



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
June 7, 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 3:34 p.m.

Trustees in attendance: Richard Adgers, John Banks, Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Carlita Cotton, Peter Galgano Jr., Steven M. Harris, Adele Hodges, Alyssa Kelleher, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler and Sherri Vogt.

Absent: Juan Cruz, Richard Dzeikan, John Lawlor

DVA Staff in attendance: Commissioner Ronald P. Welch, Lori Conchado, Joseph Danao, Briana Mitchell

Chair, Patrick Nelligan called the meeting to order at 3:34 p.m. and entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting which were accepted by Trustee Leaf and seconded by Trustee Harris. The minutes were passed unanimously without any corrections or edits.

Chair Nelligan introduced and welcomed newly appointed Commissioner Ronald P. Welch to the group. Commissioner Welch comes to the DVA from Easter Seals Rally Point in Eastern Connecticut, a nonprofit organization that provides expanded access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities for those with disabilities and the veteran population. Commissioner Welch retired in 2014 as a Brigadier General. Commissioner thanked the group for their work and looks forward to working with them to continue moving initiatives forward.

Chair Nelligan introduced the DVA's new Manager of Community Advocacy, Lindsay Jesshop. Ms. Jesshop previously worked for the state's long term Ombudsman's Office where she advocated for individuals in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and residential care homes. Ms. Lindsay is and looking forward to working with our Veterans in her new position.

Deputy Commissioner Danao asked Ms. Jesshop to report DVA events for the period of January – March 2023. Ms. Jesshop reported former Commissioner Saadi held several Meet & Greet sessions to celebrate the contributions of staff for Women's History Month, honored a DVA WWII Veteran by presenting him with the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal and participated in the Southington Veterans Coffeehouse held in conjunction with Representative Poulos to meet with over 80 Veterans for a question-and-answer session on available benefits. The department held a Ribbon Cutting ceremony on March 28, 2023 to celebrate the opening of the new Office of Advocacy & Assistance District Office in the Bigelow Center for Senior activities in Fairfield.

A Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Ceremony has held in the Gold Star Families Memorial Auditorium to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the withdrawal of all U.S. ground combat forces from Vietnam and honor those who served. The event was well attended by Veterans and family members, Veteran organizations, and state officials. Additional events honoring Veterans include the celebration of a WWII Veterans 100th birthday where he was presented with a special recognition from the FBI for being the oldest living graduate of the FBI Academy and awarded a Connecticut Wartime Service Medal for his service. Ceremonies were held both on campus and at the State of Connecticut Veterans Cemetery in Middletown over the Memorial Day weekend to honor and remember those who have served.

Outreach events included a visit by “Augie” the water buffalo, who visited with Veterans and participated in a presentation from a student attending the Northwestern Regional School’s agricultural program, the Cummins Inc. employees who volunteered their manpower for their second year on campus weeding and planning flowers at the Healthcare Center and DVA Veteran Lion’s Club members efforts in planting and mulching around the Returned Soldiers Memorial. Veteran Service Officers Paul Spedaliere, Jeannie Gardner and Devon Julien participated in events at the Montville Senior Center and at the 1st Annual Veterans Military Resource Fair held at the Legislative Office building.

Upcoming events include a Municipal Veteran Representatives Training on June 9th, a ceremony to present Corporal Dorothy “Dottie” Dee the Women’s Military Memorial “Living Legend Award” and the Connecticut DVA and Federal VA Resource Fair on June 24, 2023.

Deputy Commissioner Danao provided an alibi announcing updates to a house bill adding \$37,000 to the budget to cover the required cost of staff meals per contract and a house bill proposing an increase in the number of Veteran Service Officers for the Office of Advocacy & Assistance.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

A. Fiscal Report

Director of Fiscal Services, Ms. Briana Mitchell reported the DVA’s 3rd Quarter budget is robust and will end the year with a surplus. OEM expenses were extremely tight due primarily to unforeseen expenses in increased utility costs. A request has been made to OPM for a transfer of funds to ensure payments for utility costs. The department released its 1st, 2nd and 3rd quarter allotments on time and received an advanced allotment to cover 3rd quarter expenditures.

Trustee Adgers inquired as to the status of the Residential sub-committee’s recommendation on a new fee structure. Chair Nelligan, through Ms. Conchado confirmed the discussion is ongoing with a meeting scheduled for June 14, 2023 with a presentation to the board at the next meeting.

B. Projects & Operations Report

Deputy Commissioner Danao reported the boiler project is moving forward with plans to install two new boilers. Trustee Barry inquired what is delaying us from completing this project and Deputy Commissioner Danao explained the department had to acquire the funds and work through planning stages with several state agencies.

The department has \$500,00 for capital repairs for the roof at the Healthcare Center and repair of the existing water tower which is in the concept phase. A project to upgrade our security system includes a new gate house and cameras which is in the design stage. Trustee Vogt inquired whether replacement of call bells at the Healthcare Center was on our radar, whether we were cited during our recent inspection and if any

residents have been injured. Deputy Commissioner Danao confirmed we were not cited and are being proactive in working with contractors and no residents have been injured.

C. Cemetery Property Acquisitions

Deputy Commissioner Danao reported he has a meeting with DAS on June 8, 2023 to further discuss bonding funds to purchase additional land for the state cemetery in Middletown. Information from this meeting could be utilized to apply for the Federal VA's first round of cemetery pre-application grants that are due on July 1, 2023.

D. Residential Program Fee Update

Chair Nelligan called on Trustee Samy, the chair of the Residential Fee sub-committee to provide a brief update on the groups progress. Mr. Samy reported the committee members have met and are working on a fee analysis provided by former Commissioner Saadi. The group is looking at ways to make the fee structure more equitable in terms of income and impact on Veterans. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for June 14, 2023.

III. New Business

A. Wreaths Across America

Trustee Vogt announced the first of two upcoming concerts to be held at Crystal Bee's in Southington to raise funds for WAA. The last fundraiser held there sold approximately 200 tickets with a donation of \$2030 to the Perpetual Care Fund. Trustee Vogt is calling on board members to assist with getting the word out and selling tickets to double numbers for the upcoming shows. Posters and tickets will be made and shared with members for the September 15, 2023 event. This event will help to offset an increase in the price of wreaths which are going to be \$17.00 each this year. Our goal for this year is to provide a wreath for each deceased Veteran. Trustee Vogt would also like to branch out to towns in the northeastern part of the state for fundraising support. Trustee Adgers offered his assistance in planning future events as he has 25+ years experience.

Closing

Chair, Patrick Nelligan announced Brigadier General and Trustee John Lawlor accepted the Vice-Chair position. With the recent appointment of Commissioner Welch, the board now has two Brigadier General's and one Chief Warrant Officer 5 on board.

There being no further business Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn which was accepted by Trustee Adgers, seconded by Trustee Leaf and the meeting adjourned at 4:48 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 13th. at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:



Patrick Nelligan, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date July 3, 2023