



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
September 6, 2023**

(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 3:36 p.m.

Trustees in attendance: Richard Adgers, John Banks, Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Carlita Cotton, Juan Cruz, Peter Galgano Jr., Adele Hodges, Patrick Nelligan, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler and Sherri Vogt.

Absent: Richard Dzeikan, Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, John Lawlor and Fredereick Leaf.

DVA Staff in attendance: Commissioner Ronald P. Welch, John Carragher, Lori Conchado, Joseph Danao, Lindsay Jesshop, Briana Mitchell, Lesbia Nieves.

Chair, Patrick Nelligan called the meeting to order at 3:36 p.m. and entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting which were accepted by Trustee Vogt and seconded by Trustee Galgano. The minutes were passed unanimously without any corrections or edits.

Manager of Community Advocacy, Linsay Jesshop provided an overview of DVA achievements for the past quarter to include a well-attended Veterans Rep training, two PACT Act events assisting over 1,000 Veterans in processing claims, the start of construction on a large Pavilion on campus made possible through a private donation, Press Conferences with Attorney General Tong regarding military scams and with Senator Blumenthal to announce a Veteran Farmers Grant Program. Radio interviews included WINY and CRIS radio to discuss the PACT Act and DVA's 4 core missions. Other notable events included a large gathering held at the DVA Gold Star Families Auditorium honoring Corporal Dorothy "Dottie" Dee for her nomination for the Living Legend Award and two Wartime Service Medals presented to Army Air Corps. Sergeant Ludwig "Sam" Garh on his 105th birthday and Navy Veteran David Parkinson on his 100th birthday.

Upcoming events include a Board of Trustees fundraiser "Rock 4 Vets", Cigna and Saluting Branches on campus to volunteer their services landscaping and performing tree work, Stand Down, Residential Veterans trip to DC, Unclaimed Cremains, the town of Rocky Hill's Road Race and Wreaths Across America.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

A. Fiscal Report

Director of Fiscal Services, Ms. Briana Mitchell presented the DVA's 4th Quarter budget which is on track for the year end. Expenditures continue to be closely monitored by fiscal staff to meet the increasing budget needs and maintain funding to support our Veterans.

B. Projects & Operations Report

Deputy Commissioner Danao provided an overview of ongoing projects to include the construction phase of the Pavilion, ongoing work to renovate Building #18 across from the DVA campus and HCC's call bell system and upgrades to replace the existing gatehouse, add cameras and mass notification system, which are in the design stage. A major energy efficiency initiative funded by DEEP in conjunction with CT Green Bank Solar Field Installation is scheduled for replacement of lighting throughout the campus.

C. Cemetery Property Acquisitions

Deputy Commissioner Danao reported 3 million dollars in bonding was requested to support the expansion of the cemetery property and Commissioner will participate in a bond meeting at the end of the month. All options to expand or establish a new cemetery are still under consideration. The DVA continues to look at options to expand our capacity long term.

D. Office of Advocacy & Assistance

OA&A manager, John Carragher reported the unit generates \$125 million annually to the Connecticut economy through claims Veteran Service Officers submitted to the Federal VA with 8,269 total claims submitted by 11 VSO's serving our Veterans statewide. Legislative support for the 2023 session was successful in increasing the minimum number of VSO's by adding two additional positions and a supervisor to focus on supervising, providing training to Municipal Vet Representatives and provide services to Residential and HCC residents. Renovations to a building adjacent to the main campus to house the new supervisor, staff and training room is in process and near completion.

A total of 1,026 PACT Act related claims were filed on behalf of 915 individuals with 568 complete and 458 pending. The workload to process claims remains high as there is not deadline date for submission. Post 9/11 Veteran demographics continue to be a challenge.

The new case management system went live on September 1, 2023 with most data having been migrated from the Federal VA. The system has improved accuracy and efficiency in filing claims.

E. Residential Programs

Director Nieves presented an overview of an upcoming Veteran resident trip to Washington DC on October 20 – 23, 2023. Reservations have been made for 26 Veterans and 4 staff members to travel via bus to visit several venues. Trustees are encouraged to reach out to Director Nieves if interested in traveling with the group.

F. Residential Fee Program Update

Trustee Samy, the chair of the Residential Fee sub-committee reported the members reviewed data on fee analysis dating back to 2016 and determined they did not feel changes are needed at this time. Chair Nelligan

put forward a motion to maintain the Residential Fee Structure with no change. The board voted unanimously to keep the current fee structure in place.

Closing

Chair, Patrick Nelligan asked that the Stand Down locations and information be shared with members and encouraged members to attend and support the Stand Down, Rock 4 Vets and Wreaths Across America initiatives.

There being no further business Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn which was accepted by Trustee Vogt, seconded by Trustee Barry and the meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 13th. at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Nelligan', is written over a horizontal line.

Patrick Nelligan, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date November 8, 2023