



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
March 9, 2022**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting (conducted via Teams meeting platform) was called to order by Chairman Nelligan at 3:28 PM.

In attendance: John Banks, Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Adele Hodges, Alyssa Kelleher, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent: Richard Benson, Juan Cruz, and Steven Harris.

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi, John S. Carragher, Lori Conchado, Joseph Danao, Tammy Marzik, Briana Mitchell and Jane Siegel.

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

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

Commissioner Saadi spoke briefly on events that took place since December 2021 including Wreath's Across America held at the CT State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown in December, which raised over \$25,000 for the Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund. The DVA campus hosted several other events to include a visit by American Legion National Commander, Paul E. Dillard; Presentations of Wartime Service Medals to four World War II Veterans celebrating significant milestones.

Black History Month was celebrated with a ceremony featuring Keynote Speaker Keith Grant a decorated U.S. Air Force Promotable Captain and APRN for Harford Healthcare, remarks by U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal and presentation by Veteran Resident Mr. John Roscoe on Health and Wellness. Also in attendance were Rocky Hill Mayor Marrota, DMV Commissioner Magubane, Deputy Commissioner Guererra, Statewide Veteran Leaders and DVA staff.

Commissioner highly commended the efforts of Xavier High School student Michael Wollen who earned over \$700 chopping and selling firewood to purchase gift cards, water, K-cups and present a \$200

check to support the DVA Veteran Outreach Program. Mr. Wollen, the nephew of Brigadier General Joseph T. Wojtasik was presented with the Commissioner's Challenge Coin in recognition of his generous efforts.

Upcoming events include the Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day event scheduled for March 30th, Press Conference to announce the new DMV Veteran Specific License Plates, Hartford Athletic Soccer Military Appreciation Day on May 29th, Memorial Day Event at the Middletown Veterans Cemetery on May 30th, a date TBD in June for the Veteran Unclaimed Cremains Ceremony and a Marine Corps Boxing Event in Springfield, MA on November 12th to raise proceeds for the DVA.

Commissioner introduced and welcomed new members Mr. Ron Coveney, the newly elected president representing DVA Residential Veterans and Mr. John Carragher, the new OA& A Manager who came to the DVA after serving 40 years with the Connecticut National Guard. Mr. Danao introduced Mr. Ezra Cabrera the new Plant Facilities Engineer, a retired Navy Utilities Chief.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

A. COVID-19 Response & Recovery

There were two instances of raising COVID-19 numbers during December and January with 13% of staff, 24 HCC Patients and 1 Residential Veteran determined to be positive. All have recovered and returned with the exception of one who is expected to be released from isolation within the next few days.

Commissioner Saadi reported a 99% vaccination rate among staff and residents and applauded the cooperation among residents in completing monthly and bi-weekly full point prevalence COVID testing. The DVA continues to conduct COVID-19 Mitigation Operations Meetings to monitor veteran and staff vaccination rates, maintain critical supplies and provide weekly updates.

All staff are reported to be working either in their office or teleworking and the campus is now open for visitors and clients wishing to drop off paperwork.

B. Budgeting and Staffing

Commissioner Saadi recognized DVA Fiscal Director Briana Mitchell for an update on the budget and staffing trends. Ms. Mitchell shared appropriations for Personal Services and Operating expenses for the quarter reporting the DVA's first and second quarter expenditures are in line to carry us through Fiscal Year 2022 balanced. Ms. Mitchell reported the proposal to shift the use of IGW (Institutional General Welfare Funds) to purchase pharmaceuticals to OE was approved in the Governor's midterm budget. The shift in funding sources and continued monitoring by staff will keep our budget in balance.

Commissioner explained DVA was utilizing IGW (Institutional General Welfare Fund) dollars to purchase pharmaceuticals that were reimbursed by the federal government with the money going into the general fund rather than for the DVA specifically. The shift of monies into the DVA OE account will now allow us to build upon this account, which previously was insolvent.

C. Projects Report

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a DVA projects update which include the installation of a large awning over our transportation area and a Bond request allocation of \$595,000 for a large boiler replacement project which is scheduled to be reviewed at the Bond Commission Meeting on 3/31/22.

The Residential Quality of Life Improvements continue with the submission of a plan and timeline for F-wing to be presented to Commissioner Saadi for review. Phase II of the auditorium renovation will continue anticipating there will be additional activity as improvements are made. Roof replacements for residential buildings and the Healthcare Center are being reviewed as we shift from winter to spring. The project needs to go out for bidding and the cost is expected to be very high. Energy efficiency is a number one concern currently with 200 steam traps that are in need of repair and will result in instant energy and water savings. This project and repairs to the concrete deck outside of the Main Dining Room are considered Life, Safety projects and will require bonding funds to complete.

D. Cemetery Property Acquisition

Commissioner Saadi reported the DVA has received appraisals for the property and made an offer of \$350,000 for the 13.6 acres of land abutting the Veterans Cemetery in Middletown which was initially rejected by the parish. The DAS State Property division then contacted the parish and asked for reconsideration of the offer or a good faith offer which were both rejected. The parish rejected further discussions absent the DVA increasing its offer. The acquisition of St. Mary's parcel would extend the operational life of the cemetery by decades allowing for the addition of 4,025 standard plots, 7,000 cremation plots and 6,000 columbarium niches. Commissioner Saadi contacted DMHAS Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon regarding an eight-acre parcel on Bow Lane owned by CVH. Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon is agreeable to the transfer of the property to the DVA however the DMHAS legal department advised that the property must remain in CVH inventory until conclusion of ongoing litigation. The next step is possibly increasing the offer to St. Mary's Parish and continue discussions with CVH pending the outcome of litigation. Commissioner Saadi will update Lt Governor Susan Bysiewicz who is in full support of the DVA acquiring additional property for the Cemetery.

Co-Chair Sherri Vogt suggested involving members of the community to garner support and raise additional funds if necessary. Commissioner noted that he would be unable to participate in any fundraising efforts.

III. New Business

A. Legislative Update

Commissioner reported on pending legislation which he testified on before the Veterans Affairs Committee on Tuesday, March 8th. A total of 20 Bills were raised at the Public Hearing with Commissioner speaking on 8. Commissioner spoke in favor of HB 5367 to recognize the establishment of conflict specific license plates for Iraq and Afghanistan; HJR 92 the recognition of Chief Harold Tantaguideon's postmortem recognition of service; SB 341 the establishment of a Task Force to study Veteran property tax exemptions; SB 342 Federal reimbursements for pharmaceutical purchases; SB 340

Formalizes the procedure for restoration of benefits for certain Veterans with an Other Than Honorable discharge (OTH); SB 345 Commissioner supports the concept of waiving the transportation fee, however cautioned the Committee on possible confusion regarding acceptable ID's; SB 338 Commissioner opposed the Study of Municipal Veterans Services as the DVA does not have the staff to support this initiative. He recommended that leadership, veteran service leaders and legislators work to develop a cost-effective solution. SB 344 – State Contracting Preferences for Veteran Owned Business. Commissioner suggested making a change to allow for partnerships of 50/50 ownership to be approved. SB 339 Technical revisers bill.

B. DVA Staffing Update

OA&A Manager John Carragher started on 2/25. OPM approved a full time VSO position and floater position to travel between Bridgeport and Milford and Mr. Paul Spedeliere filled a full time VSO position in the Norwich Office. Facilities Management hired Mr. Ezra Cabrera as the new Plant Facilities Engineer and Mr. Tony Decaro is the new Building Superintendent.

C. War Conflict Specific License Plates & the CT Veterans Trail Working Group

DVA developed a training module for DMV teaching them how to read DD-214's and identify specific war conflicts for processing applications. Commissioner and Ms. Marzik have met with tourism staff discussing how the wine and antiques trails were developed with the assistance of consultant. Commissioner, Ms. Marzik and Mr. Carragher will be reaching out for volunteers interested in serving on the working group.

IV. Closing

Chairman Nelligan took the floor asking for a Call to Arms for all to reach out to elected officials requesting support and advocate for funding the DVA needs and has previously been underfunded for. Residential President Ron Coveney has been contacting state representatives and VA Committee Members to schedule an on-campus visit and garner support. Guest Tom Hardy sent an invitation to Co-chairs, Vice-Chairs and ranking member of all 6 leaders of the VA Committee inviting them to visit the DVA campus.

There being no further business Chairman Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn. Per the scheduled dates set by the Board the next meeting is scheduled for June 8th at 3:30, venue to be determined. Motion to adjourn was made and passed unanimously at 4:54 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Patrick Nelligan, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date April 7, 2022