

Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Board of Trustees Meeting

A meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke (HLY) was held telephonically on Tuesday, June 9, 2020. The meeting began at 5:05 PM.

- **Members Present:**

Kevin Jourdain, Chairman; Christopher Dupont, Cindy Lacoste, Carmen Ostrander, Richard Girard, Isaac Mass.

- **Also Present:**

Val Liptak, Acting Superintendent; Dan Tsai, Acting Secretary, EOHHS; Norman Gousy, Chief Financial Officer, Pat Dill, Interim Nurse Executive; Mark Yankopoulos, Legal Counsel; and Nancy Shimel, Recording Secretary.

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

- **Public Comment**

No public comment was offered.

- **Approval of Minutes**

Upon motion by Isaac Mass and seconded by Carmen Ostrander, it was unanimously VOTED to accept the unamended minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting held on May 12, 2020. Kevin Jourdain conducted a Roll Call vote on the approval of the unamended minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting held on May 12, 2020. The Roll Call vote is as follows: Christopher Dupont (Yes), Richard Girard (Yes), Cindy Lacoste (Yes), Isaac Mass (Yes), Carmen Ostrander (Yes), Kevin Jourdain (Yes).

- **CFO Update**

Norman Gousy reviewed the "Trustee Fund-Summary of Receipts and Disbursement Report for FY20 for the period ending May 31, 2020, as well as the current month's activity detail. He noted there is a change with UBS statements being split into equity investment and fixed income statements. Norm provided information on the operating budget using the standard reporting format. This report does not reflect many more of the more recent costs related to stabilizing the Home. We are focused on serving the veteran residents safely and the stabilization of the Home. The fiscal year will end on June 30th and a year end reconciliation will be done. Norm will provide an update on the overall operating costs and COVID expenses at the next Board of Trustees meeting. He reported that EOHHS has assured us that we will have any funding that is needed for costs that exceed our budget.

Isaac Mass inquired if the change with the statements is just a change in reporting and not allocation. Norm confirmed that this is the case. Kevin Jourdain reported that our financial advisor, Michael Ravosa, had recommended a 40% fixed/10% cash split. Kevin Jourdain asked for confirmation that there is nothing outstanding and that all is currently at UBS. Norm confirmed that this is correct.

A motion was made by Christopher Dupont, and seconded by Carmen Ostrander to accept the CFO report. All were unanimously in favor to accept.

- **Report from State and Administrator:**

Daniel Tsai, Acting Secretary for EOHHS, expressed his thanks to the Board of Trustees. He noted that it was a pleasure to meet the Board of Trustees in person during their recent socially distanced tour of the Home. They were able to see the work on the ground and work of the staff during the tour. Secretary Tsai reported that there were several Town Halls held with staff today. He and Val Liptak will give an update on the current status of the Home and the transition to take place over the next several months as we transition out of crisis. He identified the first phase, which took place between March 30, 2020 to the end of May, 2020, as "Crisis Response and Management". The next phase is "Transition and Rebuilding", which is expected to run from June 1, 2020 – December, 31, 2020. Secretary Tsai reported that there were encouraging numbers around recent COVID testing done on residents and staff at the Home. He invited Val to report on these numbers as well as upcoming outside visitation.

- **Report from State and Administrator (cont'd):**

Val reported that over the last month, the Veterans have remained stable. COVID retests were conducted on both veterans and staff. Results were as follows: There were 124 veterans tested – 5 veteran tests were positive. There were 322 employees tested – 2 employee tests were positive. Out of the positive tests of veterans and staff, 6 of the 7 were known positives that have remained positive. There was only 1 veteran that turned positive. A retest program is currently being worked on over the next week, including a plan for anyone whose test came back positive.

Val reported that we are currently following the Medicare 5 star long term care industry standard for staffing. The National Guard has been kept in place until additional organic staff are hired. She reported that 90% of staff have returned to work.

Val reported that today we started the fresh air program at the Home. Several veterans were taken outside with the recreation staff, and this was a huge success. She also reported that outdoor visitation will begin next week for the veterans. A CNA will be dedicated to each individual veteran during this visitation. Visitation slots will be scheduled Tuesday-Saturday, 5 slots per day with 5 CNA staff. This will allow 20 veterans per day to individually visit with 2 people of their choice for 30 minutes; giving 100 veterans the opportunity for outdoor visits per week. Val noted that between outdoor visitation and the encouraging COVID testing results, we can see the impact from the work of the staff, National Guard, Behavioral Health Center and Baystate Medical Center. She reported that we continue to be vigilant with maintenance of infection control procedures.

Secretary Tsai reported that with only 2 staff and 5 veterans remaining COVID positive, there were many discussions at the Town Halls around how to encourage staff to remain vigilant with infection control. Our first priority continues to be the safe care and infection control for the veterans and staff. There has been a lot of crisis management with the clinical command center and folks doing everything required, along with the support of the National Guard. We are working to create systems, accountability and processes to support a return to day-to-day operations that can be safely and sustainably managed over time by the organic staff at the Home.

Secretary Tsai reported that the interim executive team will be in place for the next 6-7 months. We will have continued support from the National Guard. The main focus points for the next phase are:

- Focus on safe infection control
- Staff at or above the Medicare 5 star long term care industry standard staffing level. Staffing levels will be assessed with the return of the veterans from Holyoke Medical Center and the acuity of the population.

Secretary Tsai reported that Val Liptak will remain as the administrator at the Home for the foreseeable future. We will be creating a new role for Chief Operating Officer. One of the members from the National Guard will be in that role. During the second half of June, Val Liptak will start to spend some of her time at Western MA Hospital. With the support of the right interim executives, this will allow her to remain engaged with the Home to help guide it through the Transition and Rebuilding phase.

Secretary Tsai noted that the engagement of family and loved ones with the veterans will be a major priority in the next phase at the Home. Outdoor visitation will continue and a Zoom Town Hall will be scheduled in June for family members.

Val Liptak reported that there will be additional leadership roles over the next 6-7 months to include:

- Interim Chief Operating Officer – a National Guard candidate has been identified for this role.
- Interim Director of Facilities – a candidate has been identified for this role and will start on Monday.
- Director of Operations – this position will assist with transition of the Home going from 6 units to 8 units to 10 units, as well as providing leadership to a host of different programs.
- Interim Chief Medical Officer (CMO) - The current CMO will stay on until the position is filled. We are still in the process of interviewing for this position. The CMO will provide oversight of all medical and physician functions, including 5 physicians and 1 nurse practitioner.

- **Report from State and Administrator (cont'd):**
 - Interim Chief of Staff – strategic partner to Administrator; lead the coordination and strategic alignment, implementation of significant organizational and strategic plans. Will work with CFO setting up budget, as well as Legal Counsel and Director of Communications.

Kevin Jourdain noted that the powerpoint presentation did not include a position entitled “Chief of Staff”. Val reported that this is a new addition to the others. The position is vacant at this time. Val stated that she will send an updated interim leadership chart to the Board of Trustees. Kevin inquired if this position will be on the interim team. Val confirmed that the position will be on the interim executive team.

Val stated that a Program Analyst position has been posted to assist with the implementation of software programs, to include an electronic medical record system, Omnicell system, and the Policytech policy program.

Val reported that the current interim clinical executive, Pat Dill, will oversee the clinical interim team. The interim team include the areas of infection control, quality, education, staffing and 2 staff working on the unit to complement supervision coverage on the day and evening shift.

Val reported that we are updating performance expectations and accountability and revised job descriptions to ensure we have the right staff in the right positions. Quality and compliance measures will be put in place, along with a regulatory requirement plan going forward. We will be looking at the long term plan over the next 6 months.

Secretary Tsai expressed his gratitude to the National Guard for their support of the Home, as there have been up to 180 soldiers on the ground. He reported that the National Guard will continue to provide staffing through the end of July on very specific shifts and clinical roles where we will be making additional hires. This will ensure that we can complete the hires and onboard key staff over the next 2 months. He reported that he is grateful that one of the National Guard leads, who has the right skill sets and leadership, will stay on with the Home in this interim Chief Operating Officer role.

Cindy Lacoste inquired if the Director of Facilities and the Director of Operations will be splitting workload. Val confirmed that they will working in tandem, splitting work operationally.

Isaac Mass inquired if the National Guard who are staying on in the transitional phase are staying on in National Guard role or are they being offered civilian positions at the Home. Val stated that they are staying on in the National Guard role through July, although some have shown interest in coming on as individuals at the Home.

Isaac asked if anything is being done with outdoor visitation for veterans who do not have local family. Val confirmed that there are some veterans who have friends from the community, and we will be working with the health care proxy of the veteran, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to visit with someone.

Chris Dupont requested confirmation on the timeline for the Transition and Rebuilding Phase – Val confirmed that it is June 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020. He also inquired on how the ipads have been received. Val noted that the addition of the ipads has been wonderful for the veterans. They are very engaged, going on multiple times per week. She reported that with the assistance of the recreation department, the veterans were able to send pictures of themselves outdoors to their family members today.

Chris inquired if we are able to provide ipads to families who don't have the ability to communicate. Val stated that the ipads are not being given to the families, they are just for the facility.

Kevin Jourdain inquired if there has been a significant amount of volume on the hotline, and if there have been any complaints or concerns received. Val reported that the hotline is still operational Monday through Friday from 8:00am-4:00pm. She stated that most families are now calling directly to the unit, rather than the hotline.

- **Report from State and Administrator (cont'd):**

There have not been any reported complaints on communication. The concerns have been around outside visitation and requests for a Town Hall meeting, which will be scheduled in June as a Zoom meeting. The hotline is being utilized for scheduling outdoor visitation. Kevin Jourdain inquired on the outdoor visitation sessions, are families able to give their loved ones a hug or walk around the grounds? Pat Dill reported on the process for outdoor visitation, which includes screening the visitors, separated areas for each visitation, wearing of masks, and maintaining social distancing throughout the ½ hour visit.

Carmen Ostrander inquired if there is enough time for disinfection between visitations. Pat Dill reported that a CNA is transferring each veteran, and there is 30 minutes in between sessions. There are 2 staff members dedicated to wiping down the area to ensure the safety of veterans and families.

A motion was made by Cindy Lacoste and seconded by Isaac Mass to accept the State and Administrator report. All were unanimously in favor to accept the State and Administrator report.

- **Old Business**

Trustee Account Update – Kevin Jourdain reported that the Trustee Account audit being done by Powers and Sullivan will continue to progress. He inquired if Norm Gousy has responded 100% to what Mike Nelligan from Powers and Sullivan has requested. Norm reported that there is one remaining request on the list to be done.

Kevin Jourdain inquired on the OIG information request for information on the Trustee Account from January 2016 to present. The OIG also sent request to EOHHS and general counsel for EOHHS that touches on things other than the Trustee Account that Sharon Boyle is working on. He inquired if the information request, as it relates to the Trustee Account, has had 100% responsiveness. Norm reported that he is working with EOHHS on the response, and that it should be completed soon. Mark Yankopoulos reported that within the next day, there will be full compliance on all requested documents. Kevin noted that the Board of Trustees will provide 100% cooperation with all information requests. He thanked every state employee who was involved in this review.

A Reflection on Tour of Facility for Trustees with Val Liptak and Staff – Kevin Jourdain thanked Secretary Tsai for co-hosting the tour of the Home. He noted that it was a great opportunity to be at the Home and to see the improvements being done with the Refresh Project. He observed as a takeaway of the tour, whether the viability of the structure of the Home will meet the needs of the veterans going forward. He noted that there is an immediate need to put in necessary resources, and that it can't be overstated that EOHHS and Secretary Tsai want to ensure the Home is a success. He noted that Val Liptak has lots of wonderful ideas that she pointed out, but this begs the question about what the long term plan is. He believes the building has outlasted legitimate viability. Kevin went on to express his thanks to everyone at the Home. He enjoyed conversing with the National Guard, and expressed his gratitude to them, the department heads, and senior leadership. The Board Members had the opportunity to hear the daily reporting at the facility, and wanted to recognize their commitment.

Cindy Lacoste thanked the National Guard and staff for the work they've done. She wants to ensure that they are aware that the Board of Trustees support them. She inquired if there are any issues keeping up with the PPE supply. Pat Dill reported that we have had an adequate supply of PPE for our needs here. She reported that Norm Gousy, CFO, monitors this daily and has bi-weekly meetings with the state to discuss PPE. Pat reported that we don't anticipate any issues with PPE, and as we change to a recovered status in the Home, this will decrease the need for PPE.

Old Business (cont'd):

Business request: Dementia Walk for the Board – Kevin Jourdain noted that a Finance Committee was not able to be scheduled yet, so have not had the opportunity to further discuss the Dementia Walk. Norm reported that the architect provided two options for the area. The study is available in the Finance office, and the architect is available to give an overview of the project. Kevin stated that we need to know how this capital project intermingles with the projects going forward. He inquired if it is harmonious with where we see the facility going forward, as we'll want this done exactly the way it should be done. Kevin requested that Norm forward any documents relative to the Dementia Walk, to include information on when this was voted on, what the initial budget is, as well as the prediction for the total cost. Kevin also requested that Val review these documents. Kevin stated that before any resources are committed, we need a full update and review of documents, and EOHHS evaluation of the proposal. Val stated that she will review this documentation. Chris Dupont inquired if the donation received for the Dementia Walk was received from the family of a former veteran, and was the amount \$100,000. Norm confirmed that this is accurate. Chris inquired if the donation was restricted to the Dementia Walk. Kevin Jourdain requested that Norm research whether the donation is restricted, and whether it can be done for \$100,000.

New Business:

Kevin Jourdain credited reporter Kathy Curran from Channel 5 on her reporting relative to the issues at the Home. He noted, in particular, an article from May 27, 2020, that went up on Channel 5 entitled "Missed Opportunity at Holyoke Soldiers' Home May Have Come at High Cost". Kevin noted that the article eludes to the fact that there was an opportunity to build a new facility in Holyoke at a cost of \$116,000,000. The VA would have paid 65% of the cost to build. Kevin inquired if Administration, EOHHS and the Baker Administration has had the opportunity to see this report by Channel 5 so that they have background on the information reported on. He noted that it seems to make sense for the long term future if we have the opportunity to receive this 65% reimbursement for a new Soldiers' Home. He inquired if Administration is willing to look into if the VA can help us with this and is open to having a discussion of having a new building as a possible solution for the future of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

Secretary Tsai noted that the long term planning discussions include many different pieces, particularly in the era of COVID. He stated that as far as social distancing in the facility, the spacing between the beds is not sufficient going forward. We will be evaluating all options on the table from DCAMM around this. We will be looking at actual needs, the needs of the veterans, and infection control. All options need to be fully explored as part of that, including a range of directions that will be considered around the building. Secretary Tsai noted that it is his understanding that there was a proposal in 2012 submitted to the VA. He was not here at that time. He noted that there are competitive grants that can be applied for in mid-April of each year, where both the VA and the state support a portion of the cost. He reported that during the next 6-7 months, the long term plan for the Home will be discussed. Kevin noted that if review of long term plan is done in a timely manner, we could meet the mid-April 2021 timeline; if that is the direction we choose to go. Secretary Tsai confirmed that this timing would be during the transition phase.

Isaac Mass reported that the recent tour was his first full tour of the facility. He stated that the Board would like to see more of the facility once safe. He felt that the facility was woefully inadequate prior to COVID and will remain inadequate after. He stated that even with the millions of dollars being put in, that a new facility needs to be built. He suggested that by the next Board of Trustees meeting, we should have a plan for who the key members of the planning team will be so we know who will be involved. He hopes the team will include federal and legislative partners. He stated that we should have a state of the art facility for the veterans going forward, as he believes the veterans deserve much better care than what is provided in this facility. He stated we need to be prepared to go after a competitive grant.

Cindy Lacoste stated that the Board of Trustees has a copy of the DCAMM study that was on the table a couple years ago.

New Business (cont'd):

Secretary Tsai reported they are going through this study, and that part of this is what is being done with the Refresh Project. He noted that the content of the study was not in the context of COVID. We agree, irrespective of COVID that there are adjustments to the facility that are required. With COVID, we need a picture of the types of thing to be considered around infection control above and beyond the original DCAMM study. He reported that all is on the table – we want to ensure the best quality care for the veterans.

Chris Dupont referenced the Channel 5 report and news article in the Hampshire Gazette by former Deputy Superintendent John Paradis. He noted that the article was about a brand new addition and complete renovation of the rest of the facility. This went back to 2012 and was submitted by former Deputy Superintendent John Paradis and former Superintendent Paul Barabani. He noted that the project is still on the books as far as the VA is concerned. Within the last year, 45 projects have been approved by the VA, and we sit at number 50 because the project was never funded by the state. He noted his disappointment of not having been made aware that the project was out there. Kevin Jourdain asked if EOHHS could look into this. He inquired if the position of the state is to commit 35% or whatever share is necessary, in the event that this is the direction we go. Secretary Tsai stated that he cannot comment on things in the past, but want to be clear that what we will be looking at all options, but first and foremost will do what allows us to provide the best quality care to the veterans without compromise. We anticipate reviewing options in collaboration with a whole range of stakeholders beyond the Board of Trustees to make decisions, and we look forward to this dialogue. We will figure out how to make this happen within a 6-7 month period. Now that the Home is stabilized, we need to look at long term planning and there are questions that need to be looked at.

Kevin Jourdain stated that you have partners in the Board to continue to do that. He thanked Secretary Tsai for the continued support and leadership. He stated that, to Isaac's point, we should identify members of the committee. He noted that there is Board support to nominate Board of Trustees members for representation on the committee. He stated that it is a good option for the Legislature to be involved as we need the financial component.

John Paradis requested to make public comment. Kevin Jourdain stated that any public comment would need to be during the public session of the meeting. He advised Mr. Paradis that if he would like to be on a future agenda, he should notify Mr. Jourdain to be added under the public session portion.

Re-appointment of Medical Staff: Mark Yankopoulos reported that at the Medical Staff Meeting held on Thursday, May 14, 2020, it was voted unanimously to reappoint Dr. Robert Byrne. The re-appointment of Dr. Robert Byrne was presented to the Board of Trustees for approval. Upon motion by Isaac Mass and seconded by Carmen Ostrander, it was unanimously VOTED to approve the above mentioned appointment.

- **Adjourn:**

Kevin Jourdain made a motion, seconded by Cindy Lacoste, to conclude the Public Session and move into two Executive Sessions for the purposes stated on the agenda. Mr. Jourdain noted for the public's awareness that the Board of Trustees will not be returning from Executive Session to Public Session. The Board of Trustees will adjourn after the second Executive Session has ended.

Roll Call Vote is as follows: Chris Dupont (Yes), Richard Girard (Yes), Cindy Lacoste (Yes), Isaac Mass (Yes), Carmen Ostrander (Yes), Kevin Jourdain (Yes). It was unanimously voted to conclude Public Session and move into Executive Session at 6:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Shimel
Acting Secretary for the Board of Trustees