

Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Board of Trustees Meeting

A special meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke (HLY) was held via webex on Wednesday, January 27, 2021. The meeting began at 5:35 PM.

- **Members Present:**

Gary Keefe, Chairman; Mark Bigda; Sean Collins; Kevin Jourdain, Cindy Lacoste, Isaac Mass, Carmen Ostrander

- **Also Present:**

Michael Lazo, Chief Operating Officer; Cheryl Poppe, Secretary, DVS; Mark Yankopoulos, Legal Counsel; Alda Rego, Assistant Secretary for Administration and Finance, EOHHS; Matt Deacon, Legal Counsel, DVS; Sharon Boyle, General Counsel, EOHHS; Eric Sheehan, Assistant Secretary, DVS; Ganesh Ramachandan, Senior Project Manager, DCAMM; Scott Parker, Principal, Payette; and Nancy Shimel, Recording Secretary

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

- **Public Comment:**

John Paradis requested to make public comment. Mr. Paradis is a member of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Coalition. Mr. Paradis asked on behalf of the coalition, that consideration be given to include more beds in the design plan for the new building than the proposed 180-204 beds currently in the plan. He inquired whether this will be the right size facility to ensure the veterans get the care they need, when they need it, and hopes that money or parking will not be affecting factors relative to the size of the facility. He relayed his concern for families not being able to get their loved ones into the facility due to the extensive waiting list. He reviewed past statistical data for those seeking admission to the facility through the period 2013-2016, as well as the decision to decrease the census to 235 in 2016, stating that the facility was overcrowded and inadequately staffed. He also noted his concern that 40% of veterans will pass on while on the waiting list for admission to the facility. Mr. Paradis expressed his thanks for the opportunity to speak.

Cheryl Malandrinos requested to make public comment. She stated that her father-in-law was a former resident at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke who passed in the spring of 2020 during the COVID outbreak. Ms. Malandrinos provided an overview of her loved one's experience at the Home, noting financial issues they experienced secondary to the admission waiting list timeline. She noted that her loved one benefited from the camaraderie he had with the veterans while he was a resident at the Home. She hopes that consideration will be given to build a Home large enough to support as many veterans as possible. Ms. Malandrinos expressed her thanks for the opportunity to speak.

- **Status for Soldiers' Home in Holyoke New Construction – Matt Deacon:**

Matt Deacon provided an update on the proposed regulations relative to the requirements under MGL c 6 Sec 7. One of the portions of this is to adopt regulations on hospitalization, treatment and discharge from the Home. Attorney Deacon has worked with Chairman Keefe, and Trustees Jourdain and Mass to draft an admission/discharge/transfer regulation. The VA regulations were tailored to the specific needs of the Soldiers' Home. One of the other pertinent items was relative to regulation MGL 115a, section 5 which documents that the Board of Trustees should adopt rules and regulations subject to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). There is a process to get these regulations approved by the Secretary of EOHHS. The first step in that process is to draft regulations, which will go to EOHHS and A&F for approval, followed by a vote by the Board of Trustees. After this vote, there will be a public hearing. We are currently going through the process of approval and will keep the Trustees updated on where we are in the process going forward. Attorney Deacon stated that he is available to assist on any other regulations that the Trustees would like to work on.

Status for Soldiers' Home in Holyoke New Construction (cont.):

Kevin Jourdain inquired if there is a final version of the text of these regulations that can be distributed to the Trustees prior to the 2/9/21 Board of Trustees meeting. Attorney Deacon will distribute the regulations that were submitted to EOHHS to the Trustees, and once he receives the responsive document back from EOHHS, he will also provide that to the Trustees for review prior to the vote.

Chairman Keefe noted the good input provided on these regulations, and will await the input from EOHHS on this, noting that the Board will circle back on any other regulations they would like to review going forward.

- **DVS Role and Milestones for the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke New Construction – Secretary Cheryl Poppe**
Secretary Poppe reviewed the role of DVS relative to the new construction at the Home, noting that DVS will be working closely with personnel from the Soldiers' Home, DCAMM, and EOHHS to finalize the grant applications that will need to be submitted by 4/15/21. She stated that they are familiar with the process in terms of what will need to be submitted and accomplished. We will continue to work closely in the weeks ahead to ensure all deadlines and requirements are met for this project.

Secretary Rego noted the speed in which Administration and the agencies have worked to accomplish a very good proposal for moving forward with this project. DCAMM has a deliberate process, and we have moved this along very quickly. She relayed that Secretary Sudders, Secretary Heffernan and Secretary Poppe have made this project a top priority, noting that Governor Baker is ready and willing to move this forward. She reported that the design does take into account a fact-based assessment and report, ensuring we, as officers of the Commonwealth of MA, have responsibility for the allocation of state and federal funds, and are doing so with the highest integrity.

- **DCAMM Role and Milestones on Soldiers' Home in Holyoke New Construction – Ganesh Ramachandran**
Ganesh Ramachandan, senior project manager at DCAMM, provided a background on what has been accomplished to date, as well as what is currently being worked on, and what will need to be done in the next 79 days before the 4/15/21 deadline. He stated that the typical DCAMM process takes 9-12 months, noting that we are trying to do this in 4 months with this project. He notes that there is an amazing team in place, who have made incredible progress in a very short time. Mr. Ramachandan reviewed the rapid planning assessment process, which involved stakeholder input, surveys and virtual workshops and site analysis. A larger technical team has been formed over the last 8 weeks, and that the Construction Manager has been involved in the process at an early point. He relayed his assurance with the Commonwealth of MA study ___ and looks forward to an iconic architectural landmark in Western MA in honor of our veterans.

- **Payette Briefing on Modification Potential and Finalization of Plan for the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Construction – Scott Parker**

Scott Parker, Principal at Payette Associates, presented a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Design Update". He provided a detailed review of the following areas:

- Timeline Review
- Needs Assessment Recap
- Design Process
- Cost Analysis
- Planning Concept
- Aesthetic Inspirations
- Summary
- Next Steps

Upon completion of his presentation, Mr. Parker opened the discussion up to questions.

Payette Briefing on Modification Potential and Finalization of Plan for the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Construction (cont.):

Gary Keefe thanked all those involved in the project, stating that the biggest issue may be a discussion on the bed count, also noting the importance of meeting the 4/15/21 deadline, as if we do not, we will need to wait until next year to submit.

Isaac Mass asked for clarification that there are 6 floors of residential beds, and that there are no residential beds on the first floor. Scott Parker confirmed that is the case in this design plan. Discussion followed detailing room layouts on each floor. Mr. Parker noted that there are no double rooms detailed in this plan, and that is something that is still being worked on, noting that the end room on every wing can serve as a double room, bariatric room, or serve other specialty needs. He noted that the single room design was based on consistent stakeholder feedback. Mr. Parker noted that one floor will have specific types of resident care – variation dependent on what veteran population will be served. The top floor has 2 wings, rather than 3, and 24 beds. We will need to decide how that 24-bed unit will be utilized. Trustee Mass clarified bed counts across the floors. Mr. Parker noted that there is a range of 180-204, as there may be some variation if there is a dedicated dementia unit. Trustee Mass inquired on feasibility to add a third wing on the top floor.

Trustee Mass inquired on how a behavioral health unit will be integrated into the design plan? Mr. Parker stated that there is no designated behavioral health area shown in the design, but that may be part of the 24-bed unit on the top floor – decisions are still taking place around behavioral health.

Trustee Mass inquired on the plan for palliative care? Mr. Parker stated that this will depend on whether its decided to have a dedicated palliative care unit, or whether to integrate these beds into the regular long-term care units, as some residents may prefer to stay on the unit they have been on.

Trustee Mass inquired on whether an additional floor can be added on to make it an 8 floor building? Mr. Parker noted that in this building design, we are trying to maintain individuals connection to the outdoors, noting that the more floors you add, it will become harder to get residents out, as people have limited mobility, and there is a limit to the number of staff to bring residents outside. Trustee Mass asked if what is felt would be the best way to increase the bed count. Mr. Parker stated that they would have to get a team together to evaluate what the trade-offs would be and trying to find the best solution.

Kevin Jourdain stated that he does not want to see the bed count go below 235, as we need to be sensitive to the fact that there is a need for these beds. If it is necessary to add another floor to accomplish this, then it should be done. He inquired on the assumption that there will be a declining number of veterans going forward, asking how we can assure that the number of veterans going forward is going to be less 50 years from now. He feels its risky to say we don't need those beds going forward. Scott Parker stated that the data used was provided from the Veterans Administration. This data shows that there will be a lower veteran population in Massachusetts. The data was used as a metric to understanding equivalent building size. Trustee Jourdain inquired if stakeholder input was pursued relative to the size of the building, noting that this would be a good threshold question to ask. Mr. Parker stated that this question was not specifically asked, adding that stakeholders may not be a good judge for this issue. He noted that many scenarios are factored in, and this number was what we believe is the right number of beds for the facility.

Kevin Jourdain inquired if the use of parking lot Q at Holyoke Community College and shuttle service has been considered for staff parking? Mr. Parker stated that this was not looked into, as we don't look upon off-site parking as a reasonable way to fulfill parking.

Payette Briefing on Modification Potential and Finalization of Plan for the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Construction (cont.):

Kevin Jourdain inquired if more money can be allocated so we can ensure the size of the building does not get smaller. He noted that the Board represents the people, and they are trying to advocate on their behalf for a building that serves the needs of the community. Secretary Rego stated that the Governor and Legislature is careful with funding, and all the funding is closely analyzed. The funding we are pursuing will put the Commonwealth of MA in debt for 30 years. The most important thing is to build the best facility we can, with the support of the Board of Trustees. We believe this is the best facility. We have included an Adult Day Health unit to meet the response that this service is needed. This will allow individuals to keep their veteran at home longer. If we are to make changes to enlarge the facility, we run the risk of missing the 4/15/21 deadline.

Kevin Jourdain noted that he is very impressed with the vast majority of the overall proposal and the speed with which it is moving but is concerned with the timeline to get the building operational. He inquired what needs to be submitted for the 4/15/21 deadline – do we have to commit to the number of beds by that date? Mr. Parker stated that the initial cost of the building needs to be submitted, and that cannot change after submission. If this were to significantly change, we can be asked to withdraw our application and be put on hold for application the following year.

Isaac Mass inquired on whether a facility such as Farren Care Hospital could be rented and utilized as a temporary location for the Home, and the current facility demolished to shorten the timeline of construction. Mr. Parker stated that it would take 6-8 months to abate the current building, and a few more months to demolish, with another 3-4 years to construct the new building.

Sean Collins stated that he applauds the great work done and the outstanding questions from the Board members, noting that Trustee Jourdain brought up a good example that we don't know where we'll be in 10-20 years, and that it may be better to plan for more residents, than less. We should advocate to keep the same number of beds we have currently.

Cindy Lacoste noted that she is glad to see the Adult Day Health program included, but also feels that behavioral health beds are needed at the home.

Gary Keefe stated that the design is a beautiful building – praising all those involved in the process. He inquired if it would be feasible to add another floor to the current design? Secretary Rego stated that she would not want to answer this without all the necessary information. She can take this back to the team and follow-up with the Board. Chairman Keefe inquired if there is the ability to replace some of the single rooms with double rooms? Mr. Parker confirmed that this can be done. He stated that one of the things required in the first submission to the grant program is to prove the need for the number of beds. We will be using data from the Veterans Administration. He noted that there is the need to provide relevant data that the beds we are requesting will be occupied, as the VA can kickback the application based on demographics. This was one of the reasons the 2012 building project did not go forward.

Isaac Mass noted that while what is being stated around the declining numbers in the veteran population – the veterans are coming back with more needs. Many of the facilities in the private sector are consolidating – this will have an impact on the Soldiers' Home. It is important to annotate this in the demographics. Kevin Jourdain added that Mr. St. Vincent is being transitioned to a behavioral health nursing home. He noted the high cost of being in a private sector nursing home, and people want to get into the Soldiers' Home. He noted that the Home never has empty beds, and he believes we will always be able to fill these beds. He stated that there is no evidence that we will need less beds long-term.

Payette Briefing on Modification Potential and Finalization of Plan for the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Construction (cont.):

Gary inquired what are the things that may affect getting the application submitted by the deadline. Secretary Rego stated that any delay in our continued planning and continued design will interrupt the process. The application must be complete, and the evidence is incredibly important. We rely on the updated data from the VA. The more we can start on this, the better off we will be to meet the timeline. It is the best opportunity to get a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. Scott Parker emphasized that this program has difficult timelines to meet. The VA is clear on how they approve these things. We must file everything they request, meeting the established deadline.

Isaac Mass inquired if we make the recommendation at the 2/9/21 Board of Trustees meeting, will it be too late? Secretary Rego stated that it is actually too late now, as we are so far into the process. Secretary Poppe concurred, noting that the other thing of importance to note is the Adult Day Health Program – we are still counting that into the equation. She noted that the residents in this program may not necessarily attend every day, so will have a more flexible capacity. As far as Behavioral Health, there is no specific design, but we are flexible to accommodate Behavioral Health beds – we are working on this now to determine how we can improve behavioral health today and transcending into the future. As far as double rooms, the idea of private rooms is to accommodate family being able to stay in the room at the end of their loved one's life. This would be more difficult with a double room.

Ganesh Ramachandan noted his concern on any delay, noting that there are many people working on this project. We can look at moving double rooms from the interior unit to the edge, but adding an entire floor is an enormity that we just don't have the time to do at this point.

Trustee Mass stated his concern, as he noted that the Board had inquired at the meeting in September what the timeline would be to submit any input. He stated that if input was needed earlier, then this meeting should have been held sooner so input could be provided. We will work with you to approve a plan. We are here to advocate under our role under the statute. He stated that he would rather hold off for a year, than approve what he feels could be a mistake. He feels that a 235-bed facility should be designed.

Chairman Keefe asked if for the 2/9/21 Board of Trustees meeting, the team can look at how bed space can be added, and to look at the possibility of adding an additional floor. We would run the risk of not getting the funding if we wait until next year.

Secretary Rego voiced her concern on waiting another year. The legislature is ready to assist now. The teams have worked very hard to put this together and would like recognition on this. She added that the Administration has the authority to obtain funding for this building, not the Board of Trustees. Trustee Mass stated that he is not inclined to hold this up, noting that it was the Board of Trustees who identified the shortcomings of the facility and recognized the need for a new facility. He would like the opinion of the Board to be heard. In the current plan, there are less beds than we feel are appropriate – this can be maneuvered with single/double rooms. But adding an additional floor with a 37-bed unit would bring us to 229 beds, which is still 6 beds shorter than what Trustee Jourdain had requested.

Cindy Lacoste stated that looking at the floors, including the long-term care beds and adult day health beds – if there are more veterans, can change into long-term care beds. She noted that she likes the numbers that are there now with long term care beds and adult day health beds. Trustee Jourdain pointed out that it would be wise to keep the census as close to 235 as we can. I do think we need adult day health beds. It would be cost prohibitive to turn long-term care beds into adult day health beds. The first floor is not designed for that type of care. The best way would be to add an additional floor.

Payette Briefing on Modification Potential and Finalization of Plan for the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Construction (cont.):

Matt Deacon noted that the agenda does not have a vote included on it – he cautioned that we need to stay within Open Meeting Law. Trustee Jourdain stated that this item has been presented before us, and there is no requirement to state that there will be a vote presumed. If we had debated items not on the agenda, we could not vote on them.

Isaac Mass made a motion, seconded by Kevin Jourdain, to approve the presented design plan, with the floor plan on page 13 of the document, and with an additional floor that follows that same floor plan. A Roll Call Vote was taken on this motion: Mark Bigda (Yes), Sean Collins (Yes), Kevin Jourdain (Yes), Cindy Lacoste (Yes), Carmen Ostrander (Yes), Gary Keefe (Yes). The VOTE was unanimous to approve this motion.

This item will be included on the agenda of the next Board of Trustees meeting on 2/9/2

- **Adjourn:**

Kevin Jourdain made a motion, seconded by Cindy Lacoste, to conclude the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Shimel
Acting Secretary for the Board of Trustees