

Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Board of Trustees Meeting

A meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Soldiers' Home Holyoke (HLY) was held in person, virtually and telephonically on Tuesday, March 8, 2022. The meeting began at 5:33 PM.

Members Present in Person:

Cindy Lacoste

Board Members via WebEx:

Mark Bigda, Sean Collins, Isaac Mass, Kevin Jourdain, and Carmen Ostrander

Board Members Not Available:

Gary Keefe, Chairman

Also Present:

John Bagley, Attorney, Morrison Mahoney: John Cronin, Chief Financial Officer (DVS); Matthew Deacon, Legal Counsel (DVS); Dr. Diane Dietzen, Chief Medical Officer (HLY); Robert Engell, Interim Administrator (HLY); Debra Foley, Communications (HLY); Stephen Giordano, Business Office Accountant (HLY); Kelly Hansen, Glen Hevy, Deputy Superintendent (HLY); Michael Lazo, Interim Superintendent (HLY); Brooke Leahy, Chief of Staff (DVS); Officer (HLY); Mark Yankopoulos, Legal Counsel, Caitlin Menard, Director of Social Services (HLY); John Paradis, HSH Coalition; Cheryl Poppe, Secretary (DVS); Sheri Shaw, Infection Prevention Supervisor (HLY); Ernestina Sirignano, Executive Assistant to Secretary Cheryl Poppe (DVS); Linnea Walsh, Communications Manager (VET); Mark Yankopoulos, Legal Counsel and Kathleen Denner, Recording Secretary (HLY)

Roll Call:

Trustee Lacoste conducted a Roll Call as follows: Trustee Collins (Yes), Trustee Bigda (Yes), Kevin Jourdain (Yes), Isaac Mass (Yes), Carmen Ostrander (Yes), and Trustee Lacoste (Yes).

Not Available: Chairman Keefe

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

Approval of Minutes:

Upon motion by Trustee Bigda and seconded by Trustee Ostrander it was unanimously VOTED to accept the unamended minutes of the regular Board Meeting held on February 8, 2022 and all subcommittee meetings in February. Roll call vote Trustee Bigda (Yes), Trustee Collins (Yes), Trustee Jourdain (Yes), Trustee Mass (Yes), Trustee Ostrander (Yes) and Trustee Lacoste (Yes). It was unanimously VOTED to approve the minutes.

Payette New Home Update (Mr. Lazo):

Mr. Lazo let the group know that the next update from Payette will be at the April 2022 board meeting

CFO/Treasurer Report (Mr. Giordano)

Mr. Giordano reported there last month we received a little over \$3,000 in donations bringing our annual total to a little over \$38,000 and the expense were just under \$29,000 these expenses were primarily for entertainment and bingo. He shared with the group that the finance team had previously reported that they had conducted interviews for 3 positions within the finance team. He continued that they recently hired a veterans account specialist

and we continue to emphasize staff education and training opportunities relating to procurement and state protocols. A motion was made by Trustee Bigda to accept the treasurer report and Trustee Jourdain seconded. All in favor the motion was approved unanimously.

DVS Staff Report (Secretary Poppe)

Secretary Poppe gave an update on the Governor's Challenge on suicide prevention among service members and families. She also shared that our annuity payments that we pay to our gold star family's members and 100% service-connected veterans went out the first week in February and some of the families in Holyoke Soldiers' Home do receive this benefit. Secretary Poppe reported that our Women Veterans Survey has received over 300 responses so far. She continued that we will be having focus groups and they are currently working on the date and location, with a possible location of West Springfield. She continued that the YMCA is partnering with women veterans and their families on the weekend of the 26th and 27th of March and there are 25 participating YMCA's that will be available to women veterans and families; there will be activities and events with possible child care. She shared that some of the Western Massachusetts that will be participating are Leicester, Holyoke, Greenfield, Pittsfield, North Adams, Springfield, Wilbraham, and as part of the Berkshire YMCA Bennington Vermont. Secretary Poppe mentioned that the VA has been doing a market review analysis of its facilities as part of the asset and inventory review and they are releasing the report on the 14th of March and then there will be another meeting to look at the modernization of VA facilities and locations based upon modernization demographics and the services needed in that area.

Holyoke Soldiers' Home Administrator/Staff Report (Mr. Lazo)

Mr. Lazo reported that the census currently at the home is 95 veterans onsite, 1 veteran resident from the domiciliary is on extended leave of absence, we had 3 admission so far this month with 2 more this week. He continued that 99% of our veteran residents have received the COVID-19 booster, one of the new admissions still needs it and 299 out of 300 eligible organic staff members or 99.6% have received third dose, we have pending documentation and vaccination for that remaining eligible employee. Mr. Lazo shared that we have 0 positive veterans or staff and we are continuing to conduct surveillance testing 2 times a week while monitoring community positivity rates and internal numbers looking to reduce testing to once a week, we have reduced the N95 masks to surgical masks based on the community rates. He also shared information from DPH complimenting the home on the infection control work done during the recent COVID surge, DPH stated that having only 4 veteran residents test positive was really above and beyond when compared to other homes in the area where other homes had 50% or 75% positive rates while we only had 4 of the 90 veterans onsite.

Mr. Lazo stated that the building is pending construction on 2 south. He continued that on February 23 they completed walk through and will be starting construction in April, this is a 6-month process so looking to October for a complete date and until then 1 north will remain the isolation unit.

Mr. Lazo shared that on February 14 we held our second veteran community meeting with topics that included admissions, infection control, the outpatient department, and the dormitory; another meeting is scheduled for May 9.

Mr. Lazo passed on that the Operations Department is making progress with 96% of veterans having been contacted that 99.4% have PCP's, there is no information for 43 veterans with documentation being added to their charts. There were numerous messages left for 23 veterans with no response so certified letters were sent out over the past month and so far 18 returned receipts have been received so far and social worker that continues to work with 4 veterans left to finalize the transition. Mr. Lazo reported that the Domiciliary has 5 veterans left: 2 will be moving to transitional housing with Soldier On and eventually to Gordon Mansfield once their apartments are ready, 1 veteran is moving into his son's house, 1 veteran has found a community apartment which needs further assistance, and 1 veteran has been referred to Soldier On and Chelsea Soldiers' Home and he is weighing his options. He continued that the Social Work Department is very involved with these 5 remaining veterans and are continuing to work with various organizations in DVS as well as local organizations to try and finalize these moves. He shared that for recreation we have a robust calendar for March we do encourage veterans to wear mask for activities, activities will continue if a unit is closed, entertainers are required to be vaccinated and are wearing masks and being tested. All quarantines have ended so veteran residents can gather in the Canteen.

Mr. Lazo shared that on March 4 Fritz Mihelcic Commander-in-Chief of the VFW, as well as Bob Woods Massachusetts Commander and his staff visited and met with veteran residents and then took a tour of the refresh. They seemed very pleased with the work that has been done.

Mr. Lazo updated the board that staffing we have 95.6% is active with zero staff out for COVID related reasons and our HPPD for February average is 9.15 which is still double CMS gold standard. He gave EHS a thank you for bonuses and shift differentials with the bonuses although it will be expiring in the middle of March the shift differentials through July.

Mr. Lazo informed the group that the ADON (Assistant Director of Nursing) resigned as of February 25 and is going to work at UMASS in Worcester which is closer to her home and allows her to be back in the ER. The Home is continuing to look for a Director of Nursing, an Occupational Health Nurse, a Veteran Care Coordinator and Legal Counsel. Mr. Lazo continued that there have been interviews for Legal Counsel and the Occupational Health Nurse and in the meantime, we have onboarded 3 security officers for our organic security. He shared that we had a Veteran Care Coordinator scheduled to begin on February 20th, but she had to back out due to military deployment that will last not less than 6 months.

Trustee Jourdain asked Mr. Lazo how things are going with Admissions and what do we currently have on the waiting list. Mr. Lazo responded that we are admitting 1-2 veterans per week with this week bringing 3 veterans in and today we had a readmission of a veteran that was here prior to COVID, his family had taken him out during COVID so he is back and has rejoined his unit on 3 north. He continued that there are 102 names on the waiting list, with 8 veterans ready to be admitted with an additional 13 almost ready to admit they are finalizing some paperwork and we will continue to admit up to 3 a week depending on availability until the beds are full.

Trustee Mass asked Mr. Lazo his earlier comments about a potential employee who was offered and had an offer of employment and then backed out due to a military deployment is that correct? Mr. Lazo replied yes. Trustee Mass asked what position that was for? Mr. Lazo replied that it was for the Veteran Care Coordinator position. Trustee Mass asked if we explained to the potential new hire, who had already accepted the position that we would accommodate the deployment and hold the position for them when they returned, Mr. Lazo replied that it was explained to her and she said she it did not feel right to hold the position for 6 months.

Trustee Collins asked Mr. Lazo regarding the DPH and their praising for how the Home has handled COVID, how did you get that feedback? Mr. Lazo stated it was a phone call between Kim St. Pierre our infection control nurse and Melissa Cummings of DPH. Trustee Collins asked for further clarification regarding the 4 veterans that are working with the contracted social workers veterans, but these were not the domiciliary veterans. Mr. Lazo replied that the 4 veterans from the Outpatient Department closing who have not identified PCP's and the social worker assisting them.

Holyoke Soldiers' Home General Counsel Report (Atty Yankopoulos)

Mr. Yankopoulos reported as of today there are no significant changes to the legal posture of the Home and all of the investigations that are in process are preceding the DOJ investigation AG and OIG. He continued that there are no new suits as of today and no outstanding record request. He shared the search for his replacement continues. Trustee Jourdain asked if you have seen the article in the Boston Globe on March 2 that alluded to some lawsuits that may or may not be filed and was anyone related to Holyoke in anyway in those suits. Mr. Yankopoulos replied not that he is aware of. Trustee Jourdain stated that the article also references OIG investigations so when you say no new DOJ or OIG, we know the ones related to 2020 but is there any new ones related to some of these things that we are aware of so how many active OIG relative to Holyoke are you aware of. Mr. Yankopoulos replied there are currently 2 OIG investigations, there was one that was commenced in late 2019 and still ongoing with very little action in several months and there is a second investigation that started shortly before the holidays Mid December and is ongoing. Mr. Yankopoulos stated to the best of his knowledge the article you are citing has sparked anything new for Holyoke. Trustee Jourdain asked if this is relative to Perlstein. Mr. Yankopoulos replied it is all COVID follow through.

Home's Family Advocate Committee Report (Ms. Menard)

Ms. Menard shared that they received feedback regarding a survey they send out to families as far as days and times to change meeting. She continued the new monthly schedule will be a rotating from noon, 4 and 6 with a different day. There were no follow up items from last meeting and kudos to the staff that the families felt heard with the survey. The next meeting will be on Monday.

Home's Veterans Advocate Committee Report (Ms. Menard)

Ms. Menard reported that there was no meeting last month because the president of council wanted to make sure that every voice could be heard and since we could not gather in Canteen so that will be happening this Thursday.

Trustees' Finance Committee Report (Trustee Jourdain)

Trustee Jourdain reported there was no February meeting, will have one next week. Trustee Jourdain stated that there was a motion that did come up that the Finance Committee did want to advance, and we have someone that this would be applicable to. We had extended a motion from Finance that said we would entertain up to \$3,000 if there came upon a situation where one of our domiciliary veterans was stuck in getting a place to live and we had a circumstance where there was a person who was able to secure an apartment but needed financial support of the trustees to cover the first, last and deposit in the amount of \$2,925 we received this request on this person's behalf from the leadership at the soldiers' home so I would like to advance that to the board for your approval to help this veteran transition to his apartment. Trustee Jourdain made a motion to approve \$2,925 for the veteran to locate to new apartment and to cover first, last and a security deposit from the Trustee fund. Trustee Mass seconded. All in favor, the vote was unanimous. Motion approved.

Trustee Jourdain stated a UBS report will be given at the next meeting.

Trustees' Operations Committee Report (Trustee Collins)

Trustee Collins reported the Operations Committee did not meet in February and our normal meeting will be 2 weeks from today.

Trustees' Bylaws Committee Report (Trustee Lacoste)

Trustee Lacoste reported no February meeting, we are having a March meeting next Tuesday and will discuss the discharge policy update.

Superintendent Hire Committee Report (Trustee Lacoste)

Trustee Lacoste reported that she spoke with Attorney Deacon and we are going to work with John Cronin and he will be helping us by being the liaison between us and DVS and the finance are handled the right way. They discussed the vendors on board with the state to get together for the search committee, draft letter items to be looked at. Trustee Collins tracking what is out there for public consumption that will be deliberated in the Senate this Thursday. Trustee Lacoste had not heard anything further.

Trustee Jourdain was asked for some information by some people relative to how the trustee account works for some details and the investment policy, and a number of the mechanics about it because I think the way the proposed legislation was being written it was going to be a little more sweeping that they actually were intending and I think there is an educational process going on with some of the legislators about how in particular our trustee account works and I think the desire is not to take that away from the board. So, I provided some information to some individuals that were speaking with one of the key state senators and I provided all of that information so that they can make sure what is supposed to be staying with us, stays with us. He continued that he thinks they are trying to get up to speed on how those really work in those dollars so hopefully that helped. He stated that people have a number of opinions as to predictions as to how it is all going to turn out.

Old Business

Update of EMR vendor contract (Mr. Engell)

Mr. Engell reported that the SSTA Demonstration Committee with tremendous support and leadership from EHS, DVS, Superintendents and their teams we have successfully reached a contract last week. He continued that they are still working on a few final details so cannot release vendors name yet but it will soon be public record. Mr. Engell shared that the next phase is development of an RFR then the solicitation and procurement of implementation partner for the hard work to begin and we anticipate that will be a 18-24 months.

Update on VA Small Home Grant Program (Sec. Poppe/Mr. Engell/Trustee Keefe)

Secretary Poppe shared that she was at her director's conference two weeks ago and we did pose the question and there is no update on the priority list yet and she believes that is due to the legislature not being passed at the national level. Secretary Poppe remembers that the list has come out as late as March 25 depending on where they are in session in coming up with their budget, it may take longer.

Staffing Status (Mr. Lazo)

Mr. Lazo had no additional updates from what was reported above.

Update on License Plate Program Initiative (Trustee Jourdain)

Trustee Jourdain shared that Mr. Deacon has been very helpful with us in terms of gathering a number of the mechanics of the information that we need. He continued that since the last meeting he has met with Chelsea Superintendent Tom Lyons and he said they are warm to the idea if it can be done, Mr. Lyons shared that he wanted to touch base with Dan Magoon who he knows very well and Mr. Magoon is involved with Mass Fallen Heroes who has done some license plate work in this area on one of these initiatives so Mr. Lyons and Trustee Jourdain will meet with Mr. Magoon. He is hopeful to have information for the finance committee meeting next week.

Domiciliary Closure & Patient Placement Update (closure March 31, 2022) for remaining patients needing Residence Off Holyoke Soldier Home (Ms. Menard)

Covered above.

COVID-19 Memorial Planning Committee status(Trustee Keefe)

The membership of this Sub Committee will be comprised of:

- Trustee Gary Keefe
- Trustee Kevin Jourdain
- Mr Eric Segundo (VSO Rep)
- Mr Jesus Pereira (VSO Rep)
- Mr Troy Henke(Coalition Rep)
- Ms Laurie Beaudette (Coalition rep)
- Mr Mike Lazo (HSH Staff)
- Ms Deb Foley (HSH Staff)

- Mr Mark Yankopoulos (DVS Staff)
- Ms Randace Rauscher (DVS Staff)

New Business

Trustee Lacoste Request to have the Board approve Finance Committee Chair to authorize any/all future funding for Holyoke Soldier Home veterans who may, with short notification, require funds to secure off site housing to be used to secure services of Licensed Realtor, or First/Last/Security, as long as the amount is less than \$2000 that was proposed by Atty Deacon. Trustee Jourdain said the finance committee was hoping up to \$3000 if something comes up before the April meeting and in case something comes up before the closure. Mr. Deacon shared that he did speak to Chairman Keefe and mentioned that we want to be nimble in the event that there are situations that come up placing the veterans. Trustee Jourdain reported that the finance committee voted it is a good idea to adopt but never had an official board vote. Trustee Jourdain made a motion to amend the amount from \$2,000 to \$3,000. Trustee Mass seconded. All in favor, the vote was unanimous. Motion approved.

Executive Session: Pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A Section 21, The Trustees will enter into executive session to discuss personnel actions related to and resignation for former employees of the Holyoke Soldiers Home. The Trustees will also discuss pending litigation during the executive session. The Chair has determined that discussion of the pending litigation in an open session may have an adverse effect on the position of the parties to the suit. The meeting will not reconvene and will adjourn at the conclusion of the executive session.

Adjourn:

Trustee Lacoste made a motion to adjourn into Executive Session and it was seconded by Trustee Bigda. Roll call vote Trustee Bigda (Yes), Trustee Jourdain (Yes), Trustee Mass (Yes), Trustee Ostrander (Yes), Trustee Lacoste (Yes). It was unanimously VOTED to conclude the meeting at 6:17 PM.

The next meeting will be April 12, 2022

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Denner
Acting Secretary for the Board of Trustees

Attachments:
BoT-Minutes-20220208-Draft
BOT February Finance Data