# **April 2025 Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present: Jack Buckley, Dicken Crane, Jeff Collins, Phil Doherty, Ted Dooley, Dennis Smith, Jennifer Wilson, Kevin O’Shea, Vivian Ortiz, Melissa Harper

Council Members Attending Remotely: Phil Doherty

Council Members Absent: Ann Canedy, Susan Smiley

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Matthew Perry, Fran Blanchard, Paul Cavanagh, Drew Stock, Karen Granatino, Chloe Gotsis, Kathryn Ward, Kerrie Peaslee, Kerry Harrison

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Bill Boles, Neil Rhein

Virtual Attendees: Chip Jones, Christine Liu, Alexis, Chuck Anastas, Deb Cary, J. Skalski, Jun Lee, Michael Norton, Lawrence Tucker, Nick, Nicole Freedman, Sarah Freeman, Suzanne Gall Marsh, Wendy Machmuller, H. Richardson

## Call to Meeting, 1:00pm – Chair Dicken Crane

Chair Crane welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roll call of councilors present. He spoke about the Pittsfield Complex RMPs and said that it brings up the challenges that DCR has between the conservation and recreation aspects of the agency. He said that they don’t want to forget the recreation and that he has heard that from others. He is interested in knowing how many of the public comments are focused on recreation and not just conservation.

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo welcomed the Council to Borderland State Park. He started by addressing the news that he will be leaving his position as Commissioner to begin working on the senior leadership team at UMass Lowell. He said he will be transitioning from his role as commissioner this summer.

Commissioner Arrigo said that it is a shorter period of time than he had initially anticipated being with DCR, an agency that he knows has experienced more than its fair share of change.  He assured the Council that as long as he is here work will continue as normal, and DCR will maintain the momentum we’ve built, adding that serving as commissioner has been an honor.  He told the council that with their support and partnership, they’ve been able to build healthy communities and make a difference in the lives of people across the state.

Commissioner Arrigo stated that he will be here for the next few months as they work to find and transition the next commissioner noting that he will be directly involved with the search for the new commissioner and will do everything he can to ensure a smooth transition.

### Innovation Awards Ceremony

Commissioner Arrigo shared that they have awarded project funds to 16 teams from 42 total submissions across categories for ‘Most Educational’, ‘Most Impactful’, and ‘Most Innovative’ as part of the first ever DCR Innovation Awards. The projects include pollinator gardens, a traveling salt marsh, a red spruce seed bank, and many other great ideas that will be put into action. He thanked Fran Blanchard who led the project, and her selection team of Paula Davison, Celeste DePalma, John Cavanaro, Yvonne Jones, Ryan Prentiss, Chris Lynch, Stephen Doody, Kate Preissler, and Matt Villamaino, with advice/guidance from Jonathan Simon, for their hard work in putting this program together and for the difficult job of choosing the finalists.

### World Figure Skating Competition

From March 25 to 30, Boston hosted the ISU World Figure Skating Championship competition at the TD Garden.  During the competition, DCR’s Steriti Memorial Rink as the official practice space. This event brought together skaters from countries all over the world. Commissioner Arrigo thanked the DCR staff who worked on this event from day to day and made this a special experience for all the participants: Carl Giambusso, Brian Halliday, Fred Pelletier, Romero Holliday, Azizy Xander, Dan Morris, Chuck Allen, Janice Parlon, and Mary McCarthy.

### Wilderness First Aid Training

DCR staff and local Appalachian Trail (AT) volunteers participated in Wilderness First Aid Training at Mount Greylock's Visitor Center in Lanesborough. The training was offered to local trail volunteers and extended to DCR staff. It was taught by Josh Weeks who has dedicated 17 years to volunteering with the Massachusetts AT Management Committee in various roles as instructor, trail maintainer and chairperson. These trainings provide a great opportunity for continuing education for both DCR staff and local communities as well as an opportunity for people to get out into the parks to experience all they offer.

### Plymouth Wildfire Education

DCR Forest Fire Control partnered with the Town of Plymouth, Plymouth Fire Department, and the NFPA Wildland Fire Division to host a presentation and public meeting to discuss wildfire and assist with educating town residents on how they can be proactive in protecting and mitigating risks on their own properties. The Town of Plymouth’s Department of Energy and Environment updated residents on actions being taken on town property to mitigate wildfire risk and habitat restoration. The meeting was attended by approximately 100 members of the community.

### Wildland Fire Training

On Friday March 28 the DCR Forest Fire Control Dist.1 team was at the Cape Cod Technical School in Harwich teaching the field day portion of S-130/190 NWCG Basic wildland fire training. After spending eight days over the month of January learning in the classroom, students were able to apply all they learned in a hands-on and immersive outdoor setting. The 16 Seniors, who are in the Fire Science class, participated in a mock work capacity test (3-mile hike in 45 minutes), burnout operations, direct and indirect fire suppression techniques utilizing hand tools and fire engines, fire shelter deployments, and Fire weather calculations. Students that completed all the required prework and in-person work received their NWCG S-130/190 Wildland firefighter Certificates.

### How to Create a Visitor Center Identity

On March 20, Interpretive Services staff held a planning meeting at the Visitor Center in Worcester to begin determining its identity and programming that DCR will offer there. Staff from the Visitor Center and Central Region came together to brainstorm different aspects of the site's stories, meaning, audiences, and the tools that can be used to share this information with the public. This project will lead to the site's interpretive service plan, outlining what interpretive opportunities will be offered at this beautiful and important site.

### Cultivating the Next Generation of Stewards

In March, State Lands Management Foresters Keith DiNardo and Joelle Vautour hosted field tours for over 30 students from UMass Amherst’s Silviculture course at Erving State Forest and Lawton State Forest.  Silviculture is a required course for forestry students and other programs offered by the Department of Environmental Conservation at UMass Amherst. The university reached out to our forestry staff to show examples of even age silviculture and forest succession following harvest. Students were engaged, asking questions and participating in conversations about the forest management planning process, future monitoring efforts, collaboration with the public and other stakeholders, harvest outcomes, and harvest supervision.

### Preserving Cultural Resources

The Office of Cultural Resources (OCR) met with South Region Operations at Borderland State Park in the Ames Mansion to provide an overview of their mission, functions, and cultural resource priorities for the South Region. Operations staff shared projects that they are interested in pursuing and ideas for increased communication and collaboration. Everyone contributed valuable insights and actively participated in the discussion. There was great teamwork throughout the meeting. Commissioner Arrigo thanked Wendy Pearl, Kevin Allen, Raena Blumenthal, Andrew Buckley, and Maeve Studholme for planning and coordination.

### April Break and Park Serve Day

From April 19 to 27, DCR will be holding its annual April School Vacation Week events at properties across the state. This year, there are 68 programs at 13 properties. The agency invites families to come out and play in Massachusetts State Parks and enjoy a fantastic array of family friendly programs and experiences for all ages. More information is available on the DCR website.

DCR is also hosting the 19th annual Park Serve Day on April 26. There are more than 60 events at 40 different properties around the state. Commissioner Arrigo met with the Executive Directors of the five partner organizations along the Charles River, including Stewardship Councilor Laura Jasinski, who will be welcoming a large group of volunteers on the day.

### MA 250

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolution right here in Massachusetts. DCR is celebrating with several events on DCR properties, starting on April 18th with Paul Revere’s Midnight Ride Anniversary Walking Tour, followed by the Midnight Ride reenactment on April 21 presented by the Friends of City Square Park. More information and events are available on the DCR website 250 page. The agency has also created a series of postcards highlighting DCR properties that were involved in the revolution including Fort Phoenix, Castle Island, Roxbury Heritage, and the Dorothy Quincy Homestead.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Ortiz asked about the 3-1-1 system that is being put into place.

Commissioner Arrigo said that they have hired two people that are now testing out the system. He is hopeful that they will be rolling the system out to the legislator in the next month or so. As requests come through MassParks, they are inputting the requests into the system to test it, and will begin to work with legislators and staff through the system.

Chair Crane asked what the 3-1-1 system is.

Commissioner Arrigo said that it is a process that provides accurate information that people need and a level of customer service that makes it easier for users to get answers to questions they have about the agency.

Councilor Wilson suggested putting the councilors into an early user group for the 3-1-1 program. She asked if Commissioner Arrigo could share any information about the process of finding the next commissioner.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he can’t share too many details, but that the goal is to find the next permanent commissioner and that there isn’t interest in having an interim or acting commissioner.

Councilor Buckley thanked Commissioner Arrigo for his time in the job, saying that he is the sixth DCR Commissioner he has worked with as a member of the Council, and that he thinks he has done the best job for the agency. He said that one thing that was highlighted in the Strategic Readiness Initiative is inconsistent leadership at the top of the agency. He said that he encourages the Commissioner, Secretary, and Governor to look at the situation and ask if there are changes that can be made to retain commissioners for a longer period of time. He suggested the model that is at Mass Fish and Wildlife where the director is hired by the Fish and Wildlife board which allows for consistency when administrations change.

Councilor Jasinski thanked and congratulated Commissioner Arrigo and said he has done an incredible job with the agency. She has noticed on the partner side is the collaborative nature of the agency under his leadership.

Commissioner Arrigo said that it is something they are looking at for a new commissioner, for them to have the experience to take the work that has been done and building upon it. He said that they will make sure the agency does not slide back.

Councilor Wilson said that no matter who appoints the commissioner, to let it become its own position and to speak to the magnitude of what is within its authority.

Councilor Buckley said that there is a high probability that the next commissioner will stay for the same amount of time and that they need to figure out how to fix that.

Councilor Harper said that she thinks they all reacted in the same sort of way, with a heavy heart that he is leaving, but with gratitude for what he has done. She asked about the language in the Stewardship Council’s legislation that refers to their role in choosing a commissioner.

Councilor Wilson said that the language gives them the power to appoint an acting commissioner.

Councilor Harper asked if while they are looking at this situation and trying not to repeat the challenges that have happened in the past, is there a way for the council to be more involved and have a voice in the process so that some of the things that they’ve worked hard to change gets protected.

Councilor Ortiz said that she is appreciative to know that the Commissioner is leaving beforehand, noting that it hasn’t always been the case in the past.

Chair Crane said that because of who the commissioner is, he is confident that he won’t leave them in a bad place. He said that there should be a role of the Stewardship Council in who is commissioner so that the position doesn’t become a political football. He said that when DCR is at the whim of political pressures, it makes it hard for the agency to have long term progress.

Councilor Smith asked if there was an update on reappointments of councilors whose terms expire this year.

Commissioner Arrigo said that there has been communication between his office and the governor’s and that there has been a request to reappoint those who are seeking it.

Councilor Harper said that she has been working closely with Commissioner Arrigo and Mr. Perry on making a plan to get the reappointments.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he has appreciated the support of the council and that he will be imparting its importance on to whoever replaces him, noting the importance of the council having a full complement of members.

Councilor Collins thanked Commissioner Arrigo and congratulated him on his new position. He said that its important to understand what is causing the turnover, and that the conversation should be had with Secretary Tepper and Undersecretary Cooper to find out what they can do to support having the Commissioner in place for a long time. He said that at Fish and Wildlife, the director is appointed by the board and there is a commissioner appointed by the governor.

Councilor Buckley said that it is a different situation but that you can’t look at the history and say that the way DCR has been operating hasn’t been working. He asked if there is a structural way that they can make it work.

Councilor Ortiz said this is also a comment that they are hearing from park users, and not just a conversation that is happening amongst the council.

Councilor Collins suggested that a delegation of the Council request to meet with Secretary Tepper to discuss this issue further.

Councilor Buckley volunteered to be a part of the group.

Chair Crane clarified that they will make a request to the Secretary to meet with her or one of her staff to discuss the position of Commissioner.

Councilor O’Shea suggested that they send a formal request on behalf of the whole council for a meeting, and then after decide who will go to the meeting.

Councilor Buckley said that the job that Commissioner Arrigo has done has made this a bigger problem because he turned things in the right direction and that there is a sense of momentum. He had a real impact and that makes the problem more acute. He is concerned about sliding backwards.

Chair Crane said that he will write a letter that can be sent to Secretary Tepper requesting a meeting.

## Regular Business I

### Presentation on DCR Strategic Readiness Initiative – Fran Blanchard, Senior Director of Strategic Readiness

Fran Blanchard gave a presentation to the Council on the Strategic Readiness Initiative and an update on the progress the agency has made on the goals in the initiative.

### After the presentation concluded, Councilors were given the opportunity for questions and comments.

Councilor Ortiz said focusing on the Environmental Justice communities, as a person that belongs to a group that cares for the Neponset River trail it is hard for her to get her neighbors who care about the space to come and join them. She asked if there are any focus groups where community is inputting and giving suggestions. She said that there are things done to the community without neighborhood input. She added that signage and language access are very important to her and that it should be written by a level in any language that is understandable by anyone.

Councilor Harper thanked Ms. Blanchard and said that this was the most comprehensive presentation that the council has seen on the Strategic Readiness Initiative. She said that when thinking about the future of DCR, she considers the Council’s work on trying to increase transparency and that the priorities that make DCR more public facing and accessible are the things that should be the priorities. She added that things that prove demand are also important because data that tells the legislature about what DCR is doing for the community, then it is easier to make a case for funding. For metrics, she would like to see a dashboard to see how DCR is succeeding and how success is measured.

Councilor O’Shea said that he seconds Councilor Harper’s statement. He said that the number one thing he is concerned about with capital planning at DCR is the maintenance part. He said he often sees properties that are invested in and then not cared for.

Councilor Jasinski said that from the partnership lens it’s great to see progress, but that a lot of executive directors of friends groups are asking what happened with the Strategic Readiness Initiative. She said that it would be great to share the progress with a partner group. She added that something that came out of report is that there is ROI at DCR, and they would like to see metrics that reinforce that. Knowing how hard it can be to get metrics in a public park system, she asked what the agency is doing on qualitative metrics and storytelling.

Councilor O’Shea noted that as part of the climate bill that recently passed, EEA has had to make a dashboard for progress on certain projects and that DCR may look to them to see how they can build their own.

Councilor Wilson asked about a strategic plan for the agency.

Commissioner Arrigo said that there have been internal conversations about creating one.

Councilor Wilson said that the Special Commission Report had a section on the Stewardship Council and that if there are opportunities to partner on that they would like to. She said that there are other things like dam safety and rangers and the State House that were suggested to be moved in the Special Commission Report and that the council may be able to help with that. She said that when thinking about RMPs, they want to make them so they’re not a burden but are useful and can be focused on by the agency.

Commissioner Arrigo responded that some of those challenging items that have been identified take time and energy and take you away from the focus of the agency. He said the point about RMPs being a fundamental piece to our properties, but time is being taken away from focusing on them because of other things that are out of their control. Building trust is important to make harder things a little bit easier because we need legislative support and partner support.

Councilor Wilson said that she echoes that the publicity and marketing of the agency has been great and with the rebranding, she hopes that more marketing that comes with it.

Commissioner Arrigo said that the interesting thing about branding is it is the agency’s opportunity to be more present and salient in people’s lives and minds. He said that the current logo doesn’t stand out, and that the agency has been risk averse in the past but trying to be more a part of people’s lives.

Councilor Ortiz agreed about the logo, saying that they need to create better knowledge of what properties belong to DCR in the Boston area.

Councilor Collins said that the council marvels every month about how much the agency does and asked how can you brand something so big. He said Internal and external alignment is a big task, that progress on certain issues are out of the agency’s control, and that communication is key to get to implementation that we’ve been promised and tasked with. He said that the council is here to help and have some of those conversations.

Ms. Blanchard said that they have taken on some of the internal agency communication, creating org charts and intranet pages which help with processes like procurement.

Councilor Collins said that it is important to enforce and set expectations for technology transitions within the agency.

Councilor Buckley said that they should think of a way to make all the work that’s been done visible to the public and that they would be well served to think about ways to show this visually. He added that for employee retention, there are two different things, staff retention which for any manager has to be planned for, and leadership retention which is a separate issue and requires a different plan.

During Special Commission one of the conversations around capital projects was tied to the environmental justice conversation so it could show where the agency is putting its resources. She asked if Ms. Blanchard could share progress on that.

Ms. Blanchard said that she is not a part of the capital planning team, but that part of the prioritization process will be the creation of criteria and that some of the criteria will be about environmental justice communities. The design and engineering and climate teams do this now, but it is not talked about in a public way.

Chair Crane said that he appreciates how Ms. Blanchard has woven together several initiatives, the Strategic Readiness Initiative, Special Commission Report and Core Mission and Principles and that its great that these things that were initiated separately have been brought together. He said that one of the outcomes of this effort is how the public receives the benefit and a big piece of that is education. He said it is important for the public to not just see the transparency of how they fit together, but also see the value of the natural environment, recreational opportunities, and mental health benefits of DCR properties and that the public doesn’t see in their daily lives how important all this is. He added that connecting aspects of DCR together and thinking of this issue in terms of the branding, DCR should have some acknowledgement or be acknowledged as providing a wide range of benefits to public and everybody.

Councilor Ortiz suggested creating man on the street conversations and asking “do you know who runs this” in regards to DCR services.

Councilor Harper suggested asking the question “how did DCR serve you today?”

Chair Crane gave the example of a DCR beach and how it provides habitat for plovers, people can fish for striped bass, and that it nurtures a lot more than you see without someone pointing it out.

Councilor Dooley said that zooming out from parks and beaches, one of the things DCR does is create experiences and memories, and that the ability to visit the properties helps to create foundational memories and that it is an opportunity to do it for free or low cost. He added that people care about what they know about.

Councilor Buckley suggested that they ask what if the things DCR does were removed, saying they can frame how important things are by thinking of them being taken away.

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Collins made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 13, 2025 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor O’Shea seconded the motion.

The March 13, 2025 meeting minutes were approved.

### Public Comment

[Guidelines for Public Comment are available on the DCR Stewardship Council website.](https://www.mass.gov/doc/dcr-stewardship-council-public-comment-guidelines/download)

Chairman Crane invited members of the public for comment.

### Comments were given by the following members of the public

* Bill Boles, Sandwich
* Neil Rhein, Director of Keep Massachusetts Beautiful

## Regular Business II

### Committee Updates

#### Policy Committee

Councilor Wilson said that her and Councilor Collins had an initial meeting with Peter Church and Jessica Rowcroft to receive an update on the progress of landscape designations. She said that at the next meeting of the committee, they will be discussing the Strategic Oversight Plan.

#### Stakeholders

The next Stakeholders Committee meeting will be held on May 2, 2025 at 8am.

#### Finance

Councilor Buckley said that he has contacted DCR CFO John McMillen to schedule a meeting and is waiting to hear back.

### Councilor Comments

Chair Crane said that he has been thinking about the expansion of the bottle bill and why that hasn’t happened yet in Massachusetts.

Councilor Collins said he follows DCR on Instagram and suggested that other councilors do the same.

Councilor Ortiz spoke about the importance of advertising Universal Access opportunities for people in wheelchairs, and the importance of highlighting public transit access to DCR parks.

## Adjournment

Councilor Dooley moved to adjourn the meeting.

Councilor Smith seconded.

Councilor Crane thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting.

Please check the DCR Stewardship Council webpage for notice of upcoming meetings. <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council>