



December Meeting Minutes

Council Members Present: Jack Buckley, Ann Canedy, Esq., Dicken Crane, Melissa Harper, Vivian Ortiz, Alvin L. Reynolds, Esq., Dennis Smith, Nate Walton

Council Members Not Present: David Murphy, Jennifer N.S. Wilson, Esq.

Member Materials: Feasibility Study for Neponset River Greenway at Edgewater Drive

DCR Attendees: Lisa Barstow, Nick Connors, Norma Forgione, Robert Lowell, Max Tassinari, Ally Trahan, George Trubiano, Thomas Valton

DCR Consultant: Caroline Hampton

Public Attendees as Registered:

Erica Holm
Glen Ayers
Ipad
Julianrapoport
Kelly Siry

lindseymccauley
Pat Keck
Travis Counsell
Franziska Amacher
Bill Boles

Chris Redfern
Branner Stewart
Chuck Anastas
Ellen Aron
Jim Fay

Call to Meeting – Chairman Nate Walton

Chairman Walton opened the meeting, offered an overview on the Zoom format and introduced Deputy Commissioner Nick Connors for the DCR Report.

DCR Report – Nick Connors, Deputy Commissioner of Policy, Public Affairs and Administration

Deputy Commissioner Connors opened saying he would provide a brief overview of operations and respond to items raised last month.

Mr. Connors reported that snow and ice mitigation is underway, salt and sand are in, depots are ready and equipment is in good working order. He noted additional cleaning protocols and contingencies are in place for COVID-19, as staff trade trucks after long shifts of snow removal.

Winter recreation is underway. Rink openings were slightly delayed to take extra precautions for COVID-19, to establish contact tracing in accordance with the Governor's order and to create a system to reserve ice time to prevent visitors from showing up to find a rink at capacity.

Following up on last month's questions about environmental justice (EJ) raised by Vice Chair Harper, Mr. Connors reached out to several EEA and DCR staff for details. EEA's director for Environmental Justice can address the broad policy goals of the Secretariat with the council, but more specifically there are many major investments made in and for, not only former MDC urban parks, but also gateway and other cities across the state—many of which are EJ communities. As the main focus presently is on deferred maintenance projects, many are located in these communities. Mr. Connors said in the weeks ahead Commissioner Montgomery and other staff can discuss the major investments made at parks in EJ areas, such as in Worcester's Lake Park and Draw Seven State Park and Foss Park both in Somerville.

On the Edgewater Drive Study, Mr. Connors summarized the four options the study presented:

1. Leave area as is, make no alterations and add no pathways;
2. Develop a natural terrain trail against the wall at the top of the abutment;
3. Develop a stabilized aggregate trail with a number of entry points at the bottom of six or seven streets that intersect with Edgewater Drive (option discussed by Vivien Morris, Chairperson of the Edgewater Neighborhood Association at the November 12, 2020 meeting); or
4. Number three, plus full removal of the wall.

Mr. Connors noted option one is unlikely and sees further discussions involving the various parties from last month's meeting along with Councilor Ortiz and Herb Nolan, from the Solomon Foundation, who has a history of involvement on this project, having researched possible environmental mitigation. It is Mr. Connors intention to provide month-to-month updates on the status of these discussions.

Q&A

Councilor Canedy asked if the cobblestone wall is historic. Mr. Connors said that DCR and/or the MDC has made alterations. There is a historic nature but that does not mean we could not make alterations.

Councilor Canedy suggested using the removed stones to create a new entrance gateway as a remedy to each opening and that would satisfy the historic interest. This was used in the Old Kings Highway. Mr. Connors said he would mention that to the project planners and engineers.

Councilor Buckley said he asked for this update [in the minutes] last month, and he would like this issue tracked to see how responsive DCR can be to this type of outreach from a community group and a partner. Councilor Buckley also noted his appreciation to Mr. Connors for the follow up response.

Mr. Connors said he plans to give a status update monthly on this issue.

Councilor Ortiz asked if there was an update to the Friends MOU. Mr. Connors said he worked with legal and operations, resulting in a four-page document laying out indemnification—what is covered and what is not—and our shared goals for the area. The document highlights volunteering, programming, and fundraising, which are the three activities we do most; focusing on the stewardship of the property; laying out the expectations on both sides; assumption of risk and indemnification—in short what risk was being assumed by the Friend’s group and what insurance needs there would be.

Mr. Connors said our plan would be to bring most groups on in either a January or July to avoid a back-log of agreements expiring at different times, something manageable by a one-person partnership department at DCR.

Vice Chair Harper asked if Deputy Commissioner Connors would consider hosting a webinar to assist with the onboarding of friend’s groups, and he agreed he and Ms. Norwood would be able to do that.

Councilor Reynolds said based on the discussion, it sounds as though signing the Friends MOU would be optional but asked Mr. Connors for clarification. Mr. Connors said yes it is optional, but argues it is much better if both parties came to the table on such an agreement and maintained regular dialogue in the areas of programming, fundraising and volunteer activity and this provides that framework.

Councilor Reynolds congratulated Mr. Connors and DCR on the significant effort taken to put this together, and Mr. Connors thanked the council for keeping the issue before the agency.

Councilor Buckley asked Mr. Connors for the Stewardship Council to have a role in the webinar, which was met with affirmation by Mr. Connors. Councilor Harper, speaking on behalf of the Stakeholder’s Committee said they would be happy to lend support to that effort.

Chairman Walton echoed other councilors in thanking Deputy Commissioner Connors for his thorough follow up efforts both on the Edgewater issue and MOU issue—the latter which has been ongoing.

As a final remark to his update, Deputy Commissioner Connors pointed out that DCR is at the point of mid-year review on the budget. He noted they are taking a broader view than the customary look at planning and engineering, capital budgets and operations by finding ways to make alterations more broadly in the way we operate than we normally would to support staff moving forward.

Regular Business I

Approval of Minutes

Councilor Walton asked for questions, comments or edits on the minutes whereby Councilor Buckley noted that he asked for a monthly update on Edgewater Drive, which was not expressly noted in the minutes. Councilor Smith motioned to accept the minutes with the addition of the comment Councilor Buckley just requested. Vice Chair Harper seconded the motion and Chairman Walton offered a roll call on the adoption of the minutes, as indicated for virtual meetings:

- Councilor Buckley – Yes
- Councilor Walton – Yes
- Councilor Canedy – Abstained
- Councilor Smith – Yes
- Vice Chair Harper - Yes
- Councilor Crane – Yes
- Councilor Reynolds – Yes
- Councilor Ortiz – not present

The November 12, 2020 minutes were adopted.

Public Comment

Chairman Walton noted that the [Public Comment Guidelines](#) are available on the DCR Stewardship Council website and public comment was offered by the following:

- Glen Ayers
- Bill Boles
- Jim Fay

Regular Business II

[Presentation on DCR's Stormwater Program](#) – Robert Lowell, Deputy Chief Engineer

[Presentation by DCR Finance Team](#) – Max Tassinari, Chief Financial Officer with introduction by George Trubiano, Director of Administration and Finance

Q&A

Chairman Walton asked about federal grants. Ms. Forgione, Federal Funds Officer for DCR, responded noting DCR receives support from a total of eight federal grant sources. Deputy Commissioner Connors added that some grants are direct and DCR is a project partner in others.

Councilor Buckley said it would be his goal to: 1) get more information than we saw today, 2) determine roles the council can play and 3) have Mr. Tassinari join the finance committee [breakout] meetings.

Deputy Commissioner Connors suggested that the breakout sessions [finance committee meetings] could be used for a particular topic, and Mr. Trubiano stated it would be helpful to have questions ahead of time to prepare.

Councilor Canedy said she is not a member of the finance committee but would like to be part of this meeting; suggesting a separate council meeting be dedicated to this. Chairman Walton suggested a January meeting.

Councilor Smith complimented Mr. Trubiano and his team for a [comprehensive and easy to understand report](#).

Councilor Reynolds asked if there is “third-party oversight” beyond the council in reviewing the finances and retained revenue of DCR. Deputy Commissioner Connors explained that all DCR expenditures are coordinated and discussed with the Executive Branch, Administration and Finance and others. Mr. Tassinari further explained that every expenditure is tracked and publicly scrutinized by the Operational Services Division, the State Comptroller, the Attorney General’s Office, as well as Administration and Finance.

Councilor Buckley added that there are, “a lot of different eyes on this process, and we clearly have a role.”

Regular Business III

Committee Meeting Breakouts and Recap

Before going into committee reports, Deputy Commissioner Connors wanted to take the opportunity to thank Councilor Reynolds for his service on this council, noting his resignation after the January 14, 2021 meeting. Mr. Connors added he is very sorry to see him go, and he invites him to visit the council as a citizen in the future. Councilor Reynolds said he enjoyed his time on the council.

Stakeholders Committee

Councilor Ortiz reported for the group on scheduling a “check-in” with Friends groups as a whole in the First Quarter. Then Mr. Connors and Ms. Norwood would look to a fall date to bring back the Annual Friends Gathering. Chris Redfern, Friends of the [Middlesex] Fells asked for an update on scheduling Friends groups to present to the council. Vice Chair Harper is working on a scheduling plan, starting with larger groups but involving others who may come forward. Lastly, they are looking forward to having the MOU finalized so these relationships with Friends groups can become, “official on paper.”

Finance Committee

Councilor Buckley reported for the group on holding a more detailed discussion of the three major topics: 1) Operating Budget, 2) Capital Budget and 3) Retained Revenue. Councilor Crane had thoughts on bringing together a presentation on forest management and forest finances in the future. At present keeping the focus on the three areas outlined above. With the absence of Finance Committee Chair Dave Murphy, the Committee members will get back in touch with Mr. Tassinari next week on the appropriate focus for the [first] presentation to provide time to prepare.

Policy and Operations Committee

Committee Chairman Reynolds reported for the committee on next steps to fill the chair role, nominating Jennifer Wilson to serve. It will be on the agenda for January. There should be an update on the enabling legislation package in February and Councilor Canedy will contact Paul Cavanagh to put a schedule in place for consistency in reporting RMP updates.

Chairman Walton solicited comments on holding a meeting exclusively on finance issues. Councilor Reynolds replied that it is an obligation and Councilor Ortiz agreed. With that, Chairman Walton acknowledged the discussion would require a substantial amount of time for questions and the need to provide questions for DCR staff in advance.

Adjournment

Seeing no other questions, Chairman Walton adjourned the meeting at 11:31 a.m.

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

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