



December Meeting Minutes

Council Members Present: Elisa Campbell, Heather Clish, Michele Hanss, Melissa Harper, Whitney Hatch, Dennis Smith, David Murphy, Alvin L. Reynolds, Jr. and Nate Walton

Council Members Not Present: Vivian Ortiz, Katherine Sharry

DCR Attendees: Kevin Allen, Lisa Barstow, Stuart Conner, Priscilla Geigis, Stephen Doody and Joe Rotondo

Public Attendees (and stated affiliation): No visitor sign-ins

Welcome and Call to Meeting

Chairman Hatch introduced new Councilor Alvin L. Reynolds, Jr. Councilor Reynolds told the gathering that he lives in Lynn, near the Lynnfield line, adjacent to the Lynn Woods Reservation and works as an attorney.

In addition, the Chairman announced that Vivian Ortiz of Livable Streets was recently appointed and sworn-in to the Council but wasn't able to attend today's meeting; she plans on being present at the January session. The Chairman also ran through the day's agenda, including historic curatorship legislation, a discussion on whether to send a letter to the Legislature regarding curatorship taxation, and an exchange of ideas on future agenda items.

The Chairman invited Deputy Commissioner for Conservation and Resource Stewardship Priscilla Geigis to present the Commissioner's Report.

The Deputy Commissioner extended Season's Greetings to the Council on behalf of Commissioner Roy, who could not attend the meeting due to a prior personal commitment.

Before delivering the report, the Deputy Commissioner gave a brief overview of the history of Camp Nihan which was originally a Boy Scout camp in the 1920s. Now, its cabins can be reserved by the public. Sprague Lodge, where the council met, is also used by DCR staff for internal meetings. A recently added wood-pellet fired furnace heats the building.

Commissioner's Report

Cambridge Watertown Greenway

- On December 5, the DCR joined MassDOT, and other state, and local stakeholders in Cambridge to break ground on the long awaited link connecting four of the most heavily used greenways in the region.
- With a DCR design and MassDOT construction, the Charles River Reservation, the Watertown-Cambridge Greenway, the Mystic River Reservation, and the Minuteman Bikeway will be connected.
- The 1.25 mile extension will be a major accomplishment for the Baker-Polito Administration's efforts to build off-road, family safe recreational opportunities.
- At the conclusion of this project, commuters and park visitors will be able to seamlessly enjoy a jog, ride, or walk from the trail network of the Charles River Reservation to the Minuteman Bikeway.
- This connection creates one of the most extensive urban off-road greenway networks in the country; expanding recreational opportunities and creating green commuting options for the region.

Black Friday Hikes

- After Thanksgiving, the DCR hosted its annual, "Go Green on Black Friday" campaign.
- Six state parks held guided hikes, as an alternative to the Black Friday shopping frenzy and a way to connect people with our public lands.
- We were delighted that over 100 visitors braved the cold to participate.
- The Baker-Polito Administration is proud to provide healthy, active recreational opportunities in the Autumn season—and throughout the year.

First Day Hikes

- Despite the cold weather, active visitors continue to enjoy our parks for snow shoeing, skiing, winter hiking, and more.
- DCR will host its 28th annual First Day Hikes on January 1, 2019.
- As is our tradition, we are inviting the public to start the New Year at a DCR property— staff will lead guided hikes at 12 properties across the state, including at nearby Breakheart State Reservation.
- From hiking along mountain tops to traversing through forests, these events demonstrate that Massachusetts parks can be just as much fun in the winter as they are in the summer!
- This will be the 8th year that the nation will hold First Day Hikes in all 50 states. We are proud that we could share this wonderful Massachusetts tradition with the rest of the country beginning in 2012.

Blue Hills Summit Improvements

- One mountain top close by has seen some major improvements recently. Atop the Blue Hills stands the Blue Hill Weather Observatory.
- The tower was named for Charles William Eliot, one of the founders of one of DCR's predecessor agencies.
- DCR recently repaired and replaced the roof of the historic Eliot observation tower and picnic shelter. Both structures were outfitted with new synthetic slate roofs to preserve their historical appearance.
- Additionally, Summit Road, the three-quarter mile access road from Canton Avenue to Eliot Tower has been leveled—greatly improving pedestrian access to the summit.
- The Baker-Polito Administration is proud to preserve the historical resources of the Commonwealth while expanding recreational opportunities for all.

Snow and Ice Prep

- DCR is conducting preparations for the winter weather season working with all of our state and local partners to best serve each region of the Commonwealth through winter weather events.
- The DCR snow and ice fleet is ready for the 2018/2019 season. Each asset receives a 90 point inspection.
- Salt sheds have received shipments and additional salt orders and deliveries are occurring over the next few weeks.

Arborway Redesign

- Last month the Council had a joint meeting with the Friends Network. It was great to see everyone and to thank our friends organizations for their continued support of DCR staff and our agency's mission. I especially enjoyed taking part in the awards ceremony and talking one-on-one with representatives of friends and partner organizations.
 - At the meeting, a question arose from the Arborway Coalition about safety on the Arborway and the Council asked for an update at the December meeting.
 - DCR plans to do a, "Road Safety Audit" for the Arborway.
 - Staff members are currently working with MassDOT to gather all of the data related to crashes and road safety from Kelley Circle to the Casey. Over the next month or so, an analysis of the data will be performed by engineering staff.
 - In parallel to the data analysis, DCR plans to schedule a site walk and working session in mid-January that would involve a representative from the major stakeholder groups 2019. The site walk/working session would take the greater part of a day.
 - A consultant will compile the outcomes of the site visit and session into a draft report for stakeholder review in late February 2019.
 - A final report will be shared publicly in April 2019.

Celebrating 125 Years

- As you know, the Department of Conservation and Recreation has been celebrating its 125 year anniversary.
- It all started on June 3, 1893, the DCR, then as the Metropolitan Parks Commission, which was the first regional parks commission in the country, acquired land where the famous Waverley Oaks once stood.
- The park, Beaver Brook Reservation in the Town of Belmont, became the first state park in Massachusetts.
- Now after 125 years, the agency continues its mission to protect, promote, and enhance our state's natural, cultural, and recreation resources for us all to benefit from.
- You will be happy to know that a descendent of one of those Waverley Oak Trees still stands today, and I invite you to visit the park to see where it all began!
- As our birthday year comes to a close, I want to thank DCR staff for all of the hard work. They put their hearts and souls into managing our properties which span 450,000 acres, and thanks to them, millions of visitors have unforgettable experiences in the ninth largest state park system in the country.
- We do not do this alone. I'd also like to thank our stewards and stakeholders for their unwavering support as we seek to provide outdoor recreational opportunities to the public.

DCR 2018 Highlights

- A few highlights of DCR's 125th birthday year include:
 - Protecting 1,200 acres of land which are now part of DCR's forests and parks
 - Protecting 558 Atlantic Coast Piping Plovers (adults and juveniles), a protected species under the Federal Endangered Species Act, on DCR coastal beaches this summer, including approximately 5% of the world's population of nesting adults;
 - Expanding DCR's Summer Nights program to partner with nine organizations to engage urban youth in free evening programs promoting recreation, education and the arts.
 - Programs were held in urban communities including Worcester, Springfield, Lawrence, Lowell, Brockton, New Bedford, and Boston.
 - Enrolling 500,000 acres of private forests, 2.5% of all private forests statewide, which is roughly 800 square miles, through the Forest Stewardship Program;
 - Partnering with park advocacy groups, civic and community organizations, businesses, municipalities, and dedicated individuals to match private investment with over \$850,000 toward financing capital projects within the DCR system via the agency's Partnership Matching Funds Program.
 - As a match, private investment annually generates more than \$1 million to support these community-driven projects;
 - Opening seven new spray decks located in various urban parks across the Commonwealth, representing a \$7 million dollar investment in affordable outdoor recreation; and reopening Massasoit State Camp Ground, following a \$5 million dollar investment.
 - Plus acquiring another campground on the Cape, which will open as Wellfleet Hollow under DCR management in the spring.
- It has been a momentous year here at DCR, and I continue to encourage you to explore our DCR properties this holiday season.

Thank you and Happy Holidays. This concludes the Commissioner's Report.

Commissioner Q&A

Councilor Murphy asked for an update on the Blue Hills Deer Hunt. He was informed that 72 deer were taken compared to 67 last year.

Chairman Hatch said he was impressed with the Arborway presentation at the November meeting by an advocate and was thankful to Deputy Commissioner Geigis for the update.

Policy Committee Update

Councilor Campbell said the Policy Committee had not met and therefore had no update. She also reported that the committee should be reformulated as there are several new Stewardship Councilors.

Finance Committee Update

Councilor Clish reported that the Finance Committee will be preparing to weigh-in on the FY20 Budget – “what’s needed and what’s the message.” She also reported that the Green Budget Coalition is likely to ask for a \$7 million budget increase.

Other Business

Open Discussion on Future Topics

The Chairman explained to the new members that it’s been past practice for the Council to submit a letter to the Legislature saying what it believes operating funding levels should be at DCR. He also said he recalls Governor Baker saying during the recent campaign that DCR should have increased staffing.

Councilor Campbell commented that she believes many of the Friends Groups aren’t aware of DCR’s financial constraints; they request funding for projects that have not been part of a planning process.

Councilor Harper asked if/how RMPs are used to inform the capital budget and planning process.

Councilor Campbell offered that all RMPs have items in them that express a budgetary need.

Councilor Reynolds asked if the RMPs have a, “scale of needs” that will inform the budget writers.

Deputy Commissioner Geigis said that RMPs are living documents and staff has been working to reformat the recommendations section so that it is more streamlined. Currently, budget requests for RMP recommendations are made on an individual basis, and we have discussed formally incorporating a review of them into the capital budget process. She welcomed the opportunity to meet with councilors to review the RMP format.

Councilor Campbell pointed out that the process of compiling an RMP can often identify items that are in need of funding. The RMP process can, “illuminate things that need illuminating.”

Councilor Clish pointed out that the core value of an RMP is to guide how different areas of the property will be managed by future stewards – for example, “sensitive habitat” versus other designations.

Councilor Smith noted that the RMP process is a learning experience and a very valuable tool.

Chairman Hatch said that DCR’s Karl Pastore from the South Region said he finds RMPs incredibly useful.

Councilor Campbell pointed out that trails standards are not limited to specific parks – they’re uniform across the system.

Discussion on Historic Curatorship Program

Chairman Hatch introduced DCR’s Kevin Allen, who is in charge of the agency’s “nationally recognized” Historic Curatorship Program, to explain the concepts of the program and answer questions. He also explained that the towns of Topsfield and Hamilton have for four or five years been trying to assess real estate taxes on local historic curatorship projects.

The Chairman explained that Senator Tarr and Senator Lovely have been actively engaged on the issue from a legislative standpoint but that the amendment they’ve offered would not prohibit taxation as envisioned in the original language.

Councilor Campbell warned that if Topsfield is successful in their efforts to tax curatorship projects, other towns may follow suit.

Councilor Murphy, with the benefit of his position as a town manager, stated that he believes taxing curatorship projects, “is a terrible idea.” He said towns would be effectively double-dipping by virtue of the Cherry Sheet process and levying real estate taxes on curatorship projects.

Kevin Allen cited an instance where the property boundary was reduced but the tax levy of \$4,500 remained the same. He stated the Town of Hamilton originally approached the state to repair the crumbling building, thus initiating the curatorship program by virtue of need. In addition, Kevin noted that the successful Willowdale restoration cost \$7 million – “these buildings are endangered species, like vernal pools.”

Finally, despite a lot of interest by staff and the Wachusett Advisory Council in seeing the building rehabilitated, Mr. Allen said it took years to identify a sole qualified candidate to assume the historic curatorship at the Mt. Wachusett State Reservation, which was a former park superintendent’s house and will be reopened as a café.

Chairman Hatch said the contents of a letter to the Legislature may include language that says: by repairing buildings that would otherwise be nuisances, the local municipality may be saving money by limiting liability exposure.

Kevin Allen pointed out the benefits of an occupied building vs. an unoccupied building. He also relayed the example of a fire years ago at a vacant Maudslay State Park building that had just been awarded a curatorship but work had not yet begun. The barn portion of the five-building complex was destroyed

and the remaining unoccupied building could have burned too but for a windless day. As a result of the fire, the selected curator was not able to fulfill their proposed plan and the remaining building remained vacant for many years.

Councilor Smith said as a former Selectman he fully supports the Historic Curatorship Program, and he supports sending a letter to the Legislature on this topic. But he cautioned about the Council getting too involved in Legislative issues. He offered a motion to have the Council send a letter.

Councilor Campbell seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion passed.

Discussion on Councilor Orientation

Chairman Hatch shifted the discussion to orientation possibilities for incoming councilors. He said he was inspired to tackle this topic after having a productive lunch with Councilor Harper. The goal: what is the best approach to orient Councilors with differing levels of agency knowledge? How can Councilors learn the main topics of concern for top DCR management?

Chairman Hatch commended Lisa Barstow for her efforts to gather relevant printed materials for incoming councilors.

Councilor Harper said a broader overview of the agency would be helpful. She then asked about the number of properties, what's under the DCR umbrella, what are the overall goals, what does success look like and how is it measured, so as a councilor she can help move those goals forward.

Councilor Smith commented that there is still a lot he doesn't know about the agency, even after serving on the council for some time. He thought a visit to DCR headquarters on Causeway Street in Boston and meeting with key staff would provide a, "better picture."

Councilor Reynolds would like to know more about actual and perceived limitations of priorities at DCR.

Councilor Harper would like to know more about how the budget is developed.

Councilor Walton found the enabling legislative documents to be very helpful.

Councilor Campbell stressed that DCR is a very complicated organization. Forestry, dam safety, etc.

Councilor Clish mentioned orientation by osmosis.

Councilor Murphy said he found the greatest resource to be fellow council members.

Chairman Hatch said he likes Councilor Smith's idea about a visit to DCR HQ.

Melissa Harper expressed a desire to meet with the DCR staffer(s) with recreation oversight; possibly different councilors could "pair up with a staff member for a deeper dive," then share what they learned at future meetings.

Chairman Hatch said he would work with Lisa Barstow and Stephen Doody regarding the possibility of an orientation at DCR HQ between Council members and agency staff.

Councilor Smith raised the issue of future start times of Council meeting, preferably to earlier in the day. He also suggested there may be instances where the public is encouraged to attend future Stewardship Council meetings.

Councilor Campbell said moving the Council meetings any earlier in the day would be an unfair burden for members like her having to travel to metro Boston from Western Massachusetts.

Discussion on Future Agenda Topics

Chairman Hatch shifted the discussion to future Council agenda items and offered the following as possibilities: re-visiting the enabling statute, landscape designation, Asset Management Modernization Project, Climate Action Implementation/Environmental Bond Bill, joint meeting with Fisheries & Wildlife, recreation provisions on watershed lands, internal and external communications, capital and operating budget and staffing.

Councilor Clish noted that DCR and Fisheries & Wildlife have different approaches to trail management.

Councilor Smith liked the staff directory that was distributed at the Supervisor's Academy; Lisa Barstow informed Councilor Smith that an updated staff directory is actively in the works.

Councilor Reynolds requested that a look at recreation priorities be added to a future agenda.

Councilor Campbell raised a concern about which parks are being, "loved to death" as a result of over-visitation.

Deputy Geigis commented that a growing recreational activity is walking dogs in our parks, which has presented challenges for staff and visitors when dogs are off leash in on leash areas. Councilor Harper asked if DCR has a dashboard on metrics. She was informed that EEA is setting up a climate change dashboard.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Hatch motioned to approve the October and November meeting minutes, the motion was seconded. Councilor Reynolds abstained [not a member at the time], all other members in favor, the minutes were approved.

Public Comment

None

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Chairman Hatch motioned to close the meeting at 1:55 p.m. The motion was seconded, all in favor, the motion carried.

The next meeting will be held January 11, 2019 at Dunn State Park, 289 Pearl Street Gardner from noon to 2 p.m.