



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
March 21, 2017**

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

**I. Convene Meeting:**

The Meeting was called to order by Chairman Christopher McDavid at 3:31PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by Chairman McDavid followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance: Christopher McDavid (Chair), Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Robert Cheslock, Amy Donahue, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Brien Horan, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Paul Tarbox, Michael Tetrault, Kjell Tollefsen.

Absent: Philip Cacciola, Michael Thomas and Tatiana Quinzi.

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

Chairman McDavid asked DVA Chief of Staff and General Counsel Thomas Saadi to swear in the re-appointed and newly appointed members of the Board.

Chairman McDavid spoke of his recent trip overseas concluding that he was pleased to be back and to work with the Board this year. Chairman McDavid then introduced DVA Commissioner Sean Connolly who welcomed the Board and introduced DVA staff present – Thomas Saadi, Fausto Parra, Maria Cheney, Michael Clark and Joe Danao.

Commissioner Connolly presented a general update of DVA activities to the Board highlighting recent Veteran and DVA achievements, including the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame Ceremony, a visit by Major General Troy Kok of the 99<sup>th</sup> RSC to the DVA Campus and the "Ruck to Remember" at the DVA Campus honoring Connecticut's OIF and OEF fallen heroes. Commissioner Connolly then discussed upcoming DVA and Veteran events, such as the Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Ceremony on March 30<sup>th</sup> at the State Capitol and the Veteran Small Business Series at the DVA Campus from April 26-27<sup>th</sup>.

Chairman McDavid then thanked the Commissioner for his report and commented positively on the number of events and list of accomplishments of the DVA staff.

## II. Old Business

Chairman McDavid asked Commissioner Connolly to provide an update on the new Residential Program Fee adopted by the Board at its December 2016 meeting. Commissioner Connolly briefly explained the policy and stated that Veteran Residents have been cooperating with DVA Staff in submitting required financial statements and that the DVA is on track to send out the updated Program Fee bills in May 2017.

Commissioner Connolly then explained the new DVA Transportation policy which adds to the many existing transportation options and temporary transportation support for Veteran Residents to access employment and educational opportunities within 25 miles of the DVA Campus.

Chairman McDavid asked if there were any questions for the Commissioner and with none the Commissioner then asked Chief of Staff Saadi to provide an update on the DVA DOL Detail and General Worker settlement. Chief of Staff Saadi explained that Notices and claim forms have been mailed to 191 eligible Veterans and that as the DVA receives the claim forms the data is entered into a spread sheet and DOL receipt which will then be sent to the claims administrator to mail payment to verified recipients. While the deadline set by the DOL for the initial mailing is July 8, 2017, the DVA hopes to mail out most checks prior to the end of May. Timing is highly dependent on Veterans submitting completed claim forms to DVA in a timely manner.

Chairman McDavid asked Commissioner Connolly and Fiscal Manager Michael Clark for a DVA Budget update. Commissioner Connolly explained that the current proposal reduces the DVA personal services by \$868,510 which will need to be addressed through savings (\$400,000) achieved through the use of an automated pill machine for the Healthcare Center and further savings (\$468,510) through attrition in staff positions. Trustee Barry asked whether the projected savings was per annum or over a longer period of time. The Commissioner stated that the savings is projected per annum.

Chairman McDavid then asked for a projects update by Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao. Director Danao provided an update on the Middletown Veterans Cemetery plot expansion grant and the maintenance and beautification grant. Director Danao explained that DVA has several other projects racked high on the Federal reimbursement list including a new Fire Alarm and suppression system, Emergency generator, and ADA upgrades. Director Danao stated that the DVA has addressed problems with thefts from the Cemetery shed by now using secure storage containers and also reviewed several smaller ongoing and planned projects including the creation of the Residential F-Wing computer and business office Resource Center.

Trustee Benson asked for the status on installation of headstones at the Middletown Cemetery. Director Danao stated that the DVA is behind on installations due to loss of a staff member and weather, however, the planned use of new federal e-system for ordering headstones will help in the future and he is reviewing options for addressing the backlog. The Commissioner then explained that the DVA was looking to engage Czaja to assist at which time Director Danao added that no determination has yet been made on Czaja.

Trustee Benson then asked to return to the budget and asked whether the DVA Cemetery Services will get line item funding and whether the federal plot allowance can be directed to that

line item. Fiscal Manager Clark explained that the line item is being considered for submission to OPM for the next fiscal year and stated that the federal plot allowance was treated by the State the same as per diem funds and deposited in the General Fund. Commissioner Connolly added that he would be reviewing the options for maintaining such cemetery funds for perpetual care and operations in the next fiscal year. Trustee Barry commended Director Danao and Fiscal Manager Clark commenting that \$6 million in cemetery projects and upgrades is great however it was necessary as the Cemetery has been ignored for many years adding that he supports the establishment of a perpetual care fund.

### **III. New Business**

Chairman McDavid then asked Commissioner Connolly and Chief of Staff Saadi for a Legislative update. Commissioner Connolly provided an overview of the DVAs legislative package as well as bills the agency supports and called on Chief of Staff Saadi to explain the details of the bills. Chief of Staff Saadi explained SB 342, which would clarify the definition of Veteran in CGS 27-103(a)(2) to include, number of days of active service notwithstanding, any one honorably discharged or released under honorable conditions from the Armed Forces within the definition of Veteran. Trustee Barry asked whether this will alter eligibility for burial in State Veteran Cemeteries to which Saadi responded no as eligibility is set by Federal law and the DVA is the recipient of Federal funding for its Cemeteries. Trustee Benson asked what impact this would have on other benefits including municipal tax abatements. Saadi noted that the bill would not expand the number of Veterans who would qualify for benefits or honors reserved for disabled Veterans, Wartime Service Veterans or Veterans just coming off of active duty or their eligible survivors (e.g. municipal tax abatements, wartime service medal, tuition waiver, one year waived motor vehicle registration, etc . . .) because those statutes expressly define eligibility in a manner more restrictive than the baseline definition of Veteran in C.G.S. 27-103(a)(2). Trustee Tarbox further explained that many municipal tax abatements are permissive and subject to wartime service and/or disability rating requirements.

Chief of Staff Saadi then explained that H.B. 7102 would provide increased protection to Veteran and service member information including Selective Service or Military Identification numbers, military discharge documents, and copies of military identity cards by including such information within the ambit of information, such as Social Security Numbers, protected pursuant to C.G.S. § 42-471. Violators would be subject to civil penalties of up to \$500 for each violation as well as injunctive relief. He further explained that SB 857 seeks to designate the DVA Rocky Hill Campus as the "Connecticut Veterans Center" which communicates to all Connecticut Veterans that the campus is a Center for them. He stated that the Committee amended the bill to rename the campus the "Rocky Hill, Connecticut Veterans Center" and that is a misnomer communicating that the campus is a Municipal entity which the DVA is working to address. Chief of Staff Saadi explained that HB 7101 clarifies, consistent with federal law, that members of the National Guard and Armed Forces Reserve components who do not have active duty service beyond that for initial entry training are eligible for burial in our State Veterans Cemeteries if they are entitled to receive retirement pay under 10 USC chapter 1223 or, but for, their age would otherwise be eligible to collect such retirement pay.

Chairman McDavid then asked Commissioner Connolly to discuss the DVA strategic objectives. The Commissioner outlined four strategic objectives directly related to the DVA Core Functions and improving agency operates as (1) Continue Revitalizing DVA's Residential

Program; (2) Begin Three Key Projects, two cemetery projects and one campus project which is the fire alarm and sprinkler replacement and upgrades in Building 2; (3) Review and Update Office of Advocacy and Assistance and Burial and Memorial Service; and (4) Expand Partnerships and Collaboration for Connecticut's Veterans Center of Excellence.

Trustee Tarbox mentioned that he was pleased to read a news article reporting that DVA VSO Anne James is holding an informational session on Veterans benefits in Milford.

#### IV. Closing remarks

Commissioner Connolly asked Trustee Tetrault to introduce himself and provide the Board with his background. Trustee Tetrault stated that he is an Army Cold War veteran and has resided at the DVA Residential Facility for 11 years.

There being no further business, Chairman McDavid entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Tarbox and seconded by Trustee Harris. Motion passed unanimously at 4:428PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



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Christopher McDavid, Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 4/19/2017