



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
January 29, 2025**

(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: John Banks, Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Tara Desjardins, Peter Galgano Jr., Adele Hodges, John Lawlor, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, and Sherri Vogt, Paul Barry, Michael Saylor

Trustees attending via Teams: Heather Sandler, Shard Samy, Stephen Harris

Absent: Alyssa Kelleher, Steven M. Harris

DVA Staff in attendance: Commissioner Ronald P. Welch, John Carragher, Joseph Danao, Renee Gorr, Mary Grennan, Beth Lehn, Teri Mercey, Laura Nelson, Kelsey Postl, Bethanne Watts

Other in attendance: Kristen Rzasa, Middletown Resident

Ms. Rzasa introduced herself as a Middletown resident that would like to get involved to help the Veterans of Connecticut. Also, to pursue opportunities to assist with acquiring land for the cemetery expansion and Municipal Representatives participation.

Chair, Patrick Nelligan called the meeting to order at 3:40 p.m. and offered a motion to accept minutes for the October 9, 2024, meeting which were accepted by Ms. Vogt and Mr. Lawlor.

Chair, Patrick Nelligan stated he is looking forward to this upcoming year of uniting the visions of the Governor, BOT and CT DVA.

Commissioner Welch began with introduction of the new Fiscal Manager II, Ms. Mary Grennan and Executive Secretary, Ms. Teri Mercey. The updating of the electronic medical records process is moving forward – Project Officer hired – contract with Matrix. Effective 27JAN25 the MOA was fully executed for the boiler project. Significant outreach continues and the RFP for cemetery expansion went out. Mass email updates to Veteran Service Organizations and MVRs has had positive reviews.

Commissioner Welch invited each staff member new to the meeting provide a short introduction of themselves. Renee Gorr (Director of Residential), Mary Grennan (Fiscal Manager II), Beth Lehn (DAS IT), Teri Mercey (Executive Secretary to the Commissioner), Laura Nelson (HCC Director), Kelsey Postl (Food Services), Bethanne Watts (DAS HR) presented.

Many ceremonies were held across the state honoring our Veterans to include weekly events with Lt. Governor Bysiewicz, Veterans Day speeches, parades and other activities around CT to honor and remember those who served. CT DVA held Veteran Day ceremonies at the State Veterans Cemetery and DVA campus. Commissioner continues to attend bi-weekly meetings and conferences with the National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs and counterparts to discuss important state and national issues and policies affecting our veterans and families. Exceptional job to all involved with multiple Veteran Day activities, WAA, and VHOF.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

Mary Grennan presented on the behalf of Fiscal Services, noting that she is looking at the budget and driving factors. She will be working with OPM to identify and meet the needs of the Agency. Trustee Vogt asked various questions in relation to the budget season or forecasted expenditures. Ms. Grennan stated that she will be working closely with her team for the best of the agency.

Deputy Commissioner Danao reported on current projects listed as the Veterans and Family Temporary Housing (ARPA \$5m) has been fully obligated. The Levitow Lane is currently in execution phase, and the building 60 project in the programming and design phase. Throughout, furniture, appliances, fixtures and miscellaneous repairs continue a regular schedule. The bid is ready for the Levitow Healthcare Center Call Bell System and the roof replacement as well. The Project Manager is onboard for the Electronic Medical Recording System and is awaiting contract. The DVA energy efficiency projects are in the design phases, with the lighting replacement at 100% complete. The boiler installation is in execution phase.

Office of Advocacy & Assistance Manager, John Carragher reported 12 of 12 positions are currently filled with Veteran Service Officers handling 9,997 claims annually, producing 16.4M in benefits to Veterans with 504 claims submitted for this quarter. The Processing Technician position is pending an offer, and the Administrative Assistant position is progressing to interviews. The division continues to work on a large project to update and archive cemetery files and completed an audit conducted by the National Cemetery Association with few issues noted and corrections made as required. Renovations to Building 18, which will house a Veteran Services Support Center are coming along. The execution of "Connecticut Veterans Affairs Sends" (610 subscribers) will published and sent 1-2 times a month. Trustee Vogt asked if this would include invites from outside groups/organizations. Mr. Carragher confirmed the intent is to include news, alerts and invites of events. Overall awareness and communication to our Veterans of Connecticut. Cemetery expansion

The Office of Advocacy & Assistance exhibited excellent planning and coordination that resulted in a very positive turnout and participation during Wreaths across America at the CTSVCs as well as Wreaths out.

Manager of Community Advocacy, Lindsay Jesshop's (not in attendance) report showed an overview of the past events held within the community. Media releases for Unclaimed Cremated Remains, Veterans Day Events and Wreaths Across America. Veteran Hall of Fame 2024 honored 14 inductees and was held on January 23, 2025. Upcoming events include the Groundbreaking Ceremony for the housing project to be held on February 3, 2025.

Director of Residential, Renee Gorr stated that the current census is 143 Total - 126 Residential Facility - 5 Patriots Landing (17 total). The program is thriving, with the Recreation Department moving to a new location on campus to better serve the Veterans also, having a Veteran Service Officer on campus has been very beneficial. Ms. Gorr stated she has been working very closely with staff and listening and implementing ideas with positive improvements. The Veteran Council meetings continue with the elections being held on February 10th.

Director the Healthcare Center, Laura Nelson began with the introduction of Mr. John Banks as the new Veteran Council Chair and Michael Saylor as Vice-Chair. They are continuing to build census and the new electronic health record project has been approved and implementation has begun.

Additionally, the Commissioner reported that the DVA census for both Residential and the Healthcare Center have increased. Our Residential facility has 2 open beds open at this time and the HCC has pending applications with a few beds reserved for isolation if needed.

Chair Nelligan asked that trustees consider participating in 1 of the 6 Committees:

- Cemetery Expansion
- Public Relations, Advocacy and Legislation
- Housing & Fees (specific to DVA campus)
- Healthcare
- Municipal Vet Reps & Veteran Organizations
- Resource Management Fiscal (Budget)

Website update to include trustee photos and bio's – Trustee Sandler accepted and will initiate an email to members to submit information (3Q meeting)

Chair Nelligan thanked everyone for their input and stated he looks forward to making this a great year of accomplishments.

Trustee Paul Barry submitted his resignation from the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs Board of Trustees.

Closing

There being no further business Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn which was accepted by and by all Trustees and the meeting adjourned at 5:25 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 23, 2025.

Respectfully Submitted:



Patrick Nelligan
Chair

Date: February 6, 2025