



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
December 13, 2022**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting was held in the Commissioner's Conference Room at the Department of Veterans Affairs located at 287 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT and was called to order by Chair Patrick Nelligan at 3:31 p.m.

Trustees in attendance: John Banks, Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Carlita Cotton, Ronald Coveney, Juan Cruz, Peter Galgano Jr., Adele Hodges, Frederick Leaf, John Lawlor, Patrick Nelligan, Sharad Samy and Sherri Vogt, Dawn Works-Dennis

Absent: Steven M. Harris and Alyssa Kelleher

Attending via TEAMS: Richard Dziekan, Sharad Samy and Heather Sandler.

DVA Staff in attendance: Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi, Lori Conchado, Joseph Danao, Tammy Marzik and Briana Mitchell.

Chair, Patrick Nelligan entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting which were accepted by Trustee Vogt and seconded by Trustee Leaf. The minutes were passed unanimously without any corrections or edits.

Chair Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi to brief on DVA achievements and events.

Commissioner Saadi spoke briefly on events that took place since September 2022 including the Building 50 Ribbon Cutting on August 31, 2022 which will serve as a Veteran Resource Support Center with 4 tenant leases currently in process. Stand Down 2022 was a great success serving over 1,100 Veterans statewide at five locations in Bristol, Bridgeport, Danbury, Norwich, and Rocky Hill. A Wartime Service Medal Ceremony was held in Newtown with several state representatives to honor Seymour area Veterans. Meriden Police Chief and Army National Guard Veteran Robert Rosado was the keynote speaker for the Hispanic Heritage Month ceremony and Board of Trustee member, Juan Cruz sang the National Anthem and presented on the life of SSG Jose "Joe" Guillermo Pickard, a Korean War Veteran and member of the Borinqueneers.

Commissioner Saadi reported that he and senior staff members traveled across the state to participate in 16 events over a three-day period in recognition of Veterans Day. Commissioner attended several events in Danbury to include the Danbury Regional Hospice, a visit to Immaculate High School where

he was presented with a \$1,600 donation raised by students, Putnam Memorial State Park for a presentation on the history of the revolutionary War, New Milford's Sarah Noble School and a ceremony at the Bigelow Center for Senior Activities in Fairfield where the new Office of Advocacy & Assistance will be located. Commissioner ended his day attending the Middletown Veterans Council ceremony at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown and on the DVA campus for a ceremony and special dinner prepared for Veterans. Operations Director Joseph Danao and OA&A Manger John Carragher were on hand for the University of New Haven Veterans Ceremony where several students were awarded Wartime Service Medals.

Chair, Patrick Nelligan attended Avelo Airlines 1st Anniversary celebration on November 4th during which the family of Michael Clark, who died during a training exercise, were presented with six round trip airline tickets and Disney World passes by Avelo. The National Guard had their Honor Guard and a staff member present to sing the National Anthem for this significant event that was greatly appreciated by the Clark family.

Other events include a Ribbon Cutting and re-dedication ceremony of the DVA Auditorium as the Gold Star Families Auditorium where many updates were made possible by private donations to include overhead lighting, curtains, and ADA accommodations. Special thanks to board member, Mr. Peter Galgano for creating a template for a parking sign to be used by Gold Star members beginning next spring. The 102nd Army Annual Holiday Concert was held in the auditorium with approximately 150 in attendance on December 10th. Commissioner Saadi spoke at the Danbury Pearl Harbor Day Memorial ceremony along with Navy Lt. Commander (Ret) Mark Dwinells where two WWII Veterans, Mr. Julius Demo and John Emond were in attendance.

Upcoming events include the Wreaths Across America Ceremony at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown and Colonel Gates in Rocky Hill scheduled for Saturday, December 17th at noon. The DVA is looking for volunteers to unload the first delivery of wreaths on 12/14. A Gold Star Family Memorial event is tentatively set for the spring of 2023.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

A. Fiscal Report

Director of Fiscal Services, Ms. Briana Mitchell provided a brief overview of the DVA Fiscal Budget reporting the DVA had no issues with the 1st Quarter managing Operating Expenses (OE) and Personal Services (PS). The bi-annual budget for 24/25 has been submitted with increases due to inflation for food and utilities. Physical operations continue with staff teleworking and managing to remain in compliance with our operating budget. Preliminary estimates for 2023 indicate a tight budget. Federal funds under the CARE Act will continue to support healthcare related costs while fiscal staff continue to scrutinize costs to continue support of services needed by our Veterans.

In response to Trustee. Lawlor's question, Ms. Mitchell clarified that the DVA operating and capital budgets are separate and distinct processes with our OE fund supporting our budget and capital funds supporting planning of projects.

B. Projects & Operations Report

Director of Operations Mr. Joseph Danao, reported the boiler project design award is pending review by the Property Review Board and discussions with DAS as to the status of the contract they have for dismantling and scrap for the previous boilers. Energy efficiency projects include updates to interior and exterior lighting, water conservation measures, electrical sub-metering of building and solar panel installation to provide electric power. The next design phase will be the large water tower. Roofing repairs for Building 5 and 8 (old hospital and new Skilled Nursing Center) under consideration due to damage incurred during storms over the past two years. DVA continues working on water service repairs and improvements to improve overall water quality and efficiency. Active projects include the shoring of decking outside of the MDR and repairs to the garage utilized by Veteran Residents. Operations staff respond to approximately 8 work order requests each day with 2586 submitted by residential services, 859 at the healthcare center with 84 remaining open over the previous three quarters. Following the December 8th Bond Meeting the DVA has \$2,499,897 remaining in bond fund authorizations minus \$533,635 allocated for the boiler project. A grant matching fund for \$801,440 will support the upgrades for our security project. A \$560,000 grant from the Bond Commission will support the boiler installation and a grant from Eversource for \$600,000 will cover lighting expenses. A solar field project is in works with the Connecticut Green Bank with no cost to the DVA and will support 90% of the Healthcare Center's electrical requirements. Connecticut State Police contributed \$2,000,000 to support the DVA water project repair through the Bond Commission. Repairs are being done as an alternative to removal as it is less costly.

Trustee Sharad inquired whether the allocated funding of \$2.5 million cover all projects. In response, Commissioner explained that fiscal is monitoring issues which may occur when we hit the two-year mark in in the biennial budget in July 2024 as the five-year outlook is not promising.

Commissioner Saadi reported that a private donation to the DVA was made to support the construction of a large pavilion similar to the one at Stones Ranch at Camp Nett at Niantic. This would be a 20 by 30 foot covered structure to replace the gazebo currently in the center of the quad to hold outdoor events and recreational activities and will have water and electrical services.

C. Cemetery Property Acquisition

The DVA was successful in acquiring ½ acre parcel from Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) to be utilized for administrative and storage space as required federally with a tentative plan to build a fence blocking the view from the cemetery. There is potential to acquire approximately 6 acres of land from the DMHAS/CVH depending upon relocation of staff currently utilizing structures on Holmes Drive Ext. and the DVA is still looking at possible property owned by the Town of Middletown on Bow Lane. Negotiation with Middletown may provide a better alternative to working with St. Mary's Parish, who still insists their property is worth \$1 million dollars.

D. Wreaths Across America

As of this morning the total sponsored number of wreaths is at 11,259, which equates to an approximate \$19,700 going towards the Perpetual Care Fund. We are waiting on final numbers; however, it appears DVA may fall short of goal by 1,000 wreaths. The two largest sponsors of wreaths by Hartford Healthcare and Eversource. It will cost \$3,000 to rent a dumpster to dispose of wreaths.

Chair Nelligan turned the floor over to WAA Board of Trustees coordinator Trustee Vogt for questions. Trustee Vogt reported looking ahead to beginning fundraising for next year's event to begin in January 2023 and considering one sponsor to donate wreaths specifically for the Colonel Gates Cemetery. WAA does a push in January offering buy one, get one free and our QR code can be utilized.

New Business

A. Hall of Fame

The Hall of Fame Ceremony is scheduled for January 19, 2023 at the CT State Armory (formally held at the LOB) with 12 individuals being honored.

B. Residential Fee Update

Commissioner Saadi requested a change in program fee that would increase from \$500 to \$550 the monthly income level for exempting Veterans from the program fee in response to a recent Social Security increase of 8/9% to begin in January. Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adopt the fee increase, which was read by Trustee Lawlor, seconded by Trustee Coveney and the motion was carried to increase the fee to \$550 effective January 1, 2023 with the increase in place for the February payment.

Commissioner requested the Board appoint a Program Fee Committee to review and make recommendations on approaches either exempting the first \$500 for every Veteran, which would result in a loss of \$133,000 in revenue to the IGW or reducing the Program Fee from 25% to 20% of adjusted income. The committee will need to work with Commissioner and Director Mitchell to identify additional revenue and/or savings to make up for lost income. After discussion Chair Nelligan appointed Trustee Samy to chair the committee with additional members to be appointed in the next few weeks.

Chair Nelligan opened the floor to Trustee Coveney to share information regarding Federal Regulation 38 CFR 51.2 and propose that the DVA work with OPM to transfer IGW food expenses back to the OE appropriated line item. Commissioner Saadi explained the change in appropriated funds from OE to IGW occurred approximately eight years ago under a prior administration due to budget cuts and during a time when the IGW had in excess of \$10 million available. The IGW funds were quickly depleted and the on the verge of insolvency until last year when Commissioner Saadi and Director Mitchell restructured the fund which is now projected to be solvent for the next ten years. Commissioner Saadi stated that he will request a meeting with the Office of the Governor to discuss the issue which will involve a budget adjustment request. Chair Nelligan requested members hold on reaching out to resources to allow time for discussions. Trustee Lawlor suggested a fact check and information gathered on the subject to be discussed in a January meeting. A special meeting will be scheduled for late January or early February to discuss talking points, perform a legal review and prepare to support Commissioner in his discussion with the Governor's Office.

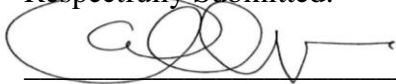
Closing

Chair, Patrick Nelligan closed by sharing his thoughts on the successes of past year, noting we are the longest continuously running Veterans home and healthcare facility in the country and looking forward to continual improvements in the new year.

An Alibi from the Commissioner regarding a change in lights out in the residential facility from 10:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. was introduced to the Board for voting and successfully passed.

There being no further business Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn which was accepted and passed unanimously at 5:09 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 8, 2023, at 3:30 p.m. The confirmation of a special meeting date in January is forthcoming.

Respectfully Submitted:



Patrick Nelligan, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date December 19, 2022