



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
June 8, 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 Vice-Chair Dawn Works-Dennis at 3:03 p.m.

Trustees in attendance: John Banks, Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Carlita Cotton, Ronald Coveney, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano Jr., Steven M. Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent: Richard Benson, Juan Cruz, Adele Hodges and Frederick Leaf.  
Attending via TEAMS: Alyssa Kelleher and Patrick Nelligan.

DVA Staff in attendance: Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi, John S. Carragher, Lori Conchado, Joseph Danao, Tammy Marzik, Matthew Pellowski and Jane Siegel.

Commissioner Saadi introduced and opened the floor to new Board of Trustee member, Ms. Carlita Cotton.

Ms. Cotton is retired from the U.S. Air Force and is a Professor of Psychology. She lives in Mansfield, CT with her husband where she has served on the Planning and Zoning Committee for Inland/Wetlands. She is passionate about serving her community and looking forward to working with and learning from our members.

Ms. Cotton was sworn in by Staff Attorney Ms. Jane Siegel.

Vice Chair Work-Dennis entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting, which were passed unanimously without any corrections or edits to the minutes.

Vice Chair Works-Dennis asked Commissioner Saadi to brief on DVA achievements and events.

Commissioner Saadi spoke briefly on events that took place since March 2022 including the April 8<sup>th</sup> Association of the United States Annual Spring Dinner attended by General Evon, Retired General McHale and Ted Graziani. Commissioner highlighted the accomplishments of Michael Zacchea, Medically Retired Lieutenant Colonel in the Marine Corps who passed away recently to include being the only American to receive Iraq's Order of the Lion of Babylon award, authoring his story "The Ragged

Edge” and recipient of two Bronze Stars for Valor and the Purple Heart Medal. A moment of silence was observed in honor in his memory.

Volunteers from Henkel Corporation were on campus to provide landscaping services to include weeding, trimming and planting flowers that were needed and appreciated by staff and Veterans. Commissioner served as the Keynote speaker at the Post 60 Veterans Memorial Wall Dedication and attended Danbury’s Hometown Heroes Banner Program displaying banners across the city in honor of local Veterans. The Armed Forces Day Luncheon hosting over 700 in attendance, including several DVA staff members was held on May 20<sup>th</sup>. The Wall of Honor Ceremony held at the Legislative Office Building was attended by CT Goldstar Families President Helen Keiser-Pedersen, who delivered moving remarks to attendees. Commissioner attended several Memorial Day Events across the state to include, Bethany, Old Saybrook and Danbury and a service at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown.

Upcoming events include the Unclaimed Remains Ceremony scheduled for Friday, June 17, 2022 at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown. Four Veterans and a Veteran’s spouse will be laid to rest with Full Military Honors beginning at 10:30 a.m.

## **II. Old/Ongoing Business**

### **A. COVID-19 Response & Recovery**

There were nearly 300 veterans in Residential and HCC that have been cared for on campus with only 135 testing positive since the beginning of the pandemic with 129 that have recovered. Of the remaining six, five passed due to exposure the to the virus and one passed due to a non-Covid related incident. Staff and residents have been diligent in caring for themselves and each other, social distancing and participated in point prevalence testing which has been successful in keeping our number down.

A total of 162 staff members have been tested positive with approximately 14 testing positive more than once. Vaccination rates among staff are approximately 88% due to on-boarding of new staff members and Residents at 99%.

### **B. Budgeting and Staffing**

Commissioner Saadi recognized DVA Fiscal Manager Matthew Pellowski for an update on the budget and staffing trends. Mr. Pellowski reported the IGW (Institutional General Welfare Fund) appropriations for Personal Services and Operating expenses for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter expenditures are in line to carry us through Fiscal Year 2022 balanced. The fiscal office has worked diligently to reduce expenditures of essential items and medical supplies from the IGW by shifting them to the OE fund which is an appropriated funding source. This shift has been essential in converting the account from near insolvency a few years ago to mid/long term solvency. The account balance is expected to continually grow as the agency expands its census, particularly in our skilled nursing facility and income payments towards Title 19 will be applied to this account.

The Legislature appropriated \$330,000 in the FY20 23 midterm budget to include funding for pharmaceuticals and an additional \$500,000 to the DVA as a pass through of funds to be utilized exclusively by Easter Seals Rally Point to sustain and expand programs. Payments will be made from the DVA account to Easter Seals on a quarterly basis.

## Projects Report

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a DVA update reporting Energy Efficiency incentives as a high priority with the planning stage to include lighting, boilers, steam traps and pipe insulation. Commissioner is working with the State Preservation Office to stress the importance of safety and durability in rebuilding the cement platform and stairs outside of the Main Dining Room. Smaller bonding requests have been submitted continuously and the DVA has been receiving support from Legislators and Administration.

### C. Cemetery Property Acquisition

Commissioner Saadi reported St. Mary's Parish has held on their rejection of the DVA's offer to purchase their property due to a disagreement in price. The issue of expanding the cemetery remains a high priority as we are expected to reach capacity in 5-7 years. Other options have been considered including: 3 lots located nearby which are being held in a trust, however the family is not currently interested in selling and property owned by Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH). Our goal is to acquire enough property to receive burials for a least an additional 30 years. A question was raised regarding whether our expansion will include additional columbarium space and it was confirmed this will be a variable in our plan. Several meetings to further discuss options are scheduled in June with an update to be provided at the next meeting.

## III. New Business

### A. Legislative Update

Commissioner reported the DVA continues to work with the Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) on reviewing DD-214 form and qualifications for those applying for the Veteran specific license plates. Also noted was a statewide training of Municipal Veteran Service Officers that was coordinated through the OA&A Office with more than 70 members participating in presentations from staff and others on various subject matter on DVA Residential Programs & Services, Cemetery Services and representatives present from the Federal VA, CT Department of Labor and the Small Business Administration, who were on hand to provide information and answer questions.

### B. DVA Staffing Update

The OA&A Office hired one new full time Veteran Service Officer and re-classified Mr. Paul Spedeliere to full a time VSO position in the Norwich Office. Facilities Management hired Mr. Ezra Cabrera as the new Plant Facilities Engineer and Mr. Gary LaFontaine has returned on a 120-day contract to assist with ongoing projects.

## IV. Closing

Ms. Sherri Vogt shared that she is working on preparations for the upcoming Wreaths Across America event to include formal letters to corporate sponsors and a new website. Any suggestions for sponsors would be appreciated.

A suggestion to make a change in time for our meetings moving forward to begin at 3:00 p.m. was entertained with the majority in agreement.

There being no further business Vice Chair Dawn Works-Dennis entertained a motion to adjourn which was passed unanimously at 4:25 p.m. Per the scheduled dates set by the Board the next meeting is scheduled for September 14, 2022, at 3:00 p.m., venue to be determined.

Respectfully Submitted:

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Dawn Works-Dennis, Vice Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date June 30, 2022