

To: Members of the Massachusetts Stewardship Council
From: Henry Lee
Re: Friday's discussion

At our last meeting, I promised to summarize our discussion on the future structure and mission of the Stewardship Council. Michael Dutton and his committee did an excellent job of outlining the options pertaining to both our role and organization.

I focused the discussion on our future role, since I think the questions surrounding it are more difficult to address. Prompted by correspondence with one member, and outside discussions with several former Commissioners and/or Secretaries, I added the RMP approval process to our agenda.

Michael's background memo divided the alternative roles into four options: 1. A strengthened Council with greater responsibility for setting policy (see my previous memo for more details on how this might be done); 2. An Advisory Council with limited policy responsibility; 3. An Appeals Board model; and 4. Eliminating the Council.

There was no support for option four and limited support for option three. One Council member felt it was important that the public have a resource to tap when they believe the Department is ignoring their concerns. The Council acts as an important sounding board in this respect.

Most of the discussion surrounded the first two models. While no consensus was reached, the majority of those present at the meeting were more comfortable with the status quo than the stronger policy-making options. The following points were raised:

- The Council is a group of peers who provide the Commissioner with new ideas and insights. It helps him or her do his or her job more effectively.
- The Council provides continuity because it often has more institutional knowledge than the Commissioner.
- The Council serves as the Commissioner's eyes and ears. Hence, the state should continue to seek Councilors from different parts of the state and with different backgrounds.
- The Council has only recently gained credibility, thus it may be premature to change its basic structure and mission at this time.

Though its role is unclear, the Council should continue its involvement in the Department's budgetary process, including helping to review the submissions and advocating on the Department's behalf before the legislature. Two areas in which the Council plays a stronger role are the RMP process and the Oversight Report.

Criticisms concerning the RMP process were threefold. First, even under the accelerated process, it will take twenty-three years to complete all the RMPs. This results in badly outdated RMPs and defeats the purposes of the process as outlined in legislation. Second, DCR does not have, nor is likely to have the financial and staff resources to implement eighty percent of the

recommended improvements contained in each RMP. Third, the Council lacks the expertise to assess the technical and natural resources issues, such as the inventory of flora and fauna.

Several ideas emerged during the meeting. One is to restrict the Council's role to establishing guidelines governing both the RMP process and the categories of topics to be covered and to ensure that the Department adheres to those guidelines. Another is to divide the state into fourteen to sixteen regions and do regional RMPs of all DCR properties in a particular region. If DCR completed two per year, it would finish the RMP process in seven to eight years, which is not unreasonable. Finally, the Council could ask DCR to consider its fiscal realities when preparing its management recommendations.

The majority of those present at the meeting felt that the RMP process had just begun to be effective and that any changes at this stage might erode all progress that the Department has made. A small minority (me) argued that if the three arguments mentioned above are valid, then remaining silent on the present RMP process would perhaps be a disservice.

The Stewardship Council is responsible for writing an Oversight Report annually, but this was done only once in the last seven years due to lack of staff. The report could serve as a lever to influence DCR priorities and policies.

The question as to how (or if) the Council should use the Oversight Report was discussed but not resolved. Instead, we agreed to refer the issue back to Michael's committee for review with the hope that they could make a recommendation to the full Council at our August meeting.

I will talk to Laura to see if the Policy Committee can discuss the RMP process and provide us with their thoughts at the August meeting as well.

Moreover, I would like to spend fifteen to twenty minutes at our July meeting discussing some of the operations issues. These include:

1. The optimal size of the Council (keeping the size at thirteen members or decreasing to nine).
2. Geographic distribution of members—should the requirement that five members be from the urban parks district be eliminated?
3. Should the terms of members be staggered, and if so, how might we do this going forward?
4. Should the terms remain seven years or be changed to a shorter duration such as five years?
5. Should the Council be allowed to create subcommittees?
6. Should the Council continue to meet monthly or reduce the frequency to eight times per year?