



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
September 14, 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 3:35 p.m.

Trustees in attendance: John Banks, Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Ronald Coveney, Juan Cruz, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano Jr., Steven M. Harris, John Lawlor, Patrick Nelligan, Sharad Samy and Sherri Vogt.

Absent: Carlita Cotton, Dawn Works-Dennis, and Frederick Leaf.

Attending via TEAMS: Adele Hodges, Alyssa Kelleher and Heather Sandler.

DVA Staff in attendance: Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi, Lori Conchado, Tammy Marzik and Briana Mitchell via Teams and Jane Siegel.

Commissioner Saadi introduced new Board of Trustee member, Mr. John Lawlor, Retired Brigadier General, U.S. Army.

Mr, Lawlor was sworn in by Staff Attorney Ms. Jane Siegel.

Chair, Patrick Nelligan entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting, which were passed unanimously without any corrections or edits to the minutes.

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

Commissioner Saadi spoke briefly on events that took place since June 2022 including the Unclaimed Remains Ceremony on June 17, 2022 laying to rest four Veterans at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown, two ceremonies honoring the centennial birthdays of WWII Veterans in which Commissioner presented Ms. Mary Stewart and Mr. Eugene Goetz with Wartime Service Medals, a day of kayaking at Rover's Lodge on Lake Besek in Middletown where Veterans gathered to enjoy a beautiful day and make connections and a Car Show held at the Danbury War Memorial where soldiers from the 411 Civil Affairs Battalion displayed their new Joint Tactical Vehicle and Commissioner spoke with participants and met with Gold Star mother of Navy Seal Jason D. Lewis.

On August 9, 2022, Commissioner participated in a Press Conference with Senator Richard Blumenthal to raise awareness of the passage of the PACT Act which expands presumptive conditions and benefits to Veterans, spouses and children previously denied. It is important to share information as many cases have gone unreported and others who have been denied should be encouraged to re-apply for benefits. Congress is working on additional funding and hiring of staff to handle the review of claims beginning in January 2023. CT DVA Office of Advocacy & Assistance is looking at hiring additional staff in our Regional Offices and currently working on over 30 calls from Veterans.

A Ribbon Cutting Ceremony held at the DVA Campus marked the renovation of Building 50 designating it as a Resource Support Center where various Veterans groups including the American Legion Auxiliary, VFW and Small Business Administration are housed on campus. The building, once slated for demolition now provides a place for organizations to gather for networking and business opportunities. The event drew a large crowd to include Governor Ned Lamont, Senator Richard Blumenthal and Board Members and included a Veteran Owned Business Resource and Exposition area where Veteran owned businesses were on hand to display and answer questions regarding their services.

Commissioner spent a day in Groton on September 9, 2022 beginning with a Coffeehouse gathering with Veterans, moving on to the Coast Guard ceremony welcoming the arrival of the first nuclear powered submarine Nautilus back to the Sub Force Museum, followed by the opening ceremony of the OpSail festival events.

The DVA in conjunction with Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz's Office held ceremonies in Enfield, Hamden, North Stonington, Windsor, Windsor Locks and Watertown to honor Korean and Vietnam War Veterans for their service. The events provide an opportunity for Veterans to gather and share stories that have never been shared, in an environment where they are comfortable.

Upcoming events include the Statewide Stand Down event on September 23, 2022 with locations in Bridgeport, Bristol, Danbury, Norwich and Rocky Hill. Members were provided with posters and encouraged to attend if possible and share information. A ceremony renaming the DVA Auditorium as the "Connecticut Gold Star Memorial Auditorium" is planned (date TBD) in November. Reserved seating for the event will be provided for families, with special thanks to Mr. Galgano for his creation of signs to honor special guests. A Memorial Service is scheduled on November 11, 2022 at the State Veteran's Cemetery in Middletown and a Hall of Fame event at the State Armory (date TBD) is in process with applications being reviewed. Board Members are encouraged to attend a Holiday Band Performance at the DVA Auditorium on December 10th at 5:00 p.m.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

A. Budgeting and Staffing

Commissioner Saadi provided a brief overview of the DVA Fiscal Budget noting an increase in headstone reimbursements from \$100 to \$125 has been approved. The fee is a reimbursement made to funeral homes for Veterans buried in private cemeteries.

The department is in line with appropriations for our \$25.5 million FY2022 budget.

B. Projects Report

In the absence of Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao, Commissioner provided a DVA update reporting the department received approval for our bonding allocation request of \$595,000 to cover the cost of replacing an outdated boiler system. Shoring of the concrete deck outside of the Main Dining Room is on-going and in process. Roof repairs and renovations to the garage area used by Veterans to repair vehicles is currently under review.

C. Cemetery Property Acquisition

Attempts to acquire abutting properties to expand burial space continues to be unsuccessful. Commissioner and state officials are now in discussion with the City of Middletown for the purchase of approximately ½ acre on Bow Lane that would be utilized for storage. Efforts to acquire additional property for the expansion of burial space is still a high priority as we expect to reach capacity in 5-7 years. The department continues to focus on expansion of our Cemetery rather than looking at a new location as it is cost effective and will take less time. Acquiring property within the next two years is essential as a lengthy planning process is expected.

III. New Business

A. Wreaths Across America

Board Member, Ms. Sherri Vogt is seeking volunteers to assist in reaching a goal of providing 13,000 donated wreaths for this year's ceremony. Wreaths will be laid nationwide on 12/17. When purchasing wreaths it is important to use our QR Code as \$5.00 from each sale will be applied to our Perpetual Care Fund. Board Members are encouraged to share our flyer with friends, family members and social media contacts to get the word out and to set a personal goal for wreaths sales. Ms. Vogt is working with corporate sponsorships and encourages members to as well.

B. Legislative Update

Commissioner will be working with the General Assembly in the upcoming session with a newly formed Tax Abatement Task Force to discuss credits for Veterans. Board Members are encouraged to contact their local representatives to support legislation.

C. Other

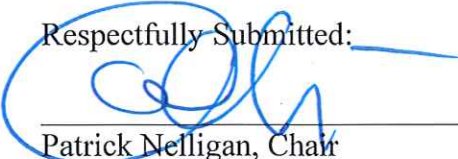
Ms. Vogt noted her concern with issues involving disability payments being applied as income and requested a committee be formed to look into this matter. A motion to create a sub-committee was raised by Chair Patrick Nelligan, accepted by Mr. Harris and seconded by Mr. Samy. Board members interested in participating should contact Ms. Vogt directly. The Committee will report back at our December 13, 2022 meeting.

IV. Closing

Chair, Patrick Nelligan shared his final thoughts on the passing of Mr. Michael Clark, a beloved husband, father, friend and soldier, who lost his life while performing duties at Fort Gordon, GA in August. Both Commissioner Saadi and Mr. Nelligan attended the services and presented a Wartime Service Medal, Posthumously to the family. The service was well attended and served as a reminder of the importance of supporting our Veterans and their families.

There being no further business Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn which was accepted by Mr. Barry, seconded by Mr. Lawlor and passed unanimously at 4:40 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 13, 2022, at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:



Patrick Nelligan, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date September 27, 2022