

**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
April 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: Phil Cacciola, Carlita Cotton, Juan Cruz, Tara Desjardins, Peter Galgano Jr., Adele Hodges, John Lawlor, Frederick Leaf, Michael Saylor, Patrick Nelligan, Shard Samy

Trustees attending via Teams: Joseph Danao, John Banks, Kristen Rzasa (Public attendee)

Absent: Juan Cruz, Sherri Vogt, Heather Sandler, Steven Harris

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

Chair Patrick Nelligan called the meeting to order at 3:38 p.m. and offered a motion to accept minutes for the January 29, 2025, meeting, which were noted with a revision to the minutes by Carlita Cotton to amend to minutes to reflect her in attendance for January 29, 2025, noted by Chair, accepted by John Lawlor and Adele Hodges.

Chair Patrick Nelligan requested Commissioner Welch to begin with a briefing on events. Commissioner Welch began by recognizing John Carragher and his team for their successful remodel of Building 18, which will serve as a central office for Congressional District 1. This location will house Veteran Service Officers and includes partnerships with a Department of Labor specialist as well as space for a training and resource center.

The year commenced with the 2024 Hall of Fame Ceremony, which honored 14 distinguished inductees. Ceremonies have continued across the state with Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz, recognizing Korean and Vietnam Veterans for their service. In February, the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) hosted a press conference with Governor Ned Lamont and Lt. Governor Bysiewicz to discuss legislative Bills HB 6909 and HB 6874. That same month, the DVA held a well-attended Black History Month ceremony, reflecting on the contributions of African American veterans. During March, the DVA paid tribute to Women's History Month and launched its inaugural Veteran Coffee House, now held every other Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. in Building One, open to both residents and the public. A Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Ceremony took place in the Gold Star Auditorium, and Commissioner Welch also presented at multiple ceremonies throughout the state to honor Vietnam Veterans.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

The Office of Advocacy & Assistance has re-initiated meetings with State Commanders to share information and discuss issues affecting Veterans on a quarterly basis.

Upcoming events include numerous Memorial Day Ceremonies throughout the state. The Connecticut Municipal Representative Training will be held on June 13, 2025. And looking ahead, Stand Down 2025 will be held on September 19, 2025, in six locations throughout the state.

Fiscal Manager II, Mary Grennan, presented a proposal and accompanying expenditure analysis to each member, recommending an increase in fees from the current 25% to 30% of income for both the Residential and Patriots Landing Programs. This adjustment is intended to help offset the double-digit increases in operating expenses experienced over the past several years. These changes are requested in accordance with the Connecticut State Agency (DVA) Regulations pertaining to Sec. 27-1021(d)-250 and Sec. 27-1021(d) 258. Q/A began with Trustee Phil Cacciola asking if the DVA allows Section 8 housing, response by Ms. Grennan was no, not applicable. Chair Nelligan asked if HUD-Vash is applicable, with the response from Ms. Grennan stating no, that program has very different rules. Chair Nelligan asked if it was possible to have a donation fund created strictly for Veterans that needed assistance, Ms. Grennan replied she will research that avenue of request. Trustee Shard Samy inquired whether the increase proposed is an overview of the other properties as well, Ms. Grennan stated yes, however, Levitow Lane does not hold occupancy at this time, therefore, there is no data to present. Trustee Samy pointed out the past decision by the committee to reduce fees to 25% of income had not fully accounted for future cost-of-living increases. Implying that the current fee structure is reflected to be unsustainable or insufficient due to inflation and rising expenses. Chair Nelligan asked if full occupancy is the expectation of the expansion housing? Grennan confirmed, stating there are many factors to consider for operating costs, sq. footage, utilities, occupancy level etc. Co-Chair John Lawlor inquired about a projected cost for two years, Ms. Grennan following with the explanation of the refining of cost centers to obtain a clear projection for individual usage regarding Patriot's Landing and Levitow Lane.

Ms. Grennan mentioned over the past 10 years the IGW account has been relied on to supplement the operation costs. Chair Nelligan mentioned his past discouragement over the years not to utilize the IGW. Ms. Grennan is working closely with OPM and diligently working on the budget. Chair Nelligan asked if the IGW will be rebuilt, Ms. Grennan and Commissioner Welch are not in favor. Trustee Tara Desjardins spoke concerning the proposed increase, stated residents' goals/purpose to getting back into society may find this difficult to manage. Director Renee Gorr mentioned the residential survey provided an outcome change of a bi-annual review of resident's income rather than the current monthly reviews. Chair Nelligan reiterated the income evaluation every six months to Trustee Desjardins' concern. Trustee Cacciola asked if financial counseling will be offered as part of this increase transition. Director Gorr commented that all residents are aware of the financial and budgeting counseling that is always available and outside resources. Trustee Carlita Cotton asked what the average rents are in Rocky Hill, Ms. Grennan compared the rents to the Hartford County area which Rocky Hill encompasses. Chair Nelligan proposed all in favor of the fee increase - response: 12 in favor, one opposed. Motion was made by Trustee Shard Samy and seconded by Trustee Lawlor.

Deputy Commissioner Danao presented on behalf of Facilities Services, reporting that the department has several ongoing projects. The Levitow Housing Project is progressing well, with a projected completion date of July 2025. Additionally, the Water Tower Project has commenced, starting with a drone survey assessment.

Chair Nelligan mentioned the agenda will deviate slightly due to unexpected absenteeism of a staff member and unexpected matters.

Residential Director Renee Gorr reported a current census of 140 residents. She also shared that the Recreation Department has been successfully relocated, greatly enhancing accessibility and visibility for the residents. The first DVA Rocky Hill Veterans Coffeehouse was held on March 28, 2025. This new initiative, which will continue biweekly, features guest speakers, valuable resources, and engaging conversations. The program has launched with great success and has been well-received by participants.

Healthcare Director Laura Nelson reported that the federal survey has been successfully completed, with the facility earning an outstanding 5-star rating. She also noted that the Medicare/Pharmacy application process is currently underway, with a submission deadline set for 2027. Additionally, two veteran residents were honored last month in a special ceremony as they were awarded their high school diplomas. The event was led by Southington Superintendent and celebrated the residents' achievements and service.

Office of Advocacy & Assistance Manager, John Carragher reported the Congressional District 1 move out of Newington VA office to Building 18 Veteran Service Center is successfully completed. The Municipal Representative training course is scheduled for June 13, 2025, and will be held in the Gold Star Auditorium. Mr. Carragher announced the Connecticut Veterans Affairs Sends newsletter has been established and volume 4 is expected to be sent on April 25, 2025. The Board of Trustees are included in the distribution of the newsletter and were encouraged to share with their communities.

Lindsay Jesshop, Manager of Community Advocacy, provided an update regarding ongoing inquiries from members of the Connecticut legislature and state and federal constitutional offices. She reported that the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) recently hosted a press conference with Governor Ned Lamont and Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz to advocate for current legislative bills, HB 6909 and HB 6874. Ms. Jesshop also detailed the use of donated funds over the past three months. These funds supported monthly entertainment events at the Healthcare Center as well as painting workshops and activities for Veterans in the Residential Program.

Our highlighted ceremonies were held in January as we hosted the Veteran Hall of Fame 2024 (14 Inductees), followed by our Black History Month Ceremony, and in March we hosted Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Ceremony.

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 4:40 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 23, 2025.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'P' followed by a horizontal line.

Patrick Nelligan
Chair

Date: May 5, 2025