



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
September 18, 2019**

I. Convene Meeting:

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Michael Thomas at 3:04 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by Chairman Thomas.

In attendance were Trustees: John Banks, Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Peter Galgano, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Michael Thomas, Mark Spranzo, Kjell Tollefsen, and Dawn Works-Dennis. Also in attendance from the DVA staff, Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Patrice Olson, Michael Clark, Tammy Marzik, Joseph Danao, and Darlene Deschaine.

Absent Trustees: Richard Dziekan, Juan Cruz, Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Heather Sandler and Sherri Vogt.

New Trustee, Mark Spranzo was administered the oath of office by DVA Staff Attorney Patrice Olson. Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion by Trustee Tollefsen and seconded by Trustee Cacciola. Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner's update: Commissioner Saadi reported on recent events and achievements of the CT DVA including recognizing and honoring five WWII veterans that served in France, attending a rock concert in Bristol to benefit DVA Veterans, participating in a Veterans bill signing ceremony by Governor Lamont and a Ribbon Cutting event expanding the Semi-Private Living Program to the B-Wing of the Residential facility. Upcoming events include the Annual DVA Stand Down Event on Sept 20th, the Annual AT&T 3 Miler on November 9th and various Veterans Day Ceremony on November 11th.

II. Old Business

A. DVA Healthcare Center Update (HCC) – License Transition:

Chairman Thomas asked Commissioner Saadi for an update on the Healthcare transition. The Commissioner explained that the HCC is now a licensed Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) and is now admitting Veterans. The final phase for certification is CMS/Medicaid/Medicare certification. The inspection for this certification should take place in September or October. The Veteran outpatient clinic (VOC) is operating six days a week and will phase to a 5 day schedule by first or second week of

October as previously planned. Chairman Thomas asked how many veterans use the VOC on the weekend, the Commissioner stated that there are seven veterans utilizing services on Saturday who are currently being educated by the clinicians to self-administer their medications with a pillbox and instructions. Each of these Veterans will be continuously monitored to ensure their health and wellbeing.

B. Fiscal Report:

Michael Clark reported on the State Budget and staffing trends explaining that DVA Operating Expenses line item has been reduced and the DVA's reliance on the IGW continues. Currently the IGW generates approximately 2.5 million a year in revenue, which is lower than several years ago due to the lower census in the Residential facility and Healthcare Center, however these are expected to increase based on the new HCC SNF license and updated residential wings. The Commissioner pointed out that the Lamont administration has supported two major bonding projects for the DVA.

C. Projects Update, Cemetery Admin Update

Projects and Operations Director Joseph Danao provided a DVA Projects update reporting that the Lamont administration has approved \$1.2 million in bonding to match the Federal \$1.6 million in grants for the agency's ADA improvements planned for buildings 2, 3 and 4. Currently the DVA is working \$13.1 million in federal grants and state bonding for two projects at the State Veterans Cemetery and the three projects at the DVA main Campus in Rocky Hill. The cemetery expansion project is complete and the appearance project is projected to finish in the spring of 2020. Other projects on site to report on include the abatement projects for building 5, the replacement of the water line to the Patriot's Landing Homes has been completed and the Fire Alarm and Suppression System which is estimated to be completed by end of the October 2019. Mr. Danao reported that the HCC's two 400 gallon water tanks were replaced and went live on September 17th and the buildings on Levitow Lane are ready for Easter Seals Rally Point occupation.

D. Wreaths Across America/Civil Air Patrol Update

Chairman Thomas then reported on the Wreaths Across America transparency issue explaining that he has inquired of Joe Sanborn of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), through e-mails and telephone calls, for an accounting of how much money CAP raises through use of the Veterans Cemetery, where those funds go and whether some amount may be dedicated to Cemetery perpetual care. Mr. Sanborn has not been responsive and more senior CAP officials are now involved and explained to Chair Thomas that a stakeholders meeting needs to take place before this information can be provided. Significant discussion followed during which Trustee Barry stated that going forward CAP should disclose on all written materials that the event is a fundraiser for CAP. There was discussion related to terminating CAP's use of the Cemetery for the WAA event which the Commissioner and Chair opposed explaining that discussions with CAP should continue and the planned event should go forward however, the Board should consider possibly taking over the event for next year unless the outstanding matters can be resolved. Several Trustees expressed their concern that money is being raised through the use of Veterans graves and so some of that money should go to the care of those graves.

III. New Business

A. Transportation Task Force – Request for BOT Input

Commissioner Saadi reported that the General Assembly has established Transportation Task Force that will focus on issues regarding seniors, the disabled and veterans. The Commissioner asks that the board to provide him with a written report of the top three to five transportation issues affecting Veterans along with recommended solutions. This should be submitted to the Commissioner not later than October 30, 2019. The information will be reviewed and compiled with other reports from participating agencies and constituencies into a comprehensive report with recommendations to be provided to the General Assembly in January 2020. Chairman Thomas has asked the board to begin a dialogue regarding this report.

B. Commissioner Military Update

Commissioner Saadi has volunteered for an active duty mobilization with a tentative report date of October 16, 2019. During his leave of absence he will remain Commissioner of DVA and will be in contact with the DVA staff via regular conference calls and periodic in person staff meetings at least twice per month. The daily operational staff structure has been approved by the Governor's Office pursuant to which Fiscal Manager Michael Clark and Projects and Operations Manager Joseph Danao will oversee day to day operations. Tammy Marzik will be handling Legislative and press matters, Joseph Danao, Ryan McKenna and Leslie Nieves will attend veteran events on behalf of the Commissioner. Darlene Deschaine will continue to be the initial point of contact for any inquires.

C. Semi-Private Living Program Expanded

Commissioner Saadi reported on the expansion of the Semi-Private Living Program (SPLP). Based on the success of the Pilot program in C-Wing the DVA recently expanded the program to three rooms of B-Wing. The intention is to expand the program to an additional 12 rooms in D-Wing in the Spring of 2020.

IV. Closing

Chairman Thomas suggested meeting either December 11th or December 13th at 3:00, depending on the Commissioner's military schedule. There being no further business, Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made and passed unanimously at 4:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Michael Thomas, Chairman
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 10/10/19