



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
December 12, 2017**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting was called to order by Chair Christopher McDavid at 3:37 PM in the DVA Acting Acting Commissioner's conference room.

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

In attendance: Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Robert Cheslock, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Frederick Leaf, Christopher McDavid, Patrick Nelligan, Paul Tarbox, and Kjell Tollefsen.

Absent: Amy Donahue, Steven Harris, Brien Horan, Michael Thomas & Tatiana Quinzi

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

Chair McDavid commented on how active we all are during Veterans Day and also wished Acting Commissioner Saadi an early "Happy Birthday."

Acting Commissioner's update: Acting Commissioner Saadi explained the many Veterans Day events across the State he attended as well as mentioned the Saluting Branches event/in-kind donation held at the Middletown Veterans Cemetery on December 1, 2017, where arborists from across CT provided their services (approx.. \$100K of work) removing and trimming several overgrown and diseased trees and shrubs in the cemetery. The Acting Commissioner also discussed the new Residential fitness center ribbon cutting and groundbreaking ceremony for improvements being made to the Residential A Wing. He spoke about the success of the 2017 CT Veterans Hall of Fame ceremony held on December 4th and went through upcoming events including the DVA Residential Holiday Party, Wreaths Across American ceremony and the groundbreaking ceremony at the State Veterans' Cemetery on December 16, and 19 respectively.

II. Old Business

A. DVA Healthcare Center (HCC) – License & Level of Care:

Chair McDavid reported on the background of the HCC licensure issue explaining that the Legislature included a \$2 million cut to the HCC based on forcing a change in the license from a Chronic Disease Hospital (CDH) to a nursing home. He stated that the HCC Sub-committee appointed as the previous Board meeting held two committee meetings and that members contacted many legislators to urge them to remove the cut from the state budget.

Trustee Nelligan, Chair of the HCC Sub-committee, explained that it was formed to assist in navigating what information would establish that changing from a CDH to a nursing home is not the way to best serve our Veterans. He explained that the committee was able to gather information that the HCC is providing a broad range of care and services commensurate with the CDH license and meet or exceed the required level of care despite the continued fiscal and staffing cut-backs. Trustee Nelligan explained that there is still a \$2M budget cut in the FY 2019 budget and that the Board must work to reverse this cut which would severely lower care for Veterans. Even if the HCC license remained as a CDH that proposed cut must be reversed as a \$2million hit to other parts of the agency would be catastrophic. Sub-committee will work to provide all Trustees with a “one pager” summarizing the relevant information to help educate legislators in the upcoming session. He highlighted that all Board members need to educate state officials so they understand that the DVA cannot absorb a \$2million cut.

Acting Commissioner Saadi explained that the DVA has done a “deep dive” on the care of each patient in the HCC for a broad range of data related to the care they are receiving and is providing this information along with myriad other documentation to DSS which is conducting a level of care review of the DVA among other agencies.

B. Residential A-Wing Update:

The Acting Commissioner briefed the Board on the status of the quality of life improvements to A wing of the Residential Facility which is scheduled for completion in the fall of 2018. He also explained that the new Fitness Center is open and operating and that there are additional asbestos abatement and upgrade projects taking place in the Residential Facility.

C. Budget & Staffing Update:

Shumei Chu and Michael Clark from DVA’s Fiscal Office presented a report in response to previous requests by Trustees of the historical staffing and fiscal trends at DVA. They explained the downward trend over the previous ten years during which staffing went from 292 full-time employees in 2008 to a current 192 level. During that same time part-time staffing went from 87 to a current level of 64. Ms. Chu explained that this represents a 32% drop in total staffing over ten years. In 2008, DVA’s Personal Service Expense was approximately \$24 million and the current FY18 is approximately \$19 million. When asked by multiple Trustees whether the DVA can sustain services, they explained that the DVA can’t sustain these cuts along with the change in licensure of HCC to Nursing Home and a \$2 million cut in FY19.

Trustees Barry and Benson voiced concerns and frustration asking what is the motivation of those seeking to cut the DVA by \$2 million when it is a small agency that has absorbed so many

other cuts. Trustee Barry asked if there other reasons for this cut other than a “mistake” being made?”

Chairman McDavid agreed with the other Trustees concerns and also expressed his concerns with the motives for the proposed cuts. Acting Commissioner Saadi explained that he had no reason to assign a secret motive stating that many legislators who have become aware of the proposed cuts expressed dismay and hope that they could address the issues in 2018. Trustee Nelligan stated where can our Veterans in need of specialty care go if the HCC becomes a nursing home? There may not be another location that can admit these veteran and for those who can stay there level of care will be reduced.

Acting Commissioner Saadi stated that in response to request by legislators and Trustees that he will be inviting Legislators to tour the DVA Campus to see firsthand the services provided to our Veterans. Trustees asked if they can attend these tours to which the Acting Commissioner responded in the affirmative. Trustee Benson stressed the need for all Trustees to be present during on site Legislative meetings. Chairman McDavid assured that all will be notified of meeting dates and times.

D. Projects Update

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update including an explanation of the Middletown State Veteran Cemetery Expansion project with a completion date of December 2018, and the Cemetery Appearance project with a completion date of February 2020. These two projects total approximately \$8.6 million in improvements fully funded by the federal Cemetery Grants program.

Director Danao also updated Trustees in the efforts to secure State Bonding funds for a new Campus fire alarm and fire suppression system. Also, a new chiller for the HCC is awaiting award of construction and the Campus emergency generator is under construction with an estimated completion date in May 2018. He also reported on the A-Wing improvements and the new DVA website which is experiencing a record amount of use as well as the DVA Mobile application which has 388 downloads since inception.

III. New Business

A. Residential Facility - Bed Bug Protocol:

Chuck Leone of the DVA Residential Program provided update on bed bug situation. In December 2014 first evidence of bed bugs found in Residential living areas. In January of 2015, Pest Management Plan put in place. Monthly inspections conducted by residential staff along with regularly scheduled canine inspections of living areas, common areas, office and B-Clinic conducted. While bed bug activity was under control for much of 2015, 2016 and early 2017 in October 2017 bed bug activity increased significantly. Mr. Leone explained that additional treatments for all living areas affected took place and that new admissions must heat treat all personal belongings upon arrival.

Acting Commissioner Saadi explained that he received complaints from Veteran Residents about the procedures and notices related to the bed bug treatment protocols and asked the Residential Director to provide him a detailed report on the issue and to update the Integrated

Pest Management Plan. Mr. Leone explained that the Residential Director held a Staff educational seminar and working group on November 28, 2017, which included experts from the State's Agricultural Experiment Station. This was followed by a Town Hall Meeting for staff and Veteran Residents on December 19, 2017, which included the State's expert. Mr. Leone explained that new procedures are being implemented which included better notification to Veteran Residents.

B. Program Fee Update:

Acting Commissioner Saadi gave update on the DVA Program Fee including revenue, compliance and non-compliance trends. He explained that there was an uptick in involuntary discharges immediately after the implementation of the new program fees for noncompliance and that absent a jump in non-compliance in October 2017, most Veterans Residents are making the required payments of 30% of income beginning on their 5th month of residency. Acting Commissioner Saadi explained that non-compliance discharge appeals are usually by providing the Veteran Resident a period of time to pay an arrearage and attend credit counseling.

Acting Commissioner Saadi explained that Veteran Resident Mike Tetreault, resigned at Veteran Residential Facility Council President and thus was no longer a statutory member of Board. However, he and former Veteran Council President expressed concerns about the Program Fee to the Acting Commissioner and that Mr. Coveney sent him an email with a proposed alternative approach. Acting Commissioner Saadi stated that he assured Mr. Coveney he would present the email to the Board which he did. The email stated that the Council voted unanimously to ask that the Program Fee be altered to a level of \$100 and that Veterans with income under \$600 be exempt from the Program Fee. The email also asked that the Acting Acting Commissioner have broad discretion to forgive arrearage owed by Veterans who would like to return to the DVA. The intent, explained the email, is to help "fill" the residential facility again while helping those who struggle with financial issues.

Trustee Nelligan suggested reconvening the Program Fee sub-committee to discuss the issues raised in the email and to review the Program Fee issue overall. Chairman McDavid agreed, reappointed the Committee and asked for a report back on findings and suggestions at the Board's March 2018 meeting. New BOT member from Residential Facility will be voted in January 2018, and that person will also be included as a member of the Program Fee sub-committee.

Trustee Cheslock reported that he presented Acting Commissioner Saadi with a petition from all HCC patients opposing the proposed licensure change. Acting Commissioner Saadi said that he forwarded the petition to all Board members as would provide it to visiting Legislators as well.

Chair McDavid surveyed feasible dates with the Board and set the next Board meeting for Tuesday, March 13, 2018 at 3:30pm. The Chair and Acting Acting Commissioner wished everyone a Happy Holiday.

IV. Closing

There being no further business, Chair McDavid entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Leaf and seconded by Trustee Benson. Motion passed unanimously at 5:26 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Christopher McDavid, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 12/31/17