# April 29, 2025 Policy Meeting Minutes

Policy Committee Members Present: Jennifer Wilson, Jeff Collins, Phil Doherty

Other Councilors Present: Dicken Crane

## **DCR Staff Attendees:** Matthew Perry, Paul Cavanagh

## Public Attendees: Chris Redfern

## Call to Order and Welcome – Policy Committee Chair Jennifer Wilson

Chair Wilson welcomed the attendees and went over the meeting agenda. She noted that the agenda said that this is a joint meeting with the Conservation Committee, but that is incorrect and is just a Policy Committee meeting.

## Approval of Minutes

Councilor Collins made a motion to approve the February 4, 2025 Policy Committee meeting minutes.

Councilor Doherty seconded the motion.

### ***Roll Call on the Approval of Minutes***

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Chair Wilson: Yes

The February 4, 2025, Policy Committee minutes were approved.

## Rodenticides

Chair Wilson asked Mr. Perry if he had any updates to share on the topic of rodenticide use on DCR property.

Mr. Perry said that he did not have the opportunity to speak with Rob King, Deputy Commissioner of Operations, prior to the meeting, but that he knows that Mr. King did have his meeting with the city of Boston to discuss their approach to rodent control. He said that he can follow up with Mr. King further and share either a written or in-person update or can request that he attend the next committee meeting.

Chair Wilson asked Chris Redfern, Executive Director of the Friends of the Fells if he could share their experience with rodenticides.

Mr. Redfern said that an old hospital site at the Fells is set to be demolished, which may cause issues with rodents. He said that they are worried about the use of rodenticides so they are working with the Stoneham Conservation Commission to have a public educational event about rodenticides that will happen later this summer.

Chair Wilson added that at the Winchester Town Meeting, there was a citizens petition to ban SGAR use in town, and that even though it was indefinitely postponed, awareness among the public is being raised and policy makers are being pushed to take action. She said that the goal with DCR leadership is not to impose a policy, but to keep strongly encouraging the creation of one so that the agency can be a model and leader in the Commonwealth.

Councilor Collins said that he would appreciate an update from Mr. King on how his meeting went. He said that there seems to have been a preliminary assessment of SGAR use by DCR, but there is still the question of whether vendors are registering SGAR use. He said that there is a new state law that vendors need to report on all use, and that with the reporting, DCR could monitor deployment, adding that even if there isn’t an outright ban, they could use the reported metrics on whether they are moving towards the goal.

## Resource Management Plans

Chair Wilson welcomed Paul Cavanagh to give an update about Resource Management Plans (RMPs).

Mr. Cavanagh reported that on May 6 the RMP team will be meeting with Commissioner Arrigo to go over 31 draft plans for the Central Highlands Complex. He said their goal is to get them approved before a new Commissioner is appointed since it will take time for a new commissioner to get up to speed on the work, and that because there is more urgency now, the senior staff team will receive all 31 drafts at once instead of broken into groups. Once they are approved by staff, they will be broken down into three groups for the public and Stewardship Council. Mr. Cavanagh added that after the meeting, he will be heading to Brook Farm for a site visit. DCR is hiring a contractor and as part of the project they have included drafting an RMP in the contract so that it can be completed as part of the larger project being undertaken. He said that having a contractor do an RMP was common before the program was fully staffed.

Councilor Collins asked if this was part of an existing landscape architecture contract.

Mr. Cavanagh said that there is a list of potential bidders and that the meeting is with some of he firms to answer questions and do a site. The contract is for a conceptual design for Brook Farm and the RMP was added to the RFP that was put out for bid.

Councilor Collins asked if it is two RFPs or if everything is included in one.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the idea is that it will all be through one. He said that an RMP done this will have some extra information that is not usually included in others, but that it will fill the role of RMP for the property. Mr. Cavanagh said that the RMP for Belle Isle Marsh will be starting internal review within the next week, adding that it is an interesting and complex property and that the ecology program and climate team will get an early look to give feedback because of all their work at the property. Mr. Cavanagh also reported that the first three plans have been drafted for the Pittsfield Complex RMPs.

Councilor Collins said that going through 31 RMPs from the Central Highlands will be a challenge for the Council, and that they should get some thoughts on how they might process them from members so everyone will be able to properly review the plans.

Mr. Cavanagh said that he and his team understand this and want to make sure it is digestible for the public as well.

Chair Wilson asked if there were different stakeholder groups for each of the plans.

Mr. Cavanagh said that some groups like the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) have interest across all the properties, and that they want to make sure that members of the public all have plenty of time to review. He said that they will bring forward a group with 30 days for comments, followed by the next set and so on. They will take time to have separate public meetings, public comment periods, and Stewardship Council meetings for each of the three groups of plans.

Chair Wilson said that they have known for a while that this was coming and that they want to be part of the goal of getting every park an RMP. She said they will do some planning to make sure that there is coverage from councilors at all of the public meetings for these plans.

Councilor Crane asked if forest management planning is covered in the Pittsfield Complex plans.

Mr. Cavanagh said that they have included the input that they received from the foresters for the complex. He said that there are some old Forest Management Plans from Southern Berkshire County, but none from the Pittsfield Complex. There is work being done to create a plan for the entire state, and until that is done, they are incorporating what they can with the information available and input from foresters.

Councilor Crane said that once the Landscape Designation process is worked out and the reserve process is finished, Forest Management Plans could be introduced.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the plan is that once Landscape Designations are done, there will be one single master document that acts as a Forest Resource Management Plan broken down by forest type instead of geographic location. Once that is completed, it will be referenced in future RMPs.

Chair Wilson said that she and Councilor Collins spoke with Peter Church and Jessica Rowcroft on the status of Landscape Designations and that it was good to hear from them about the need to create reserves but also balance recreation access.

Councilor Crane said that the visioning process for Landscape Designations was like what was done for Forests as Climate Solutions and created the different designations used now. He said that he thinks the framework is going to stay the same and that they are going to get fleshed out with more detail and that modeling info will come through the scientific advisory committee.

Chair Wilson said that they are waiting to get consistency between Parks, Watershed, and Fish and Wildlife before the Policy Committee will get a presentation.

## Strategic Oversight Plan

Chair Wilson said that they spent a lot of time crafting the Strategic Oversight Plan and that she’d like to come back to it to see the progress that has been made and if things have fallen by the wayside or can be moved forward. She said that since a lot of the work feels related to the Commissioner, some things are on pause. She said that there has been some progress with RMPs, and that the other big topic was legislative changes.

Mr. Perry gave an update on the current status of reappointments for the council. He and Councilor Crane will work together to request that Senator Paul Mark file an amendment to the Senate Budget to change the councilor terms from seven years to five years using the language approved by the council.

Chair Wilson said that they had bigger plans originally, but decided that this was a good place to start with changes.

Councilor Collins said that since there are going to be five open seats on the council, there is an opportunity to work with organizations that don’t feel like they have a path to the Stewardship Council because of the way the two Environmental Seats are chosen.

He added that in regards to the Oversight Plan, the climate change section sticks out to him and that the Conservation Committee will need to work on that. He said he’d like that committee to begin engaging with key staff through committee meetings and then bring their findings to the full council.

Chair Wilson said that she will share this discussion with the full council at the next meeting and encourage all committees to return to the plan to see what opportunities there are and how it fits into committee work.

Councilor Collins said that he’d like to learn more about policies related to trails management, especially unapproved trails. He said the comment about the need to hold a public meeting when there is a proposal to close more than 25% of trails sticks out to him, and he’d like to know if this number includes unapproved trails.

Councilor Crane said that in conversations with mountain bikers, he learned that there are trails purposely made so they can’t easily be found and that since they are being hidden, the feeling by the builders is that they have a minimal impact which is not always the case. He said that this is an issue across DCR properties.

Councilor Collins asked how groups that feel like their needs are not being met and are therefore building unapproved trails are being engaged with to learn more. He recognizes that unapproved trail building is a big issue and that he is stuck on the policy that they can’t be closed.

Mr. Cavanagh said that with unauthorized trails, every five years the agency maps out the trials that they have and take them to the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species program, and they tell DCR what work can be done without review. He said that when there are trails outside of the approved rails, it then goes against the agreement that they have with the program.

Chair Wilson asked if the committee could receive a presentation from the trails team about the 25% rule and unapproved trails.

Mr. Perry will work with the trails team to schedule.

Chair Wilson said that they haven’t talked for a while about enforcement and that issues like unleashed dogs and State House rangers should be revisited and an update given.

Councilor Doherty said that he is especially interested in this because of off-leash dogs at the Blue Hills.

Councilor Collins said that trails and usability of parks comes down to presence, education, and enforcement, and allocation of resources is a critical question, saying that they should continue to discuss this issue.

Councilor Doherty pointed out that there are spots where there are no signs about leashing dogs which adds to the issue.

Chair Wilson noted that the agency has gotten better about consistency and translation of signage but that there is still a lot of work to be done. She asked how the group would like to move forward on this issue and said it would be good to have an opinion ready for a new commissioner.

Councilor Crane said that there needs to be expanded enforcement on properties, but that the rangers at the State House shouldn’t be too tightly connected. He said that they are probably not going to take the rangers from the State House and move them to parks to solve these issues and that the problems are probably more solvable by other means. He said that tying the two issues together might not be as good as looking at them as individual things.

Mr. Perry will work with the rangers to get a presentation to the policy committee about the legal status of enforcement by DCR rangers.

Councilor Collins said that they have touched on a broad list of resource management issues, impacting the use of the parks, safety issues, and unapproved trails. He said that these things hinge on enforcement or education and how is DCR expanding and applying expertise to these issues that arise at multiple sites, and what progress is being made to address these issues.

Mr. Perry will work to line up presentations to address the issues raised.

## Adjournment

Chair Wilson thanked everyone for their attendance 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*](https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council)