



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
October 23, 2017**

*(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)*

**I. Convene Meeting:**

The Meeting was called to order by Chair Christopher McDavid at 4:02 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by Chair McDavid followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance: Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Robert Cheslock, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Brien Horan, Frederick Leaf, Christopher McDavid, Patrick Nelligan, Paul Tarbox, Michael Thomas, Michael Tetrault, Kjell Tollefsen.

Absent: Amy Donahue & Tatiana Quinzi

Chair McDavid and Trustees congratulated Acting Commissioner Saadi on his new position.

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

Chair McDavid introduced Acting Commissioner Thomas Saadi who explained his vision for the DVA in Serving Those Who Served based on three principles being Continuity, Stability and Sustainability. Commissioner Saadi then presented a general update of DVA activities to the Board highlighting recent Veteran and DVA achievements, including ribbon cutting ceremonies for the opening of The Veteran Connection, a computer/technical lounge for Veterans on campus. Commissioner Saadi then discussed upcoming DVA and Veteran events, such as the many Veterans Day events, the CT Hall of Fame ceremony on November 30, 2017 and Wreaths Across America on December 16, 2017.

Commissioner Saadi introduced Maria Cheney, Residential Director at DVA, and thanked her for leading/implementing another successful Stand Down Event for 2017.

## **II. Old Business**

### **A. DVA Meetings with OPM & OFA**

Commissioner Saadi explained that meetings with OPM and OFA have taken place to provide the DVA's perspective on proposed budget cuts. Michael Clark did not believe OPM understood the financial impact should the Healthcare Center (HCC) become a Nursing Home. The meetings with OPM and OFA were of great assistance to Staff. The same financial information shared with OPM was shared with OFA along with a tour of the DVA campus. Both were educated on what it is that DVA does and what the financial impact of a \$2M cut would create.

### **B. Residential A-Wing Update**

The Commissioner briefed the Board on the status of the proposed quality of life improvements to A wing of the Residential Facility which include a new gym in the A Wing day room and upgrades to the living areas which will transition the Wing from three connected pods with 4 beds in each to semi-private rooms with two beds and a shared common area. Improvements will include new flooring, walls, lighting, painting and furniture. The Commissioner explained that this is the first renovation of this kind in the Residential facility since it opened in 1940. Expected date to begin asbestos removal is November 13, 2017 followed by construction in the spring of 2018 and completion of the project in the summer of 2018.

### **C. Budget & Staffing update**

Michael Clark presented to the Board the current staffing concerns as well as the proposed \$2M cut. The \$2M cut that is pending approval in the budget is of great concern. This cut would be the changing of the HCC's licensure from a Chronic Disease Hospital to a Nursing Home. The financial aspect of this change makes no sense. State would be losing revenue if this change were implemented. Board expressed that they will bring this to legislators to explain how critical it is to not allow this change. Commissioner Saadi also expressed that he does not believe this decision is one which the Governor or Lt. Governor has made, but has somehow become part of the budget legislation. Chair McDavid and Commissioner Saadi did relay that they believe the Secretary of OPM was quite impressed that DVA Board members were so inspired to go to Hartford and meet with the Secretary regarding financial constraints. Trustee Thomas stated that the information provided by our finance dept. is certainly compelling, however as "politics" plays a role in these decisions, Board must approach the political pieces of this and do so in a manner that truly makes a positive impact.

Chair McDaniel and Commissioner Saadi stated that Legislators and the Public should come to our campus to see the services that DVA provides to Veterans so that they all understand the impact of changes to this Agency. Commissioner Saadi informed Trustees that he has invited members from the Appropriations Committee and Veterans Affairs Committee to visit our campus.

The Board expressed their concern and agree that this change would not save money and would jeopardize the care that Veterans are receiving. Trustee Benson voiced his frustration and shock. "DVA's budget has been going down year after year and he doesn't understand why the legislature is allowing this to happen. Trustee Tarbox explained that this year is not a normal budget cycle and that the Board needs to get this critical information out to the legislature and

public in a quick and efficient manner. Chair McDavid will forward all pertinent information regarding HCC and impending changes should this licensure change occur.

Several Trustees asked for a written summary of the fiscal impact of changing the licensure of the HCC as well as the impact on care for the Veterans. Commissioner Saadi said he would have staff prepare responses.

Commissioner Saadi provided Trustees with job description for open Physician position needed at DVA and asked that Trustees circulate and post this information through all avenues.

#### D. Projects Update

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update which included the DVA being awarded more than \$8 million in cemetery grants for two major projects that will expand the Cemetery's capacity as well as straighten headstone alignment and beautify the cemetery. Mr. Danao explained that these are 100% federally funded so there is no cost to the State of CT.

Trustee Barry asked if work would continue through winter with headstone placement. Joe responded that work will continue as long as weather permitting.

Mr. Danao relayed to Board that Commissioner Saadi and he will be obtaining funding for the renovation of the "Returned Soldier Memorial". There is funding remaining from a prior "Memorial" fund that can be utilized for this project.

Mr. Danao shared that the A-Wing project has begun (creating semi-private rooms and a gym area). Working closely with fiscal to assure finances and time-line accuracy. Commissioner believes this project will serve as a model for future wing upgrades.

### III. New Business

#### A. Committee Assignments:

Chair McDavid expressed that the Board consists of many talents which will be valuable to assisting the Agency and its mission. Requesting that Board Members form committees for: Healthcare Center, Residential Facility, Cemetery and Memorial Services, Advocacy & Assistance and Volunteers & Donations. Chair McDaniel also asks that there be a chair for each committee. Trustee Nelligan wishes to be on HCC committee. Trustee Leaf asks that there be a brief description under each committee assignment Chair McDavid will send out an email to Board Members requesting committee areas of interest. Healthcare Center, Residential and Memorial Services are top priorities at this time. Committee assignments to be complete by end of week (10/27/17). Trustees will work directly with DVA staff.

#### B. Next Meeting and Trustees Photos:

Tuesday, December 12, 2017 at 3:30pm. Commissioner Saadi requested that biographies and photos of Board Members be submitted to Commissioner's office by next meeting (12/12/17).

#### IV. Closing

There being no further business, Chair McDavid entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Pat Nelligan and seconded by Trustee Michael Thomas. Motion passed unanimously at 5:18 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



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Christopher McDavid, Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 11/8/17