

Veterans Home at Holyoke  
Board of Trustees Meeting

A meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Veterans Home at Holyoke (HLY) was held virtually and telephonically on Tuesday February 11, 2025. The meeting began at 5:31 PM.

**Board Members:** Chairman Collins, Trustee Jourdain, Trustee Bigda, and Trustee Ostrander.

**Present via Webex:** Robert Engell, Executive Director (VET); Melanie Gentile, Budget Director (HLY); Kathleen Denner, Recording Secretary Diane Dietzen, (HLY); Debra Foley, Communications (HLY); Kelly Jones, Director of Nursing (HLY); Michael Lazo, Superintendent (HLY); Jeff Lenahan, Quality Manager (HLY); Brett Walker, General Counsel (HLY); JM Sorrell, Ombudsperson; Ciara Hanlon, Budget Director (HLY)

**Roll Call:** Chairman Collins conducted the Roll Call as follows: Trustee Bigda, Trustee Jourdain, Trustee Ostrander and Chairman Collins.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** All present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Public Comment:** No public comment for this month.

**Trustee Mass Joined** approximately 5:33 PM

**Approval of November 12, 2024 minutes:** A motion was made by Trustee Jourdain to approve the November 12, 2024 Board Meeting minutes and it was seconded Trustee Mass. No Discussion.

Roll Call Vote: Trustee Bigda (Yes), Trustee Jourdain (Yes), Trustee Mass (Yes), Trustee Ostrander (Yes) and Trustee Collins (Yes). It was unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2024, Board Meeting.

**Old Business:**

**Follow up on "Funds transition"**

**Update Mr. Engell / Mr. Deacon (Trust fund follow up)**

Chairman Collins referenced the attached letter and that there was a discussion with Mr. Engell and Mr. Deacon. Mr. Engell was thankful to be able to review the documentation with Chairman Collins and answer some of the questions the board had relative to interest. Also reinforcing that the board and its spending review and approval is how those funds are controlled and talking with Mr. Clay we learned that the different levels of flexibility were in terms of where those funds were placed into cash accounts or into the short-term bond account. Other comments Mr. Clay made, but I could not verify, were that there are differences in municipalities and academic institutions within

the Commonwealth that had flexibility as it relates to these, but I am not an expert in administrative law to be able to evaluate.

Trustee Jourdain stated he was concerned that the board would not be able to invest in any equities in the future, we have tried to outline in our investment policy a long-term endowment for the veterans. Due to stock market performance and wide investing we currently have a 60/40 equity versus bond and cash portfolio mix and we rely on long-term investors. Trustee Jourdain continued that if we do not have the ability to invest wisely with investment manager at the state or UBS or to have advise us then we are undercutting the future solvency of the fund and if that in fact is a prohibition for us here then we need to rely that message to Governor Healy's office and to our legislative delegation to make sure that they clear the path regulatory wise to give us the same type of legal permissions that they do for Perac or for college endowments. Trustee Jourdain would encourage leadership to find us a way forward so that we can figure out and seek whatever permissions are needed.

Trustee Mass has reviewed the documents and has no questions on the Canteen Fund. He would like to know why no one has asked the state treasurer if she would allow us to invest in equities. It seems she has the ability, but no one has asked her. Trustee Mass has read the memo that has outlined where this is all coming from and the statute, he references is Mass General Law Chapter 29 Section 38a, which the very first phrase of that statute is notwithstanding any laws to the contrary. Meaning, the Treasurer has all these powers unless we have said something else somewhere else that is what is notwithstanding any laws to the contrary means.

Trustee Mass has a problem with what looks like an executed trust document that is not executed by the trustees. He continued that a trust has to be set up by donors and trustees are the holders of that account, so we need to be parties to that document and signors. It establishes a trust that gives the secretary name any person as a trustee, but as the legacy funds seems that it is directly contrary to Chapter 6 Section 90 Subsection D, and that says that the board of trustees for each state owned veterans home shall hold and administer in trust, the property included in the legacy fund and the effects accounts if the transfer there of to the Commonwealth is affected pursuant to a decree of a court of competent jurisdiction and in accordance with the terms and conditions imposed by such decree. He has not seen any decree that has required the board to take any action, but he does think we are required to hold and administer and has not seen anything to the contrary of that. Trustee Mass stated that Chapter 29 38a is not to the contrary because it says notwithstanding, he thinks Chapter 6, section 40d is to the contrary so that document is in conflict with the statute. Trustee Mass stated that we at one point were looking for independent legal opinion and he does not know if that was authorized and if it was not, he does not know why it was because it seems that we have a different interest, particularly the trustees have an independent interest which requires us to exercise our fiduciary responsibilities. Trustee Mass added, speaking for himself that unless I see for myself something from independent council that shows me I have the authority to make a transfer I don't know if I can vote for or sign off on it because I have a duty to hold and administer and it does not see to allow us to hold but not administer. At a minimum a trust requires the trustees to be the named trustees and needs to be the trustees of the trust, not any designee of the Secretary. It needs to ensure that we can exercise our fiduciary responsibilities, and I want to make sure I am meeting my obligations.

**Recent purchase and roll out of Touch2Play (Donation by the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company)**

Touch to Play photos were shared on the screen and will be shared via email. Mr. Lazo stated that the Touch2Play is a heavy-duty piece of equipment. That can be wheeled from room to room for veteran use. Chelsea received a donation as well.

**Update on transition checking account from Westfield Bank (Ms. Hanlon)**

Ms. Hanlon reported that at this time there is no update on how we would move the funds if we were to move the checking account into the state but not the investment account, the ability to move the funds back and forth between them if they were both held within the State there would be flexibility. Trustee Mass asked if donations are going into Westfield bank account. Ms. Hanlon replied yes.

**Audit quotes / exempt statuts ? (Ms. Hanlon)**

Ms. Hanlon reported that it has been posted twice for audit quotes requests with no responses, with also direct contact with all state approved vendors with no responses. Ms. Hanlon continued that we have confirmed with EOVS legal counsel that can move ahead procuring quotes from non-state vendors, they will have to register with the state.

Trustee Jourdain asked if we reached out to who did the last audit. Ms. Hanlon replied yes, that one of the companies did merge. Trustee Jourdain will forward the information that he has on file.

**New Business:****Performance at UBS (Mr. Ravosa)**

Mr. Ravosa reviewed the attached UBS portfolio report.

Trustee Mass would like to see a graph over time if we had been in bonds similar to the treasurer's policy. Mr. Ravosa will gather information for the board but pointed out that page four shows the Barclay Bond Index, which would represents those averages.

**Review of Investment Policy**

Mr. Ravosa began the discussion of increasing the maximum stock representation from 60% to 65% or 70%. He continued that investment policy statements can go up to 45% in money market funds, and we can go as low as 35% in fixed income. This would give us the ability to be tactical as opposed to reactionary.

Trustee Jourdain shared that our current policy states that our cap has 60% equities so we need to discuss possible at the next meeting. We may have to move monies to stay within the thresholds of our additional equity allowance. Chairman Collins suggested Trustee Jourdain draft something with Mr. Ravosa to send out to the board think about

to make an informed decision. Trustee Mass suggested some funds could be transferred from checking account to UBS account to keep the allocation equal.

**DCAMM New Home Quarterly Update (Mr. Lazo/ Mr. Schuster)**

Mr. Schuster shared the attached PowerPoint and updated the board on the construction of the Home.

Chairman Collins asked where the courtyard design would be in the process. Mr. Schuster replied that the Memorial Garden design team will make sure that the board is part of the process. Ms. Menard added that she is part of the Memorial Garden committee, and they met last week. During the meeting they reviewed 11 proposals and narrowed them down to five and will continue to narrow it down to three. Board involvement was mentioned at the meeting and will be part of the process. Trustee Mass asked of the three proposals are they local artists or national artists. Ms. Menard replied that there were 11 proposals in total, she did not have the information at hand so she will research and forward the information to the board.

**Holyoke Veterans Home Activities – “Compassionate Support of Families” (Ms. Menard)**

Ms. Menard shared that the social work team will be starting new support group programs beginning in March. These include the Warm Welcome Support Group for newer families just being introduced to the home, Quality of Life Support Group for understanding the aging process and enhancing wellbeing, Caring for the Caregiver wanting the wellbeing for the families and caregivers and Bravehearts Club helping with the emotional journey.

**VA Survey Results (Mr. Lazo / Staff)**

Mr. Lazo reported the VA Survey was held from January 28-31 and it was a deficiency free survey!

**CFO/Treasurer Update (Ms. Hanlon)**

Ms. Hanlon gave an overview of the attached Trustee Fund Spending Plan through January 31. We are at 76% of goals for donations, 52% spending for YTD.

The FY26 Budget preparations are underway, and the FY25 midyear spending review has been submitted.

**Holyoke Veterans Home Executive Director Update (Mr. Lazo)**

Mr. Lazo reported that the current census at the Home is 119 veterans with 5 beds available. The waitlist is at 109 veterans. The Home has zero veteran positive COVID and three positive staff out with COVID. We are continuing to mask due to high respiratory infection rate in the community. Staff at the Home is at 98% compliance rate for COVID and Flu vaccination rates.

Recreation team continues to support the Veterans with activities a dessert event at Christmas for families, New Years Day meal for families, and a sweetheart lunch on February 14.

Mr. Lazo stated that last Friday on a call with DPH we were informed that our CMS application has been approved and now can have an unannounced survey at any time including 4-5 surveyors lasting approximately 5 days.

Mr. Lazo also shared that our Pinnacle scores for January were at 100% favorability rating to 4.9% out of five recommended to other score and a satisfaction score of 4.67% out of five satisfaction. Our combined score out of the last 5 years has increased from 4.43% in 2020 to 4.7% in 2024 so steady improvement over 5 years, with 13 awards in 2024.

Mr. Lazo noted that we are staffing with 344 employees, with 97% reporting to work, our HPPD for January was 6.31%, RN HPPD was 1.05%, LPN HPPD 1.21% and CN HPPD 4.05 which is well above mandated.

Mr. Lazo shared that we are continuing to work on filling non-clinical roles including housekeeping, food service, finance and HR. We are 96% organic and 4% agency staff. Overtime is being continuously reviewed to ensure proper management of time.

Mr. Lazo continued that the staff is continuing to adapt to the new EMR system. Che is live and now we are teaming up to work on best practices. We are working to finalize the pharmacy department.

Mr. Lazo updated the board that when DPH came through there were suggestions for repairs to the current building and they have been completed.

Mr. Lazo shared that Colleen Strunk Ackerly and Deb Foley have created an Ambassador program that has volunteers greeting guests since we have had to close off access to our main lobby and have visitors enter through the Rehabilitation entrance. This program includes 7 volunteers – with 2 new currently onboarding. Coleen has brought on 36 new volunteers since October of 2023. Approximately 45% of volunteer support goes to recreational activities of that 25% of monthly activities are volunteer based and 19% of that 25% are spiritual based – so the volunteers have returned to their status as an integral part of our recreation activities as well as helping our teams meet the five domains of recreational therapy.

#### **Holyoke Veterans Home General Counsel Update**

Mr. Yankopoulos reported that there has been no significant change in the Homes's legal matters.

#### **Quality / KPI update (Jeff Lenahan)**

Mr. Lenahan reported on his attached PowerPoint presentation. The Culture of Safety results are back and those will be shared at the next board meeting. In 10 of the 12

measures we are above the national average. Mr. Lenahan shared that the WellSky barcode scanning assists with errors.

Full council meeting is on March 18  
Next Board of Trustees meeting is May 13

**No Executive Session Scheduled for this meeting.**

Adjourn: Trustee Jourdain made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and it was seconded by Trustee Bigda.

Roll Call Vote: Trustee Bigda (Yes), Trustee Jourdain (Yes), Trustee Mass (Yes), Trustee Ostrander (Yes), and Chairman Collins (Yes).

It was unanimously VOTED to conclude the meeting at 7:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Kathleen Denner, Acting Secretary for the Board of Trustees

**Attachments:**

