



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
July 10, 2024**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting was held in the Building 50 Conference Room at the Department of Veterans Affairs located at 287 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Trustees in attendance: Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Carlita Cotton, Tara Desjardins, Peter Galgano Jr., Adele Hodges, Professor Moore, Patrick Nelligan and Sherri Vogt.

Trustees attending via Teams: Stephen Harris, Shard Samy

Absent:, Juan Cruz, Richard Dzieken, Alyssa Kelleher, John Lawlor, Frederick Leaf, Heather Sandler and Michael Saylor.

DVA Staff in attendance: Commissioner Ronald P. Welch, Lori Conchado, Joseph Danao and Lindsay Jesshop.

Chair, Patrick Nelligan called the meeting to order at 3:34 p.m. and offered a motion to accept minutes for the April 10, 2024 meeting, which were accepted by Ms. Vogt and Mr. Barry.

Commissioner Welch began the meeting with an overview of CT Statute **Sec. 27-102n Board of Trustees for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Members. Duties. Annual report.** Commissioner explained state auditors reported reoccurring deficiencies in their review of the Board of Trustees 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports, which were not submitted due to staff changes. Commissioner clarified that his role is to participate as a non-voting member and prepare Quarterly Reports to trustees. The information gathered for quarterly reports are gathered from managers of each reporting area submitted to members for review. State auditors are now reviewing 2022 – 2023 and Commissioner has asked that they report findings as they are discovered so they may be addressed immediately.

Chair Nelligan will compile Annual Reports moving forward with information gathered from meeting minutes. Chair Nelligan stressed the importance of trustees roles as appointed members with expectations to be met and encouraged members to engage in the process. It was suggested that a joint meeting with Veteran Committee members and those who appointed members be invited to participate in a meeting.

The participation of trustees attending remotely versus in person was noted as a possible barrier in keeping trustees engaged. Trustee Samy was called upon by Chair Nelligan to speak on his opinion of the value of participating remotely. Mr. Samy agreed that in-person meetings are a better option and Teams is a good

alternative. Mr. Samy noted that his participation for all in person meetings would prevent him from participating due to his schedule and travel from Stamford and that he has learned a great deal about the DVA during meetings and feels it is a worthwhile commitment. He believes remote access is a necessary trade off and would agree that trustees should commit to participating in one in-person meeting per year.

Chair Nelligan reported there will be changes to membership due to absences and recommendations from trustees for new members will be considered. Trustees should consider committing to one or two of the following committees they are interested in participating in: Cemetery, Budget, Staffing, Admissions, Legislative, Advocacy and Projects as each will require 2-3 members.

Chair Nelligan would like trustees to share their position on the board while in the public and at events by wearing their new BOT nametags to identify them. In addition, each trustee's bio and picture will be added to the DVA website. Trustee Cotton stated that she identified as a trustee in her town and area and has worked with Representative Nolan, Veteran groups and VFW's to forge relationships in the community. Members were asked to share information on upcoming events with the group that members may attend to support our Veterans. Trustee Galgano announced an annual Middlesex Chamber Support the Troops Meeting and Breakfast on November 4th, where Commissioner Welch is scheduled to make remarks.

Trustee Barry voiced his concern over the decreasing population of WWII Veterans at a little over 11%; Vietnam Veterans at 4% of the population and how this could diminish future funding for Veterans both on and off campus. There is a need to share information on the DVA's four core missions to include the exceptional care provided at the Healthcare Center and opportunity for Veterans who may be interested in our Residential program.

Chair Nelligan noted the high quality of staff at the DVA with Veteran Services Officers (VSO'S) being the best trained in the state. However, they have high case loads that are difficult to manage. The state statute requiring all 167 towns to have a Veteran Service Officer needs to be in compliance with having VSO's who are properly trained and interested in assisting Veterans to determine benefits and file claims. Trustee Cotton has successfully worked with her town to hire a VSO who is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. Ms. Cotton suggested information that could be shared with municipalities for guidance. Commissioner Welch stated the DVA is updating our website and will include links to information and links for Veterans to connect to their local VSO. Chair Nelligan would like to see clusters of Veteran groups rally for support as they have in the past to support our VSO's and gain support of state commanders to hire and maintain their roles.

Trustee Cacciola would like to determine the number of Veterans who need assistance through the Department of Labor. Chair Nelligan noted this could be done through the Department of Defense through their "Project Skill Ridge Program" which connects discharging service members with civilian work experiences with specific industries with training, apprenticeships and internships. The DVA's database of DD 214's and the State Library were other methods noted for possible gathering of information.

Former Commissioner and current have put a great deal of time into discussions with local town and state officials negotiating for the purchase of land required to expand our cemetery in Middletown. Trustees need to be well versed on the functions of the cemetery and share continually for public awareness.

Commissioner Welch is participating on committees and tracking suicide rates which are currently at 51 per day with many discussions on how to reduce this number.

Other initiatives noted were the possibility of Vet Piers attending meetings to present their success stories, trustees participating in evening meals with Veterans in the main dining room and a possible annual dinner with trustees and Veterans.

Closing

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 5:14 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 9, 2024 at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

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

Patrick Nelligan
Chair

Date: July 16, 2024