

## **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 telephonically on Wednesday, September 30, 2020. The meeting began at 5:03 PM.

- **Members Present:**

Kevin Jourdain, Chairman; Christopher Dupont, Cindy Lacoste, Isaac Mass, Carmen Ostrander, Sean Collins

- **Also Present:**

Mark Yankopoulos, Legal Counsel

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

- **Approval of Minutes**

Cindy Lacoste made a motion, seconded by Chris Dupont, to remove from the table, the meeting minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting held on August 11, 2020. All were in favor. Upon motion by Carmen Ostrander and seconded by Sean Collins, it was unanimously VOTED to accept the unamended minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting held on August 11, 2020. Kevin Jourdain conducted a Roll Call vote as follows: Sean Collins (Yes), Chris Dupont (Yes), Cindy Lacoste (Yes), Isaac Mass (Yes), Carmen Ostrander (Yes), Kevin Jourdain (Yes).

- **NEW BUSINESS:**

**Cesar Lopez resignation** – Kevin Jourdain reported that Cesar Lopez has resigned from the Board of Trustees. We were very fortunate to have Mr. Lopez as a member of the Board of Trustees and he will be missed. Mr. Jourdain expressed his thanks for his years of service to our country and to the Board of Trustees, in particular.

**Approval of Medical Staff Appointments** – Mark Yankopoulos sought approval for the two (2) year appointments of Camille Balestri, NP and Shalonda Edwards, LICSW; and the two (2) reappointment of Gloria Krason, DPM. Information on these appointments were electronically sent to the Board members. All of these appointments have been approved by Val Liptak, Acting Administrator. Mr. Yankopoulos noted that Dr. Thomas Higgins was also listed on the agenda for an interim appointment, but this appointment had been approved at a previous Board of Trustees meeting. Sean Collins reported that the credentials for Gloria Krason, DPM, were documented as Gloria Krason, MD in the Medical Staff Meeting minutes of 9-13-20. He requested that they be changed to reflect the following: Gloria Krason, DPM. Mark Yankopoulos to have the requested change made to the Medical Staff Meeting minutes of 9-10-13. Sean Collins inquired if the appointment for Camilla Balestri, NP, is for a new appointment. Mr. Yankopoulos confirmed this. Upon motion by Cindy Lacoste and seconded by Sean Collins, it was unanimously VOTED to approve the above mentioned appointments.

- **Stakeholder Discussion of the Board of Trustees with Payette to discuss the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Capital Planning and Renovation Project:**

Scott Parker from Payette Associates provided for the following presentation: "Soldiers' Home in Holyoke – Holyoke Expedited Capital Project – Rapid Planning Phase" to open a stakeholder discussion with the Board of Trustees. Mr. Parker reviewed the slides in the presentation and opened the discussion up to any questions or comments from the Board members.

Kevin Jourdain inquired if the survey still open for completion? Mr. Parker confirmed that it is, and we are still encouraging completion of the survey. The grant application deadline is 4-15-20.

Mr. Jourdain inquired if Board members can submit any additional inquiries/comments electronically following tonight's Board meeting. Mr. Parker confirmed that they can and he will provide contact information to the Board.

- **Stakeholder Discussion of the Board of Trustees with Payette to discuss the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Capital Planning and Renovation Project (cont.):**

Mr. Jourdain wished to complement EOHHS and DVS on this expedited program. He noted that the Board of Trustees will do their part to meet the 4-15-20 submission deadline for federal funding qualification.

Mr. Jourdain inquired about the concept of single rooms versus double rooms. He noted that he has heard pros and cons on this, as there may be psychological or emotional support from having a roommate. He inquired if as Payette is doing the needs assessment, will there be input from mental health professionals on this? Mr. Parker stated that many of the regulations related to single versus double rooms come from the medical health field. One of the concerns on this consideration is around infection control. He stated that hospitals are moving away from double rooms due to infection prevention, as it is an issue. He noted that when the Chelsea grant was applied for, it was felt that double rooms were not suitable, as they would prefer that residents be encouraged to leave their room. He noted they have received feedback from some veterans stating that they would like to be in double rooms. We will have to consider the regulations and infection control issues. Mr. Jourdain noted that he is hearing good arguments on both sides of this. He would just like to ensure that we are getting multidisciplinary answers to complex questions and this is all being taken into consideration, including the input of medical health professionals and other types of providers. Scott confirmed this.

Mr. Jourdain inquired if private bathrooms in every veteran room is being considered? Mr. Parker confirmed this.

Mr. Jourdain asked how information is going to be gathered to determine the right size and population of the facility? He asked what process Payette using to determine need, as we do have waiting lists to be considered? Mr. Parker reported that they have hired a firm to do a demographic study. They will collate information from several sources, looking at projections and trends, and will map out what the long-term needs will be. He noted that this also has to do with acuity level and the capacity of the site to hold a number of patients. There are changing staffing levels, so this will also be taken into consideration, as well as the parking capacity of the facility.

Mr. Jourdain reported that the goal is to meet 100% of the need in the confines of what we have-noting the question is if we can get 100% of the necessary staffing to meet 100% of the population. How is Payette going to determine our capacity to get available staff, as we have had difficulty keeping us at 100% with employed staff? Mr. Jourdain reported that we have some agency staff, but we would like agency staff to be the exception, rather than the rule. Mr. Parker stated that they are still investigating what the outcome will be. He noted that one factor is whether we get a new building or a significantly renovated one, this will attract new staff. We will have to spend more time investigating this number, but know it's an issue for discussion.

Mr. Jourdain inquired if the option to relocate the facility to somewhere else on the campus is being explored? Mr. Parker confirmed that it is. Several options are being explored, looking at both replacement and renovation of the existing building – both options are on the table at this point.

Chris Dupont stated that his hope is to reach 250 beds on the property. He inquired if we do build a new facility, will we look outside the box about other places to put parking. He noted that Holyoke Community College has a large parking lot in proximity less than 1 mile away. Has something like this been looked into? Mr. Parker stated that no, currently this option has not been looked into at this point, but stated that this doesn't mean if the information that is gathered points in that direction, then we will follow-up on this. Mr. Dupont noted that there is currently a long wait list and this would give credibility to the size of a 250 bed facility.

Mr. Dupont inquired if we have looked into enabling the outdoor environment to the whole population of veterans at the Home for entertainment and to make handicapped accessible? Mr. Parker stated that outdoor space has come up at every stakeholder meeting. He stated that this will be a major consideration going forward.

- **Stakeholder Discussion of the Board of Trustees with Payette to discuss the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Capital Planning and Renovation Project (cont.):**

Mr. Dupont noted that the creation of an Adult Day Healthcare Program onsite would give the registration staff more insight to veterans' needs, and that possibly based on that need, identification could be made of veterans who should be admitted to the Home sooner. He hopes that the Adult Day Healthcare Program would rank high for the future Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. Mr. Parker stated that this item has come up and is part of the consideration at this point.

Cindy Lacoste noted that she has sat in at a few other stakeholder meetings. She expressed her appreciation for the provision of minutes of these meeting. She stated that she looks forward to getting behavioral health into the Home, as well as the inclusion of sensory rooms, for assistance with veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD). They could work with these veterans to help with such issues, as opposed to removing them from the Home.

Ms. Lacoste noted that the population of woman veterans is growing, and that there are many needs that women veterans have that are different from the male veterans. She stated that some women veterans, as well as men, have dealt with sexual trauma in the military. She hopes that a smaller area or wing of the Home will be included as this population is growing.

Ms. Lacoste stated that she would also like to see telehealth for veterans who are still in their homes in preparation for becoming long term residents at the Soldiers' Home.

Ms. Lacoste would also like to see a chapel and for the canteen to come back in the facility. The veterans should have a social space where they can meet with family and community members. Mr. Parker stated that these are still in the plan. He noted that they have heard a lot about the need for an Adult Day Healthcare Program and the transition of veterans from their home – all of these are part of the consideration. He stated that PTSD is clearly an issue and they are looking at how to manage this long-term. They are also mapping out the population of women veterans.

Isaac Mass expressed his thanks, noting that he was also in attendance at several stakeholder meetings and has reviewed the minutes from those meetings. He noted that it is helpful to hear who has been involved in the interviews, and that it is important for the stakeholders to know they are being listened to.

Mr. Mass stated that he feels that telehealth is important. He noted that it would be unlikely that the veterans of Franklin County would travel to the Soldiers' Home for the Adult Day Healthcare Program. Telehealth would be helpful for these veterans. With technology changing so fast, it would be helpful across the board to be able to keep veterans home as long as possible, if they are not able to take advantage of the Adult Day Healthcare Program.

Mr. Mass stated that currently the Home transfers out veterans due to acute psychiatric needs, and that these individuals may be transferred to a facility having less understanding of the needs of veterans. Service gaps within Western MA need to be identified. He noted that within the last year, Baystate Medical Center considered closing three behavioral health units out of Greenfield, Palmer and Westfield. He noted that the economics of running behavioral health systems are difficult so it is predictable that there will be a need for behavioral health. Are we looking to create a capacity for the veterans needing this and in the community at large? He stated that there are regional needs in Franklin County related to behavioral health. He also feels that we have become focused on the older population, but there are opportunities to take care of people in crisis, and that this is something that should be considered.

- **Stakeholder Discussion of the Board of Trustees with Payette to discuss the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Capital Planning and Renovation Project (cont.):**

Mr. Mass addressed the discussion of single rooms versus double rooms. He feels the ability to connect with people is important for the veterans and it affects overall health. He understands that getting veterans outside of their rooms is beneficial, but not all veterans are ambulatory and able to take a long walk to the chapel or canteen. He stated that it makes sense to include some areas, in closer proximity to veteran rooms, where the veterans can congregate with each other, both to socialize and for recreational activities. He stated that having multiple areas like this could be easily controlled for infectious disease.

Mr. Mass wished to also address the parking situation at the Home, hoping that parking would not be a concern to ensure we have met our needs. He noted that we should think creatively around this, and that off-site parking or a parking garage be a consideration. He stated that there has been a long wait list at the Home for some time and that 250 beds could be filled.

Sean Collins expressed his thanks for the presentation and noted that he concurs with what the other Board members stated. We need to focus on mind, body and spirit – all of this falls into one of these things. As far as overburdening the site, we need to put everything on the table as far as potential courses of action. He inquired as to what is the constraining factor that is overburdening the site? Mr. Parker noted that we are in the beginning states of identifying what issues would constrain the site and no decisions have been made. We are still trying to assess these things, and that there are many factors to look at. We are looking at both renovating and replacing. We are gathering all potential factors and the evaluation of these factors to determine the right direction. We are currently winding up the information gathering stage.

Cindy Lacoste inquired on the dormitory residents, and if this type of resident will be accepted going forward or if there will be changes around this? She stated that she also agrees with the consideration of a vertical parking garage. Mr. Parker stated that he would like to hear opinions on the dormitory service and if this service is valuable to the community and what we provide the community. These questions are helping us understand what is right and appropriate to do at the Home. We look to get input from the stakeholders on what they feel is the most valuable thing. He noted that Soldier On provides services that may fulfill this goal, so need to know opinions on if dormitory services continue to be valuable.

Mr. Mass stated that he felt there was a time when the dormitory did make sense, but for the long term of the facility, the resource that the Veterans Administration has put into homelessness and homeless mitigation makes it an area that is not the highest priority or best use for the space we have. He also noted that the dormitory is most likely a regionalized use – with people who are most likely to use dormitory services being from Holyoke. We are not providing services that are necessary and connecting individuals to help them transition – it is more long term in the dormitory. Mr. Mass noted that the homeless population in Franklin County do not tend to utilize Soldier On in Northampton due to distance, and that the dormitory at the Soldiers' Home has a limited scope and utilizes a lot of space. He stated that if we have to sacrifice something in the new facility, that maybe the dormitory should be the thing to let go, and we would need to transition the veterans residing there currently. He believes the Adult Day Healthcare Program would serve a greater population.

Chris Dupont relayed a comment around the overburdening of the site and the issue of staffing a 250 bed facility. It was noted that a new facility would attract new staff. He also feels that the implementation of an electronic medical records system would help with this. He hopes that the staffing issue would not affect the decision to have a 250 bed facility. He stated that the veterans have paid their dues, and if we need RN's, LPN's, and CNA's, then salaries should be made attractive enough to attract individuals to work here. He hopes that this is not a factor in the decision making to have a facility of less than 250 beds.

- **Stakeholder Discussion of the Board of Trustees with Payette to discuss the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Capital Planning and Renovation Project (cont.):**

Cindy Lacoste stated that she agrees with Mr. Mass on the dormitory. She feels that the long-term future should be caring for the larger population that needs it for a longer time.

Carmen Ostrander expressed her thanks for the presentation. She stated her concern around the bathrooms and the entrances and exits being more handicapped accessible due to a higher population of veterans who are amputees. Mr. Parker stated that accessibility requirements generally don't consider assistance with bathing. He stated that they will likely seek variances to be able to get handicapped accessible facilities in the bathroom, entrances and exits.

Kevin Jourdain noted that there are many entertainers who come into the facility. It would be nice to have a common space, with good acoustics, that could be set up for shows. I feel this would be important for the veterans. He would also like to see a chapel in a prominent location within the facility. Mr. Parker stated that he agreed with these items.

Mr. Jourdain stated that the Board will extend any additional comments in writing, and that they look forward to the continued sharing of thoughts. He thanked Payette for working with the veterans and community.

Mr. Parker thanked the Board of Trustees for spending time to discuss this. He noted that this is a great process to help understand what is important for Western MA and the Soldiers' Home.

**Adjourn:**

Kevin Jourdain made a motion, seconded by Isaac Mass, to conclude the Public Session and move into Executive Session for the purpose 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 Executive Session has ended.

Roll Call Vote is as follows: Sean Collins (Yes), Chris Dupont (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 6:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Shimel  
Acting Secretary for the Board of Trustees