# **April 2024 Meeting Minutes**

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

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Matthew Perry, Ilyse Wolberg, Chloe Gotsis

Public Attendees as Registered**:** James Hearsum, Allison Dush, Christine Liu, Denis LaForce, Elaine Lawrence, Finn Perry, Laura Jasinski, Martha, Patty Lawrence, Sarah Freeman, Steven Greenberg, Susanne Wilkinson, David Alder, Suzanne Gall Marsh, Wendy Machmuller

## Call to Meeting, 9:00am – Chair Jack Buckley

Chair Buckley welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roll call of councilors present. He spoke about attending the Friends of Whitehall meeting with Mr. Perry. He said it was an interesting meeting and illuminating to see how friends groups are committed to their parks, the problems of their parks, and helping DCR address these challenges. He said the challenge is to get them invested in the whole system. He said that he would like to reconstitute the Nominating Committee with Councilors Dennis Smith, Jennifer Wilson, and Dicken Crane as members. He noted that Mr. Perry sent out the list of committees and their members, and he would like Councilors to look at them to see if they are interested in joining any of them. Chair Buckley mentioned the hiring freeze that Governor Healy put into place and said he is disappointed because of the headway that was being made in hiring by Commissioner Arrigo and DCR. He said that next month’s meeting is at the Blackstone Visitor Center in Worcester and that there is a bike path so if anyone would like to bring a bike with them, they will go for a ride after the meeting. He encouraged anyone with the time to join in on a Park Serve Day cleanup. Last, Chair Buckley spoke about coastal issues related to climate change and DCR’s role in the conversation. He said that this is a place for the new Climate Chief, Melissa Hoffer, to step in instead of individual agencies.

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo thanked the Council for having him. He then gave an update on recent activities at the agency.

### Hiring Freeze

Commissioner Arrigo started by addressing the announcement made last week of measures being taken to balance the FY24 budget.  He assured the Council that DCR remains committed as an agency to providing the resources necessary to support operations at our properties this spring and summer, and that while the budget control measures announced last week may require some adjustments that are being worked through, he is confident that DCR will continue to carry out its mission. He added that there is no impact to DCR’s seasonal workforce, and DCR is continuing to hire for these positions for the spring and summer seasons.

### Eclipse

On Monday, April 8, DCR properties celebrated the partial solar eclipse experienced in Massachusetts with events and programming at eight properties. Eclipse viewing glasses were handed out to those who attended programs, including a model solar system tour, a craft that shows the different stages of the eclipse, sundial making, eclipse nature observation, and learning about how to safely observe the eclipse. The events were a great success with nearly 4,000 people attending and many more flocking to DCR properties to get a good view of this celestial phenomenon.  The Commissioner thanked DCR’s interpretive staff, especially South Regional Interpretive Coordinator Simon Schreier who helped to organize these events statewide.

### Park Madness

For two weeks, DCR’s communications team ran a “Park Madness” bracket based on the popular March Madness basketball tournament. The agency had great participation this year with the championship round garnering a total of 1,115 votes. The winner was Walden Pond State Reservation.

### Wild Weather

Commissioner Arrigo reported that April 3 and 4 brought snow in the north and west regions and flooding rains to the east and south regions. Morrissey Blvd in Boston was flooded and had to be shut down, and parks in the Berkshires reported several inches of snow, and even saw some people skiing. He said that this kind of unpredictable weather is becoming more common, and that DCR will continue to prepare and respond quickly and efficiently to keep everyone safe.

### Governor’s Conference on Travel and Tourism

On April 2, Commissioner Arrigo attended and spoke as part of a panel at the Governor’s Conference on Travel and Tourism hosted by the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT).  The conference was a gathering of people across state government and stakeholders from the travel industry. Commissioner Arrigo said that he shared how DCR properties aren’t just places to visit, but places to create lasting memories. In addition, DCR had a booth in the exhibit hall that highlighted its solar eclipse programming, camping opportunities, and beautiful properties.

### DCR Senior Leadership Retreat

Last month, DCR’s Senior Leadership Team held a retreat at Halibut Point State Park in Rockport. The team engaged in strategic discussions and collaborative sessions, facilitated by a team from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, fostering creativity and camaraderie. During the lunch break, Park Interpreter John Ratti led the team on a guided hike of the park’s beautiful quarries.

### The Quabbin has Reached Capacity

On March 10, the water level of the Quabbin Reservoir, measured by elevation above Boston City Base, an elevation equivalent to Boston Harbor at low tide, reached its capacity at 530 feet elevation. When full, the reservoir holds 412 billion gallons of water, at which point, excess water flows over the spillway wall, through the spillway channel and down an 80-foot drop until it joins with the Swift River. Quabbin engineers have recorded the elevation daily since 1946, originally in logbooks, but today anyone can keep track of the daily elevation online. As of April 1, the Quabbin is at 100.9% capacity.

### Canopy 2024, Forests, Climate, and Innovations Forum

On March 21, Commissioner Arrigo attended and spoke at the inaugural Canopy 2024 Forests, Climate, and Innovations Forum at UMass Amherst, a new annual event that brought together over 250 current and prospective forest landowners, professionals, businesses, and educators. The conference was also attended by EEA Secretary Rebecca Tepper, Undersecretary for Environment Stephanie Cooper, and Assistant Secretary for Environmental Policy Kurt Gaertner, along with DFG Commissioner Tom O’Shea, and Stewardship Councilor Dicken Crane, as well as many other members of our forestry team. The conference’s afternoon workshops showcased incentives for landowners, uses of Northeastern-sourced wood, climate forestry, forest management goal setting for landowners, forest health and telling the story of forestry. A lot of hard work went into organizing this conference and Commissioner Arrigo recognized the DCR team who helped put this all together including Priscilla Geigis, Mary Cardwell, Jennifer Fish, Felicia Bakaj, Jacob Macko, Sean Mahoney, Tom Ryan, Christina McKeown, and Lindsay Nystrom.

### Division of Water Supply Protection Public Access Map

With more people venturing outdoors to our properties, the Division of Water Supply Protection has unveiled a new online public access map to enhance experiences for visitors. This comprehensive map serves as a guide for visitors, offering details on recreation opportunities like hiking trails, points of interest, fishing spots, and more across DWSP lands. Additionally, the tool includes vital visitor information, updated notices, recommended hikes, and educational materials, ensuring well-informed and enjoyable outdoor adventures for all.

### Lynn Woods Conservation Restriction Celebration

On April 4, Commissioner Arrigo joined EEA Undersecretary for Environment Stephanie Cooper to celebrate the conservation restriction on Lynn Woods. The event marked the culmination of years of dedicated effort and collaboration between DCR, Greenbelt the Essex County Land Trust, and the City of Lynn. The conservation restriction encompasses over 2,000 acres across Lynn, Saugus, and Lynnfield, ensuring the permanent protection of this vital natural landscape, preserving it as a recreational, historical, and water resource for generations to come. Commissioner Arrigo thanked DCR staff members Jim Comeau, Christine Berry, Sasha Auer, and Marguerite Reynolds for their work.

### Capital Planning and Project Delivery Process Improvement Update

Commissioner Arrigo said that after gathering insights from internal stakeholders, including from members of the Stewardship Council, DCR is now launching an online survey to gather input from staff.

This week, Auribus will be sending out an anonymous online survey to all employees soliciting their input. Staff participation in this brief survey will be open for two weeks and is crucial in shaping the future of DCR's capital initiatives.

### Park Serve Day

Commissioner Arrigo reminded the Council that on April 20, DCR is holding its 18th annual Park Serve Day at properties across the state. He said there will be 68 events at 39 DCR properties including clean-ups, trail maintenance, bat box building, bird house building, flower planting, and other restorative projects to prepare our properties for the busy spring and summer seasons, adding that Park Serve Day is one of the agency’s most important stewardship events and is rewarding for all of those who participate.

### April Vacation Week Programming

Commissioner Arrigo announced programming for April vacation week, which will run Saturday April 13 through Sunday, April 21. He said that as part of ongoing efforts to provide fun, safe, and low-cost recreational programming for kids and families, DCR is offering 42 free or low-cost engaging programs for kids, from guided hikes and bike rides to painting, birding, and animal demonstrations.

### Reverse the Curse Sign Brought to Red Sox Opening Day

In celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Red Sox winning the 2004 World Series, Commissioner Arrigo joined Governor Healey and Mayor Wu to reunite the 2004 Championship Team with the famous “Reverse the Curse” road sign. The sign was originally a DCR road sign that hung off the Longfellow Bridge on Storrow Drive spray-painted by Red Sox fans to say, “Reverse the Curse,” in reference to the “Curse of the Bambino.” Commissioner Arrigo said that as a lifelong Red Sox fan that remembers well what a treasured landmark the sign became for the city, he is thrilled DCR is reuniting the members of the 2004 World Series Championship team with this piece of nostalgia to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the end of the curse.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Smith said he was glad to hear about the senior staff retreat and asked if the council could be provided with a list of senior staff members and how many there are.

Commissioner Arrigo said that there are eleven members of senior staff that attended the retreat and that they are almost at a full complement of senior staff members. The one position they are waiting to fill is General Counsel. He said he would provide the council with a list.

Councilor Smith said he would be interested in seeing the capital planning survey that is being sent to staff members.

Commissioner Arrigo said that they can send the survey out to council members.

Councilor Dooley thanked Commissioner Arrigo for touching on the climate events happening. He said that on the North Shore in Essex County, especially along Lynn Shore Drive, waves are getting close to the sea wall and will often come over onto the roadway. He said that DCR staff does a great job cleaning up after this happens, but he asked what DCR’s long-term plan is for seawalls and maintaining them.

Commissioner Arrigo said that from an EEA perspective, it is part of the Resilient Coast Initiative which is a whole government approach to what we’re seeing on our properties and looking at how it impacts DCR’s capital budgeting process and the agency’s ability to capture and assess damage on properties including seawalls. He said they will look at what short term needs are required immediately while also looking at the long-term gameplan and what is being prioritized.

Councilor O’Shea said that he was shown a video of a “citizen journalist” that broke into the Cass Center and filming the inhabitants there. He asked who was doing security for the center while it is being used to house migrant families.

Commissioner Arrigo said that the use of the Cass Center is through the Emergency Assistance Program, and that security contractor AMI is running the program on behalf of the Commonwealth and that AMI subcontracts the security. He said that DCR Rangers are not responsible for public safety at the Center at this time.

Councilor Crane thanked Commissioner Arrigo for a great forestry event at the Canopy Conference and thanked DCR and EEA for putting it together. It thought it went very well and is glad that it will be an annual event.

Chair Buckley said that he appreciates Commissioner Arrigo’s Friday newsletter and how he goes out of his way to recognize staff. He also thanked him for his work on the dashboard for capital projects which will be another important element of transparency for DCR.

## Regular Business I

### Massachusetts Horticultural Society Presentation – James Hearsum, President and Executive Director, Massachusetts Horticultural Society

Mr. Hearsum presented to the council about the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, its history, and the organization’s ongoing relationship with DCR.

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

Chair Buckley thanked Mr. Hearsum for his presentation and said that Mass Horticultural is sometimes not recognized in terms of DCR and the role it plays with the Elm Bank property.

Councilor Wilson thanked Mr. Hearsum and said that he shared a lot of great info about the organization. She said that lots of things are popping into her brain including partnership opportunities, Memorandums of Understanding, legislators, and what things can be learned and be used with friends groups. She said there is an opportunity to do something efficient and productive and usable as a model of the great work that can happen with public private partnerships. She said that she and the rest of the council will think of more questions as they absorb what they heard.

Mr. Hearsum said that he will make his contact details available.

Councilor Collins asked if there was any thought to collaborating with DCR on rare plant conservation and surveying.

Mr. Hearsum said that it was one of the explicit goals of the Olmstead garden which is undergoing a complicated long term restoration. He said that the whole of the Charles River on the property is filled with invasive and non- native plants, and that they are planning a program to train people who can identify these species.

Chair Buckley asked if there was any collaboration with Mass Audubon which has a location down the street in Natick.

Mr. Hearsum said that there is no formal relationship, but they do collaborate with the Charles River Watershed Association.

Councilor Smiley thanked Mr. Hearsum and said she would like to see the Council hold a meeting at Elm Bank in the future.

Chair Buckley said that he drives by the property often and that it is a testament to the parks and how people from all walks of life use them. He encouraged anyone who hasn’t been to Elm Bank before to visit.

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Smith made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 14, 2024 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Smiley seconded the motion.

### Roll Call on Approval of Minutes

Councilor Canedy: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Councilor O’Shea: Yes

Chair Buckley: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Abstain

Councilor Harper: Abstain

The March 14, 2024 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 Buckley invited members of the public for comment. There was no public comment given.

## Regular Business II

### Proposed Changes to Stewardship Council Legislation

Councilor Wilson presented to the council changes that have been discussed by the policy committee to the establishing legislation of the Stewardship Council.

She said that these changes were originally proposed in 2019 and were approved by the council in 2020, but when the Special Commission and Strategic Readiness Initiative started, the changes took a back seat while the review of the agency was happening. She said that they are working to address staggering councilor’s terms and to change the length of terms from 7 years to 5 years. The council was presented with the revised version of the legislation, and if it is approved, Chair Buckley and Mr. Perry will work together to get the changes to be approved legislatively to stave off the retirement of so many councilors at the same time. After the initial changes are completed the can look at other changes that may need to be made.

Chair Buckley said that he thinks it would be useful to take a vote on this since there are many new members since it was initially proposed.

Councilor Wilson moves to approve the legislative changes as written.

Councilor Harper seconds.

Councilor Smith said that as they move forward, it would be helpful to include DCR’s legislative staff and to target a couple of legislators at the beginning to let them know the goal and to help move things forward. He added that Councilors Dooley, O’Shea, and he are the only councilors whose terms do not expire next year so it is important to get the legislation through. He said they should get an idea of who is eager to leave so they can get a sense of who will be on the council and that if they can anticipate holdovers, they can begin to work with the Office of Boards and Commissions to get a full compliment of councilors.

Chair Buckley said that they are looking at ways to get this legislation change done adding that it is very important for the future of the council.

Councilor Wilson noted that the legislation says that they will work with the Governor’s Office to assist with the staggering of terms.

### Roll Call on Approval of Legislative Changes

Councilor Harper: Yes

Councilor Canedy: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Councilor O’Shea: Yes

Chair Buckley: Yes

The legislative changes were approved.

### Committee Updates

#### Policy Committee

The committee has been discussing the legislative changes and have received an update on Resource Management Plans (RMPs). RMPs continue to progress and the council will receive some to approve this year. At their meeting they asked questions about DCR’s use of rodenticides and that they will report back what they learn to see if there is an opportunity to policy.

#### Stakeholders

The committee reviewed proposals of groups looking to present to the council. Because they are meeting at the Blackstone Heritage Visitor’s Center in Worcester in May and it is National Bike Month, they would like to invite everyone to bring their bicycle and participate in a ride on the bike trail there. They received an update on the hiring freeze and are looking to set a date on another listening session sometime in the late summer.

#### Conservation

The Conservation Committee spoke with Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis to get ideas on how the committee can be helpful to DCR’s conservation work. Councilors Collins and Crane will follow up with her to have another meeting soon.

#### Finance

Chair Buckley said that they are planning a listening session for the budget in May.

Councilor Smiley said that she and Commissioner Doherty participated in the Capital Planning Exercise that Chair Buckley invited councilors to last meeting.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor Smiley asked where the agency left off with the UMass Special Commission report.

Chair Buckley said that he will talk to the Commissioner about it.

Councilor Smiley said that a lot of time and effort went into it and it would be a shame if it was lost.

Councilor O’Shea wished Councilor Dooley a happy birthday.

Councilor Wilson said that adding to Councilor Smiley’s point, when the strategic oversight plan was created, it said that the Strategic Readiness Initiative was not a substitute for a strategic plan.

Councilor Ortiz said that she hopes everyone has the opportunity to participate in Park Serve Day.

Councilor Smith said that the Strategic Readiness Initiative and Special Commission should be agenda items and that they can have a discussion about them and where they are currently. He said if it is an agenda item it might get more attention.

Chair Buckley asked for councilors to get him topics that they would like to hear presentations about at upcoming meetings.

## Adjournment

Councilor Collins moved to adjourn the meeting.

Councilor Smiley seconded.

Councilor Buckley thanked everyone for joining 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>