterans Day, November 11<sup>th</sup> 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. He highlighted the DVA's comprehensive COVID-19 Mitigation Protocols and the daily operations and programmatic calls and teams meetings with and among DVA Staff. This provided and continues to provide the Commissioner and agency leaders with a full spectrum view of data, logistic, projects and other issues across the DVA's four core functions. Commissioner Saadi reported on the DVA website link with all agency updates and COVID-19 Protocols and changes. Commissioner Saadi reported the testing of over 220 veteran residents, majority of which have been tested multiple times. Twenty-four Veteran Patients and Residents tested positive, with twenty-one recovering and three deaths in late April and early May. A total of four staff members tested positive, all have returned to work consisted with CDC and DPH guidelines to work at the facility. The infection rates of staff and veterans on the DVA campus is significantly lower than many other veterans' homes and healthcare facilities. Commissioner Saadi highlighted the support The DVA agency had been supported during this pandemic from many state agencies as well as Director Al Montoya of the Federal VA. CT state lab also gave our agency many tests and processed the tests, it gave us significant testing capacity. The agency has plenty of PPE and supplies. Currently some of the DVA staff is teleworking and will continue to do so until the state reopens. The Commissioner went on to explain that DVA never closed due to the nature of this agency, however, the DVA will roll back on the telework and have people return to the campus and reestablishing access to some of the programs that were limited due to the pandemic. This includes reopening admissions to HCC and residential as well as some of the managers returning to work on campus a couple days a week. Next week the CT DVA will be moving from an Emergency Protocol to a Recovery Phase.

### **B. Healthcare Center Report**

Director Nelson reported on the COVID-19 adjustments in the Skilled Nursing Facility which included establishing a COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Unit, built capacity in supply lines of PPE through internal efficiencies, training and use of WEBEOC. Increased number of tests and improved timeframe for obtaining results through partnership with the Federal VA. Ms. Nelson also reported that all Staff and Veteran Patients are routinely screened On-going staff support and training in accordance with CDC, DPH, CMS and Federal VA. She explained that, in accordance with DVA Protocols and CDC guidelines social and recreational activities were redesigned, meals were delivered to rooms and sanitizing and disinfection procedures were expanded. DPH conduct a point prevalence Survey on May 27 testing all Veteran Patients with all testing negative for the virus.

Director. Nelson reported that to date DPH has conducted five inspections on April 27<sup>th</sup>, May 10<sup>th</sup>, May 21<sup>st</sup> and June 3<sup>rd</sup> and the Federal VA visited on May 5<sup>th</sup>. The HCC was found to be in substantial compliance and was not cited for any deficiencies. Chairman Thomas asked if any of the veterans had any adverse reactions to the administration of the drug Hydrochloriquine and Director Nelson responded that there were no adverse reactions.

### C. Residential Programs & Services

Commissioner Saadi reported on Residential Programs & Services as Director Nieves is on military duty. Day-to-day operations of the Residential Facility and the daily activities of residents changed with the implementation of the COVID-19 Enhanced Health & Safety Protocols. These protocols included a ban on visitors to the Campus, restrictions on travel by Veteran Residents, screening and testing of Veteran Residents and the establishment of a COVID19 Isolation and Recovery Unit in the Residential Facility. As part of the screening and testing regime DVA Residential staff were supplemented by two Medics from the CT National Guard and temporary contract clinical workers. The regular shopping trips were cancelled for a period of time, but have resumed on an incremental manner following CDC guidelines and accommodations have been made for residents to conduct essential banking and shopping as needed. Various individual recreational services and support services were provided (Walk for Wellness; Arts & Crafts Supplies; Musical Instruments; Virtual individual recreational services info options provided as well as Virtual Religious services options). On May 22<sup>nd</sup> travel restrictions were modified to allow residents to travel off campus.

Commissioner Saadi reported on the recent Protocol modifications which include Veteran Residents being able to travel off campus, food vendors having access to the Campus and on Campus expansion of recreational activities and recreational facilities on Campus resuming operation later this month. Regular screening and testing of Veteran Residents will continue through the end of June and after a respite will resume in late July to determine whether any community spread is entering the Campus.

### D. Budgeting and Staffing

DVA Fiscal Manager Michael Clark provided an update on the budget and staffing trends. He reported that this is the fifteenth year that DVA will end the fiscal year with a balanced budget. The DVA's budget is 25.5 million dollars. Highlights of the fiscal operations is as follows:

- The Fiscal Department re-designated DVA's warehouse and mailroom staff essential status to ensure uninterrupted supplies and delivery.
- Fiscal equipped the office staff with the ability to telework to conduct the procurement, accounts payables, accounting, payroll, and fiscal administration operation, purchasing requests reviewed, purchase orders issued, invoices are paid, employees timesheets are validated and paid, required reports are prepared and submitted, etc.
- The supplies and inventories levels of personal protective equipment (PPE) are monitored on a daily basis with coordinated efforts among facility, central supply room, and fiscal supervisor.
- Fiscal Office is working with all departments to tracking all COVID-19 related expenditures, which included overtime, PPE, cleaning supplies, and supplemental staffing as needed.
- Commissioner Saadi waived March, April, and May 2020 program fees for the Residential Veterans.

Chairman Thomas asked if the current supply of PPE will hold up for a potential second wave and Mr. Clark answered that supplies are sufficient and that DVA is building a 90 day supply reserve.

## E. Projects Report

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update which include the Cemetery Appearance project which has restarted. On the Rocky Hill Campus the abatement projects need funding from DAS for buildings number five, number 60 and number 51. The Fire Alarm and Suppression System is complete and the ADA Upgrades for buildings number 2, number 3 and number 4 is ongoing. The Quality of Life Improvements for D-Wing are in execution phase, currently awaiting the establishment of a COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Unit in A-wing which is in the design phase.

On January 31, 2020 the Bond Commission met and approved the following requests. 1.2 million in State matching funds for the DVA ADA project and \$250,000 for DVA minor capital repair projects. A new request has been submitted for \$215,000 for DVA minor capital repairs.

Director Danao reported on Operational Support during the COVID-19 pandemic which included establishing two COVID-19 isolation wings which will be maintained. Daily disinfection regime continues in areas of the Residential and HCC facilities. Ran the DVA Emergency Operations Center, established Operating, 24/7 situational awareness & common operating picture, monitored DVA daily operational rhythm which included overall support to all DVA staff and Veterans with a daily presence on campus and support of bubbles and barriers approach to mitigate spread of COVID-1. Oversaw digital transformation including IT initiatives to enable work from home for all staff, Office 365, laptops, VPN access and update DVA website daily.

## F. Cemetery Property Acquisition

Commissioner Saadi reported on the Cemetery Property Acquisition which has been in a talking phase with DAS Commissioner Geballe. The largest parcel, and the only once contiguous to the Veterans Cemetery, is a 13.65 acre lot designated as site A and is owned by St. Mary's Parish of Middletown. It is locked between the Veterans Cemetery, Cavalry Cemetery and a private medical business. By acquiring this property, the DVA would be able to continue burial operations at a single contiguous cemetery. This matter is not only a priority for the DVA, it is also of great concern to thousands of Connecticut Veterans and statewide Veterans Organizations, the DVA Board of Trustees and Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz.

## **III. New Business**

### A. Stand Down Update

Commissioner Saadi reported that DVA intends to hold a modified Stand Down the week of September 20<sup>th</sup>, possibly on multiple days, which will be a blend of virtual and in person platforms to provide access to programs, services and personal needs items. The agency has sent out letters to all providers asking for input as to ability to participate this year and whether they can participate virtually and for those that provide physical items whether they can distribute at DVA campus and/or in different regions of the State.

## B. Building 50 – Tenant Orgs. & DVA Operation Reoccupation

Building 50, which was renovated last year and occupied by several Veteran Service organizations, non-profit providers and DVA services will be open for reoccupation by those entities for operational functions consistent with the State's reopening plans

## C. Chairperson Report

Chairman Thomas asked if there were any concerns or questions to address the Commissioner. Trustee Benson was concerned about Wreathes Across American and the Cemetery Master Plan. There was discussion among the trustees regarding the need to move forward with ensuring that all organizations that sell wreaths for placement at the Cemetery must disclose whether they raise money and to what programs those funds are applied. Commissioner Saadi explained that he will be sending a letter to those organizations stating that they must disclose such information in the written and online communications.

Trustees Benson and Barry expressed concerns regarding compliance with the Federal Survey and Cemetery Master plan recommendations. Commissioner Saadi explained that the DVA is addressing all concerns raised during the Federal Survey and that a follow on inspection will be conducted by the National Cemetery Administration in September 2020. The Commissioner further explained that the recommendations in the Master Plan are goals to achieve however, no federal dollars are in jeopardy and achieving the recommendation will take time and that the fact that such items are in the master plan actually supports DVA requests for federal funding.

Commissioner Saadi also provided a brief on the DVA efforts in moving forward with the property acquisition process in collaboration with the Department of Administrative Services.

Chairman Thomas stated that several Legislative Leaders are retiring this November so it is important for those on the board that are affected by this should to contact their appointment authorities for guidance. The following individuals are retiring; Senator Martin Looney (appointed Trustee Frederick Leaf); Representative Len Fasano (appointed Co-Chair Patrick Nelligan); Representative Joe Aresimowicz (appointed Trustee Peter Galgano); and Representative Themis Klarides (appointed Trustee Richard Dziekan).

## IV. Closing

There being no further business, Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to adjourn. The next board meeting will be Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 pm. The meeting will be held on the DVA campus, meeting room to be determined at a later date. Motion was made and passed unanimously at 5:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Michael Thomas, Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 7/2/2020