

**Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Special Commission Meeting Minutes**  
**May 27, 2021, 1:00 p.m. via Zoom**

**Commission Members Present:** Faye Boardman, Matt Douglass (Senator Rebecca Rausch's designee), Commissioner Jim Montgomery, Representative Norman Orrall, Representative Carolyn Dykema, Karen Mauney-Brodek, Fran Blanchard, Guadalupe Garcia, Heather Clish, Jonathan Gulliver, Kate Bowditch, Laura Jasinski, Mary Clutchey, Nate Walton, Buzz Constable.

**Commission Members Not Present:** Senator Rebecca Rausch.

**Materials:**

- PowerPoint presentation by the UMass Donahue Institute and EEA on research activities, proposed timeline, budget, next steps, and report outline;
- PowerPoint presentation by DCR regarding the Resource Management Plans (RMPs);
- PowerPoint presentation by the UMass Donahue Institute on the RMP process, implications, and research activities.

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**Welcome**

Chair Faye Boardman called the meeting to order and welcomed the Special Commission and the members of the public. Faye reminded participants written comments could be submitted to the Donahue Institute using [ma-dcr-commission@donahue.umass.edu](mailto:ma-dcr-commission@donahue.umass.edu) through 5 p.m. on June 8, 2021.

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**Approval of April 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting Minutes**

Chair Faye Boardman asked the Commission members if there were any changes to be made to the meeting minutes from April 27, 2021. Hearing none, Faye asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Kate Bowditch motioned to approve the minutes. A roll call vote was taken, and all voting members approved with Representative Dykema abstaining as she was not present at the April meeting. The minutes were approved.

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**Presentation by the UMass Donahue Institute (UMDI) and the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)**

UMDI and EEA gave a presentation on research activities, proposed timeline, budget, next steps, and the report outline.

At the end of the presentation, Nancy Jackson, meeting facilitator, opened the floor for questions from Commission members.

Representative Dykema noted that she did not see referenced leases and contracts, nor voting programs that offer amenities that are public-private partnerships. She asked if there were opportunities in leveraging those relationships, and if the topic would be included in the report.

Branner Stewart responded and shared that limited research has been conducted on the improvement of leases and contracts though the permitting process is being streamlined. Leveraging the resources of others, like the Friends groups, is being looked at.

Karen Mauney-Brodek shared an interest in understanding how much is spent per capita in similar states. She was pleased the timeline has been extended but was unsure that it is sufficient. She expressed concerns about how fast the data gathering, analysis, and report would be. She also wants to understand what the primary challenge is in DCR accomplishing their goals. She noted that more time would be helpful, as well as having specific items to consider and prioritize in helping the Commission's synthesis and analysis.

Heather Clish shared that overall, the extension to the timeline is appreciated. She noted that the deadline for public comment is June 8 and requested that the Special Commission website provide information about what should be commented on.

Kate Bowditch asked about the research being done on roadways. She noted that the shared documents folder provided to the Special Commission appeared only to have older material collected from 2009 related to roadways. She asked specifically what additional research is being done. She echoed that the timeline extension is great, but that she had concerns about the July meeting not having enough time for meaningful conversation amongst Commission members. Kate shared that she would like to have time to digest the information presented and have a robust discussion as a Commission.

Branner Stewart responded to explain the research being conducted on the roadways. He shared that the numerous concerns and complaints over the years have come in about the management of parkways. The UMDI research team has been interviewing staff at DCR to get a better idea about how parkways are being managed, what progress is being made, the planning being done. The team is also comparing the way that MassDOT manages roadways and looking at cooperation between DCR and MassDOT and municipalities to be able to complete roadway improvements and ADA mandated changes on roadways to make them more accessible.

Buzz Constable shared that he is glad that the project will be extended and expressed concern about it not being extended enough to accommodate other suggestions and recommendations. He emphasized the need for more data, especially in relation to environmental justice and its role in operations and facilities. Buzz encouraged going beyond city comparisons and thinking about all populations, as well as real natural areas. He offered that the culture of the organization could be investigated in operations. He shared that the best and most interesting comments will emerge if the Commission has an opportunity to hear the public, as well as the opportunity to talk amongst themselves to make recommendations.

Laura Jasinski added to Buzz's comment, first by expressing appreciation for the extended timeline and expressing concern that the extension is not enough. She shared that seeing the next steps is helpful and that they provide a process. She echoed Karen in asking to see the research completed prior to July. Laura shared a particular interest in benchmarks and best practices with more direction and better

public comment. She supported the recommendations that Buzz made. She drew attention to the value of conservation and discussion amongst the Commission members.

Representative Orrall expressed his appreciation for the timeline and shared that while it will be hard, getting to the end of a product requires guardrails and structures. He echoed Laura regarding information being provided ahead of time. He asked the Donahue Institute to provide the draft report prior to the meeting to allow Commissioners to prepare questions to make the meeting productive.

Chair Faye Boardman thanked the members of the Special Commission for their comments and suggestions. She shared that EEA would take the Commissioners' comments into consideration and adjust to offer more opportunity for productive conversation. She emphasized that the timeline must stay at the end of August, but that everyone is committed to meeting the goal of the report.

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### **Presentation by DCR Staff; Resource Management Plans**

DCR gave a presentation titled "Resource Management Plans: Legislative Requirements, Program History, and New Approach". Presenters included Priscilla Geigis, Deputy Commissions for Conservation and Resource Stewardship and Paul Cavanagh, Regional Planner.

Following the presentation, Nancy Jackson opened the floor for comments and questions from Commission members.

Karen Mauney-Brodek asked how the RMPs are related to the Asset Management System. She also asked how the recommendations and plans drive the budget and asked for more information on the history.

Paul Cavanagh responded that historically there was not funding dedicated to implementing the recommendations made by the RMPs. He shared that the team is moving towards a tighter integration between capital planning and the Resource Management Plans. Paul also mentioned that although the team thinks that there can be a tighter connection between funding and implementation and recommendations, funding is not guaranteed.

Commissioner Jim Montgomery added that the perceived disconnect between planning and involving other groups has been discussed for a few years and that the team has made great strides to making the RMPs more usable.

Paul Cavanagh also responded to Karen's first question, sharing that as the RMPs are done, they will be inserted into the AMMP database as downloads and that recommendations will be integrated into the facility needs lists in CAMIS.

Laura Jasinski asked how input and planning with partners is integrated into RMPs. She shared that the Charles River Conservancy had the opportunity to work on a vegetative management plan that had great collaboration and coordination. She prompted the question of the history of the RMPs and the future direction.

Paul Cavanagh responded that the process had just begun in January and that the team has been getting up to speed. The goal, he shared, is to have forty plans done in a year without reiterating the information in other plans. He said that in terms of working with stakeholders, the team is trying to get a kickoff meeting scheduled but has not yet been able to engage the public or partners. Paul shared that the team would incorporate things as they are available.

Commissioner Jim Montgomery noted that even in shortened form, the RMPs are very comprehensive.

Heather Clish congratulated the team for coming up with a plan to get the RMPs done. She asked about the concept of narrowing the plans to 16 pages. She asked how the public could find out that areas are being worked on. She asked if DCR is doing outreach, or if the public needs to keep an eye on the Environmental Monitor.

Paul Cavanagh responded, sharing that if all RMPs are stripped down to their language requirements, they could be as small as six pages. However, the team wanted to make sure that the plan had a reasonable tradeoff. Paul then shared that the team uses the Environmental Monitor, advertises in parks, kiosks, bulletin boards, works with Friends Groups to get the word out, as well as park managers, mailing lists, and interpreter programming. The team tries to reach the public through different channels.

Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis added that public input is critical and that the team is working with the external affairs staff to nail down dates for initial meetings with plans and input.

Fran Blanchard noted that the plans seem to be focused on priorities. She asked how the team identifies what is significant related to park identity and significant features. She asked specifically about natural and historic landmarks.

Paul Cavanagh responded by sharing that the team works closely with visitor services specialists and park staff. The collaboration takes into account how the public sees parks, what the parks are known for, what would take away the parks' character, what features are used, and what is attracting visitors. Paul identified natural and historic landmarks as cultural resources, which are flagged as the properties are evaluated.

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### **Presentation by UMDI; Resource Management Plans**

UMDI gave a presentation titled "Process Improvement Analysis for DCR's Resource Management Plans (RMPs)". This was presented by Branner Stewart, Research Manager.

Following the presentation, Nancy Jackson opened the floor for questions and comments from Commission members.

Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis shared that she appreciated the conversations that the Resource Management team has had with the Donahue Institute and appreciated seeing their findings. She

emphasized that the RMPs are serving as a foundation document and there may be other plans that reference it. The RMP team will look at priority in terms of projections that EEA is using in terms of climate change. The RMPs will provide a precursor, and the upcoming vulnerability assessments will go into more detail. Both will help to inform proposals and decisions.

Representative Orrall shared the importance of having a plan for every property rather than having extensive plans on each. Rep. Orrall noted that tying the RMPs to a capital plan is important, but that this could be a challenge at DCR with the backlog of deferred maintenance. He shared that often an RMP may recognize a new feature of a park that would be a great amenity, but the capital dollars were not there for new things when trying to focus on existing structures and amenities. He specified that this does not mean that new amenities should not be included in the plans.

Karen Mauney-Brodek asked the Donahue Institute how other states may have pursued a management plan for every park. She specifically asked about if they did so at the district level, what percent were funded capitally, how their maintenance is addressed, their cycle of plan generation, how much public engagement there is, and what the requirements are.

Branner Stewart responded by sharing that the UMDI research team has looked at five to six other states and were not able to find an explicit plan that is exactly similar, but that is something that the team can dive into deeper.

Karen Mauney-Brodek recommended looking into the city of San Francisco.

Buzz Constable brought attention to the various uses and activities in each park. He asked to what extent the RMPs capture capital and engagement or management. He asked if the management of the RMPs include possible uses and asked who collects this information and what is role of the Friends Groups.

Paul Cavanagh responded that the team identifies all known legal uses of the parks, factoring in landscape designation in zoning. A higher level of landscape designation is factored in and impacts the activities that can take place. Through zoning, activities, development, and recreation that appropriate to the land are identified. Paul noted that new types of recreation are always being invented and that zoning can help to get ahead of that.

Heather Clish thanked DCR and the Donahue Institute for their presentations and thoughtful recommendations. She mentioned the sample short RMP provided and asked about how the team captures the desired future conditions. She emphasized wanting to know how to adjust desired future conditions.

Paul Cavanagh responded and shared that much of the approach is with zoning and recommendations in terms of the desired conditions as far as the maintenance of park identity. He acknowledged the past narrative text about recommendations and asked Heather if she was asking about the future ecological conditions or recreation use.

Heather Clish clarified, asking if there will be an overarching paragraph about the desired future conditions, or a synthesized statement of where DCR wants to move with properties and consistencies.

Paul Cavanagh responded that the RMPs will get at that in park identity and significance.

Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis followed up, saying that the recommendations may get that. She reiterated that the climate vulnerability assessments and park identity will weigh against each other. For example, if future conditions predict flooding, a trail will be moved.

Representative Dykema shared that she had listened in on the feedback session from the public and had a question about maintenance, cleanliness, and everyday operational things. She stated that the public session implied a lack of staff in concerns about dog waste and emptying trash. In connecting the dots, she asked, do the RMPs capture that day-to-day maintenance? She followed up by asking if this would highlight the need for more staff onsite for maintenance.

Paul Cavanagh responded, saying that the team does not anticipate making staffing recommendations, but that those may be in other documents in DCR.

Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis acknowledged that this is a historic struggle, as staffing is always changing and that the RMPs only capture a snapshot in time. At this time, the RMPs are trying to focus on properties and staffing will be done in a different area.

Representative Dykema shared that she hoped that a key question to come out of the report was an appropriate level of staffing. She expressed that the conversation should be driven by real on the ground concerns seen by residents every day and referred to the indication that basic maintenance and cleanliness is not at the expectation of the public.

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### **Adjournment**

Chair Faye Boardman thanked the Commission members and the presenters for their input and motioned to adjourn the meeting.