



## May Meeting Minutes

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

Council Members Not Present: All present

Member Materials: Presentation by Peter Church; Stewardship Council Meeting Minutes 4-16-20; Public Comment Guidelines.

DCR Attendees: Lisa Barstow, Peter Church, Deputy Commissioner Nick Connors

Public Attendees as Registered:

508-251-25XX	Boles, Bill	Walker, Celeste
413-256-30XX	Freeman, Sarah	Walton, Martha
860-748-774X	Kent, Stephanie	
Ayers, Glen	Toma, Lee	

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### Call to Meeting – Chairman Nate Walton

Chairman Walton called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. welcomed guests and set housekeeping rules for videoconference before introducing DCR Deputy Commissioner Nick Connors.

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

Dep. Commissioner Connors reported that DCR continues to experience high visitation levels on most days akin to Memorial Day or Fourth of July. His hope is that these visitors remain engaged in our parks.

Mr. Connors reported that Operations Staff continues to work “above and beyond” each week, while now bringing seasonal employees onboard.

Mr. Connors noted that DCR leadership continues weekly to work with Secretary Theocharides office, with the COVID-19 Command Center and the Governor's Office to ensure safety and coordination in our parks. We have learned through this experience our parks are porous and visitors can enter in ways beyond our control or intention. Going forward, DCR is planning reintroduction of pools, splash pads, bathrooms and visitor centers with new safety measures to balance visitor and staff safety—including hiring lifeguards. In this planning, we are working through as many future contingencies as possible and preparing to be as nimble as possible.

Regarding RMP's Mr. Connors reported that Dep. Commissioner Geigis and her team have addressed this issue, and she or a designee will address the council in the near term.

#### *Questions for Deputy Commissioner Connors*

Councilor Reynolds asked if there has been dialogue with the Governor on various reopenings at DCR park?

Mr. Connors answered that there is regular communication with the Secretary's Office, the COVID-19 Command Center and the Governor's Office. The DCR continues to send up guidance for review and discussion on matters such as when and how to safely reopen and maintain visitor bathrooms, as well as manage visitor volume when our entry points are porous by nature. The Command Center is the hub for all, but they rely on the DCR to set the priorities in our parks.

Councilor Harper added there is a broader task force on outdoor recreation and a beaches committee, with subcommittees led by DCR staff.

Councilor Canedy suggested that the social distancing and capacity guidelines for beaches are onerous, would be difficult for lifeguards to manage and will make for a difficult summer for Cape Cod. She is concerned that these rules may be an overreach by the Governor and may be better handled by the exercise of personal responsibility while balancing the risks.

Councilor Ortiz said that so many new visitors are entering the Neponset River Greenway she is suffering as a regular user but is glad to see it being enjoyed. She said there are some vibrant, colorful COVID-19 rules signs up along the Greenway but not consistently. Putting signs up as people enter from Ryan Field to the Bridge would be helpful. She is disappointed by the irresponsibility of users leaving their dog waste bags and litter in the park but also noted the concept of, "carry in carry out" is not understood by everyone. Signs educating people to take home their own trash in more simple language might help.

As a Middlesex Fells neighbor, Councilor Wilson expressed concern that social media may be revealing a false bias that locals are more responsible park visitors than those from elsewhere. She is saddened by this behavior, believes the vast majority of locals welcome

out of town visitors to the Fells and hopes that DCR's desire to limit capacity is not to keep out certain visitors but to promote safe capacity while welcoming new visitors as a benefit.

Mr. Connors said the Fells and Blue Hills are two reservations particularly overwhelmed by high visitation during the pandemic. He ensured Councilor Wilson that efforts to limit parking were not punitive, but to educate visitors through informational ticketing and to promote traffic and pedestrian safety, noting this as especially concerning prior to having seasonal staff on board to help manage traffic flow on the busy thoroughfares in which these reservations reside. Mr. Connors added that the overwhelming visitation due to the pandemic has strengthened the partnership between state and municipal government as DCR, Secretary Theoharides and municipal leaders are all working together, focused on building the best park operation.

Councilor Canedy suggested if you limit parking lots you create friction, and she hopes that can be relaxed.

Councilor Buckley asked if the lessons learned here will impact DCR's capital budget, noting DCR has shown its importance as agencies compete for budget dollars.

Mr. Connors said that broadly there will be an opportunity for lessons learned but he does not want to jump ahead as there will be a competition for dollars. He noted that DCR has demonstrated to the Command Center, the Governor's Office and others how quickly DCR can mobilize around customer service. Whether online or on the phone, we are finding the resources to interact.

Councilor Buckley said we should not have to answer the question why we need state parks.

Councilor Murphy reiterated Councilor Canedy's statement on parking, saying he is seeing that on Wollaston Beach and Shea Rink in the Blue Hills. He sees this in some respect as liability shifting and strongly encourages DCR to revisit parking issues. Mr. Murphy also raised an Article 97 question about Houghs Neck Maritime Center. The [Quincy] mayor awaits paperwork from the DCR to build a pier, and he asked for an update.

Mr. Connors replied to Councilor Murphy that as stated last month, in no case did DCR make policy on parking without consulting with the municipality. In the case of beaches, this was a Governor's order, but we did work with every city/town. He also noted that it is illegal to park on Chickatawbut Road. To help DCR visitors find nearby alternative parks if the one they are visiting is full, our AMMP team developed a new webpage on [www.Mass.Gov/dcr](http://www.Mass.Gov/dcr), also available on smart devices, to direct them based on their current location.

Councilor Reynolds thanked Dep. Commissioner Connors, noted the RMP is a high priority item for the Council and asked if with the AMMP effort to redirect visitors there was any plan to monetize visitor data and/or protect their cyber security.

Mr. Connors said only thing we would see from a user is where they dropped a pin on a map. He noted that DCR heard from Google and Apple and there was a level of discomfort. He added DCR is using our own GIS mapping for this and noted, “we want this information to go into the ether.”

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**Special Business – Presentation from Peter Church, Director of Forest Fire Control and Forestry – [Presentation available](#) on DCR Stewardship Council website**

*Questions for Mr. Church*

Chairman Walton asked Mr. Church to comment on the status of Forest Resource Management Plans. Mr. Church said we have completed four FRMPs, have the other four in draft form and have recently been discussing with our RMP colleagues how both plans complement each other.

Councilor Crane asked what percent of DCR land is active forest land. Mr. Church replied approximately 40 percent is forest land and 60 percent is designated within reserves and parklands. Councilor Crane asked what percent is actively managed at any given time and Mr. Church replied we usually have eight projects a year, which is a small percentage, under five percent. Councilor Crane asked if there was an opportunity for the public to put forth ideas to improve access around things they enjoy and comment on projects they would like to see so they are involved in a positive way. Mr. Church said DCR foresters get information from many sources and that he would bring back those suggestions to our regional foresters. He noted there will be a series of public forums when we come on ten years of the Forest Futures Visioning Process.

Councilor Murphy commended the urban tree planting program saying hundreds of trees have been planted in his community that otherwise would not have been.

Councilor Ortiz asked about programs to plant trees in the city. Mr. Church said urban tree planting can be achieved through Urban Challenge Grants and Greening the Gateway Cities Program in select cities.

Councilor Buckley noted that he distributed an article at the last meeting by John Scanlon on forest management challenges and the need to maintain biological diversity. Mr. Church noted the article and said he is in regular communication with John Scanlon.

Councilor Reynolds asked Mr. Church if they have partnerships with municipalities. Mr. Church said yes, within our forestry group we work with cities and towns to provide technical guidance, resources and grant information, and he noted that almost every community in the state has a town forest and the DCR engages with them.

Councilor Buckley highlighted the issue of controlled burning and that Southeastern MA has extreme energy loads that rival California.

Chairman Walton noted it would be helpful to invite Dave Celino back to talk about Forest Fire Management and thanked Mr. Church for his presentation.

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## **Regular Business I**

### *Approval of Minutes*

Chairman Walton entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the May meeting. Councilor Smith moved to approve the minutes. Councilor Murphy offered a friendly amendment to strike a sentence with his comments.

Chairman Walton called the roll to approve the May 14, 2020 minutes as amended:

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|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| ▪ Councilor Buckley – yes   | ▪ Councilor Ortiz – yes    |
| ▪ Councilor Canedy – yes    | ▪ Councilor Reynolds – yes |
| ▪ Councilor Crane – yes     | ▪ Councilor Smith – yes    |
| ▪ Councilor Harper – absent | ▪ Councilor Wilson – yes   |
| ▪ Councilor Murphy – yes    | ▪ Chairman Walton – yes    |

The minutes were adopted.

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## **Regular Business II**

### *Public Comment Guidelines*

Councilor Ortiz noted the importance of preparing the public as to what is expected when they come to a meeting. She read through the draft document. Conversation ensued around guidelines. The draft will be revised for a vote at the next meeting with a view to balance time constraints with the desire for councilors to engage, where needed for clarity, with the commenting public.

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## **Regular Business III**

### *Public Comment was offered by the following:*

- Sarah Freeman
- Bill Boles
- Glen Ayres
- Stephanie Kent

*A brief break was taken become commending break-out sessions*

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## Regular Business IV

### *Committee Meeting Reports* *Finance Committee*

Councilor Buckley reported for the committee noting the state budgeting process has been upended due to COVID-19 and lawmakers may move to a monthly budget. There is uncertainty whether the feds will backfill state deficits. Mr. Buckley noted that another role we have is advocacy for the parks. The Finance Committee will have a discussion with Dep. Commissioner Connors in the coming weeks.

### *Policy and Operations Committee*

Councilor Wilson reported for the committee noting continued monitoring of the RMP process, but their main attention was fine-tuning the draft of their authorizing statutes. Their next step is to draft a memo to Nate describing changes to the draft—categorizing them by importance, impact and ease or difficulty—for full council debate.

### *Stakeholders Committee*

Councilor Ortiz reported for the group. She said their main goal is improving personal interactions and identifying the right channels of communicating within the DCR. She noted past help from Jennifer Norwood and said it has been very helpful to have Deputy Commissioner Connors on these meetings. She noted that DCR Constituent Services is fully active within the telework environment, with manager Bill Hickey responding to constituent inquiries working from home.

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In conclusion, council members noted their support of the video-conference format and hoped it would be incorporated post-COVID-19.

Chairman Walton exercised a motion to close the meeting at 11:37 a.m. and took a roll call vote as required for virtual meetings.

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|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| ▪ Councilor Buckley – yes   | ▪ Councilor Ortiz – yes    |
| ▪ Councilor Canedy – yes    | ▪ Councilor Reynolds – yes |
| ▪ Councilor Crane – yes     | ▪ Councilor Smith – yes    |
| ▪ Councilor Harper – absent | ▪ Councilor Wilson – yes   |
| ▪ Councilor Murphy – yes    | ▪ Chairman Walton – yes    |

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**Please check the DCR Stewardship Council webpage for updates:**

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council>