



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
July 23, 2025**

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

**I. Convene Meeting:**

The Meeting was held in the building 18 Training Room at the Department of Veterans Affairs located at 196 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Trustees in attendance: Juan Cruz, Peter Galgano Jr., Adele Hodges, John Lawlor, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Shard Samy

Trustees attending via Teams: Richard Dziekan, John Banks, Sherri Vogt, Shard Samy, Carlita Cotton

Absent: Phil Cacciola, Heather Sandler

New Trustees in attendance: Donna Dognin, Ryan McKenna and Harrison Stroud

DVA Staff in attendance: Commissioner Ronald P. Welch, Joseph Danao, John Carragher, Lindsay Jesshop, Renee Gorr, Mary Grennan, Teri Mercey, Laura Nelson and Bethanne Watts

Chair Patrick Nelligan called the meeting to order at 3:37 p.m. quorum confirmed by Teri Mercey

Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Patrick Nelligan stated the Board would be swearing new Trustees in at this meeting. He asked them to state their names and share a bit of their background.

- Donna Dognin – Employed with Veteran Strong, family history of veterans and advocating on behalf of veterans
- Ryan McKenna – Discussed his previous roles with CT DVA and the Federal VA, retired Air Force Veteran
- Harrison Stroud – Veteran Council President, Resident of Rocky Hill Residential Program. Looking forward to communicating the needs of the residents to understand policies

Swearing in of New Trustees conducted by Attorney Jane Siegel.

Member of the Public – Ron Catania, stated he was a retired State of Connecticut DOL employee and Veteran.

The Chair offered a motion to accept minutes for the April 23, 2025, meeting, accepted by John Lawlor and Adele Hodges.

Chairman Neligan discussed the importance of the Trustees and their role of involvement. Confirmed absentee trustees and asked each staff/person to identify themselves before they speak, requesting to go around the room clockwise after the Commissioner's update.

Commissioner Welch opened with an update on various events and ceremonies taking place across Connecticut. Highlights included quarterly podcasts featuring Brian Smith, and Irving Steel. Ongoing Korean and Vietnam Era Veteran ceremonies held in partnership with Lt. Susan Bysiewicz, and a significant World War II ceremony that took place in May. The new Rocky Hill Coffee House, created by our Residential Staff, has had a strong launch. Additionally, multiple Memorial Day ceremonies and activities were held statewide. The annual Municipal Veteran Representative Training occurred in June, with participation from the Veteran Military Committee. Property site visits related to cemetery expansion efforts with DAS are ongoing. Commissioner Welch urged the Board of Trustees to review the quarterly report for comprehensive information.

## **II. Old/Ongoing Business**

### **Laura Nelson, Director of HCC**

- Currently, two World War II veterans are scheduled to attend the Honor Flight in September.
- HCC maintains a five-star rating.
- The census is at 89 residents.
- Plans are underway to reopen B Wing while maintaining high satisfaction ratings

Trustee Vogt asked how much is estimated to open the B Wing?

Fiscal Manager, Mary Grennan stated:

- Includes \$100,000 in Operating Expenses (OE)
- Estimated \$1 million to reopen B Wing
- B Wing would accommodate 15 residents.

Trustee Vogt offered options of subcommittee to study or assist in some way

- Commissioner Welch noted that an existing analysis committee is already addressing the matter with a presentation planned for the Fall to finalize figures

### **Beth Ann Watts, HR Specialist**

- 239 full-time employees currently; capacity for 244
- Affirmative Action Plan has been approved.
- Telework process streamlined and is progressing successfully.
- The 1199 union contract is in active negotiation; HR is involved
- Open enrollment occurred in May
  - Employees with dependents will receive verification notices this summer to confirm information

## **Mary Grennan, Fiscal Manager**

- FY25 ended with a \$1 million deficit
- OPM approved an appropriation adjustment transfer of \$350,000 from PS to OE, as well as a mitigation transfer of \$650,000 to OE to cover the shortfall
- Fiscal Administration performs ongoing and in-depth reviews of all DVA appropriated funds and expenditures requests to ensure responsible and effective fiscal oversight

Trustee Dognin asked about SSMF and how it is handled

Mary Greenan stated it is a direct pass through, John Carragher added it is money that passes through not principle

Trustee Stroud asked about the fee increase for the residents from 25% to 30%

Mary Grennan explained the percentage increase due to the rise in prices and operating costs. Mary also reassured Trustee Stroud that a town hall was held and if there are further questions they will have another meeting so residents can gain a better understanding

Chair Neligan noted that this has gone into effect, and everyone is here to help them understand

Trustee Stroud stated some residents are trying to move out and the increase has made it challenging

Mary Greenan attested that agency wide they are looking to cut costs to minimize the deficit

Commissioner Welch indicated the food cost for FY 25 was 1.3 million and utilities at 1.7 million

Chair Neligan reiterated the care of the residents by all the Board of Trustees, and welcomed Trustee Stroud to reach out anytime

Trustee Samy stated constant discussion and review of how costs are absorbed is the Fiscal Administration's responsibility and the Board of Trustees to review as well

## **Deputy Joseph Danao**

### Property Site Visit and Infrastructure Updates

- State Bond Meeting:

A request is being prepared for \$2 million to fund the HCC generator replacement, which is currently not supporting the facility.

An additional \$2 million is being requested for repairs and updates to the campus water tower.

### Campus Projects Update:

- Paving Project: 2 miles of road on campus will be paved shortly.
- Solar Field: Installation will begin soon to help reduce electricity costs.
- Boiler Project: Progress continues. The project has experienced delays, it remains active

Co-Chair Lawlor asked for expected completion date – Deputy Danao stated July 2026

- MatrixCare System: Implementation is underway and operational.
- Water Tower – studies/inspection currently being reviewed

- A separate \$2 million request is also being pursued for the repair and upgrade of the campus water tower.
- Electronic Health Records (EHR):
  - The Chairperson Neligan inquired about access and requirements
  - Per Deputy Danao, access is read-only for outside parties
- Levitow Project:
  - Expected completion by Fall 2025
- Generator Replacement:
  - A \$2 million bond request is being prepared to replace the HCC generator
  - Trustee Vogt asked about replacement status
  - Deputy Danao responded that resources are still being reviewed to address deficiencies
- Call Bells
  - Trustee Vogt asked the status of the Call Bells
  - Per Deputy Danao: it's ready for bid and plan is set
- Solar Field Installation –
  - The installation of a solar energy field is scheduled to begin shortly. This project is expected to significantly reduce the facility's electrical costs.
- Cemetery Property Expansion:
  - A question was raised whether the discussions of towns can be shared
  - Deputy Danao stated: "No, we cannot speak to anyone regarding locations"

#### **Renee Gorr, Director of Residential Facility**

- Current census is 143
- 126 Residential
- 5 Patriot Landing
- 17 Family Members
- Working on the No Bed Hold Policy
- Elections took place for the Veteran Council President – Harrison Stoud and Vice President Mike Tetreault were voted in. They will conduct monthly meetings; the first meeting went over the bylaws and the responsibilities of the roles.
- Relocation of the Recreation Department has been finalized in place of the library space. A donation of an air conditioner was appreciated for that space.

- Recovery Support is continuing.
- VSO connection is highly utilized on a weekly basis.
- Online application is live
- Rocky Hill Veterans Coffee House is very well attended and partnered with local resources for donations of coffee and pastries.

Public attendee Ron Catania commented that the Coffee House is a huge success and very well done

### **Lindsay Jesshop, Manager of Community Advocacy**

Well attended ceremonies across the State of Connecticut:

- WWII Event
- Two Memorial Day Ceremonies (Residential/State Cemetery)
- Municipal Representative Training
- Web App is live and very user friendly
- Opportunity Plan
- Announced that the first-ever Farmers Market to be held on August 4 at the Rocky Hill campus coordination is ongoing with the Department of Agriculture to support the event.
- Provided a brief overview of recently passed legislation relevant to veterans' services.

### **John Carragher, Director, Office of Advocacy and Assistance & State Veterans Cemetery**

- Property Tax Exemption for Disabled Veterans
- Veterans' Dental Care Needs
- Noted recent dental care studies will help determine veterans' unmet healthcare needs within Connecticut

Expansion of Veterans Services Staffing

Veterans Service Statistics

- The current caseload includes:
  - 7,606 Request for Assistance - taken directly by OAA & A District Office Staff
  - 603 claims submitted
- Claims have resulted in approximately \$16 million returned to Connecticut veterans
- The Claim Management System continues to function effectively

Cemetery Capacity and Planning

- Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery currently has:
  - 1,841 burial plots remaining
  - 267 cremation burial spaces remaining
  - 1,716 columbarium niches remaining (expected to last until September 2027)
- Ongoing records management

### III. Questions and Discussion

#### 1. Cremation Options and Burial Planning

- Trustee McKenna inquired about cremation options in the new section
  - John Carragher explained that doing so would occupy two interment spots
- Co-Chair Lawler asked who determines whether remains are cremated or buried in a casket
  - Mr. Carragher clarified that the family makes this decision
- Trustee Leaf asked how many burial options are available
  - Mr. Carragher listed the three options:
    - Casket burial
    - Cremation burial
    - Columbarium niche

#### 2. Pre-Eligibility Registrations

- Trustee Dognin asked about the number of veterans pre-registered for burial.
  - Mr. Carragher reported approximately 3,200 veterans are registered as pre-eligible.

#### 3. Site Visits and Event Coordination

- Co-Chair Lawler suggested hosting a future meeting at the main campus to review current and upcoming projects.
- Requested that the Manager of Community Advocacy coordinate events to align with Board of Trustees meeting nights to increase participation.

### Closing

There being no further business Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn which was accepted by Co-Chair Lawlor and Trustee McKenna followed by all Trustees. The meeting adjourned at 5:35 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 22, 2025, at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:




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Chair Patrick Nelligan

Date: August 5, 2025