**Department of Conservation and Recreation**A picture containing text, clipart

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**Stewardship Council Meeting**

Via Videoconference

December 9, 2021, | 9 to 11:30 a.m.

**December Meeting Minutes**

**Council Members Present:** Jack Buckley, Ann Canedy, Esq., Jeffrey Collins, Dicken Crane, Melissa Harper, Vivian Ortiz, Susan Smiley, Dennis Smith, Nate Walton, Jennifer N.S. Wilson

**Council Members Not Present:** n/a

**DCR Staff Attendees:** Lisa Barstow, Paul Cavanagh, Nick Connors, Stephanie Cooper

**Public Attendees as Registered:**

Bart Bouricius

Bill Boles

Buzz Constable

Catherine LeBlanc

Chris Redfern

Chuck

Erica Holm

Sarah Freeman

Georgy Cohen

Glen Ayers

Jenn Martin

Lizzie Roche

Michael Nichols

Janet Sinclair

Lynne Man

Mark Jacobson

Miriam Kurland

Nancy Polan

S.G. Marsh

James Jampel

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**Call to Meeting – Chairman Nate Walton**

Chairman Walton established quorum by roll call and reviewed virtual meeting format issues and features with participants. As a member of the DCR Special Commission, Chairman Walton told council members that he thanked the Commission at their final meeting for their work in bringing the final report to the legislature. He entertained questions and seeing none, moved to the DCR Report, introducing Acting Commissioner Stephanie Cooper.

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**DCR Report – Stephanie Cooper, Acting Commissioner**

• This Administration has one year left to make progress and advance its priorities, and one of those is making DCR better. With the bookends of that timeframe in mind, DCR is thinking about a short-term planning sprint that creates an action framework for both long- and short-term goals is the most effective path we can take in driving improvements rather than engaging in a long-term strategic planning effort that would likely take years to develop. This first sprint will be an internal effort for DCR tapping resources that could include some partners and even recently retired employees…while still providing a forum to address bigger pictures, long-term issues.

• Our work in the near and long term will require the hiring of a consultant for support in development of the process and framework. This sprint will see us:

* Evaluating and defining DCR's mission and vision in a 21st century context. And,
* Establishing and articulating DCR’s core values as a transparent foundation for decision making. This includes seeking public feedback as a means of demonstrating a new transparent path forward for progress and increased engagement.

• The key in both the near- and long-term planning is developing a set of initiatives and workplan to address the Special Commission Report recommendations and creating a dashboard with metrics to measure performance and progress to share publicly (seek input) and show where we are.

Report

• As you know, DCR is an agency with a diverse portfolio which UMDI did a fantastic job of outlining and cataloging – we have forests, playgrounds, beaches, pools, rinks, dams, and so much more [not to mention the important work to support municipalities – like urban tree planting, protecting MWRA communities’ water supply, forest fire control, dam safety, flood control]. Nearly 500,000 acres that make up our holdings and enhance the commonwealth in a number of ways. But as we discuss the tremendous opportunities for improvement that this report reflects – I want to make sure I reiterate that it’s the people who make up this agency who are such an incredible resource too – they are ready to go, and we are excited by your work.

• The most important message I would like you to take away from today is that we are committed to taking action on your recommendations - from the Governor to the Secretary to me and the staff at DCR we see your effort and output as a tremendous opportunity for action and growth.

• We see the result of your efforts as an opportunity and an inflection point from which we can build, improve the way we do business and grow in a positive direction that is responsive to the recommendations and values of the report.

REVIEW

• This reset internally will be grounded by a reaffirmation of the agency’s core values. [We plan to engage our staff to recast and restate the values that will inform the public of our efforts going forward]. I plan to make a report monthly to the Stewardship Council on our efforts and progress and we are planning to conduct a series of regional outreach meetings at the appropriate time, as well.

• The Core Principles for DCR are subject to the input of employees, stakeholders and more but it has begun to crystalize into five main areas for me that I wanted to articulate a bit for you.

o Support for outdoor recreation: During COVID it became clear the vital role that the many outdoor spaces can play in supporting and enhancing the communities that host our parks and facilities. [universal access]

o Conservation of Cultural Resources: Conservation mission is central – as stewards of the land and resources, but also to ensure it provides ecosystem services for the benefit of all (into the future etc.). We must protect, restore and enhance important cultural resources through the Commonwealth. Helping to tell the story of our lands and the people of Massachusetts.

o Visitor, Interpretive and Customer Services: In support of our visitors our staff should work to tell the story of these places and these lands while also providing support for visitors new and old as they explore.

o Apply data to decision-making: DCR must demonstrate a commitment to stewardship of our resources by the transparent application of data to investment decisions/spending, staffing and sustainability planning.

o Partner with those who care about our parks: Engage stakeholders in decision making, leverage mutually beneficial partnerships in stewardship and engage with our host communities in order to drive the greatest good for the resources and the public to whom they belong [and forge] meaningful long-term partnerships. [Example – Mass Audubon @ Powder House/Magazine Beach. DCR restored historic building, MAS “tenant”/partner offering 3-season nature center drop-in programs. Mention CRC, Magazine Beach Partners. Is CRWA involved??)

Recommendations

• The Commission (and all of you) and the public/stakeholders who were part of this process are telling us we need to do better. The recommendations resonate with us, and we have been thinking about them. The agency has been looking at the report and working to break out the next steps into two very broad buckets of near term and long-term actions. I’d like to speak a bit about them below.

Near term Operational Improvements Recommendations

Budget/Staffing/Retained Revenue

• The report recommends limiting use of seasonal staff and focusing efforts to hire more converting key long-term seasonal positions to full-time/year-round positions, highlighting the importance of specific programs like Resource Management Planning. It also discusses the expanded share of the operating budget that is funded by retained revenue and recommends evaluating the purpose and intent of retained revenue making changes there.

• We agree that these are two critical areas that require thoughtful consideration and will be analyzing both and have begun deeper conversations within the Administration as it develops the Governor’s budget proposal for FY23. It is helpful for the agency to retain institutional knowledge, and to attract/retain qualified staff (by elevating to FTE). Areas like RMP need to be anchored by solid, full-time staffing.

AMMP

• The report highlights DCR’s success in developing the Asset Management Modernization program (AMMP) and the importance of completing a full roll-out agencywide, encompassing all assets. We agree….AMMP/CAMIS will help document DCR’s progress in addressing deferred maintenance, help quantify outstanding needs, tracking constituent requests and help to prioritize future investments. It will also allow for better information about the condition of DCR’s many assets. (Quantifying level of effort to maintain assets, prioritizing capital investments, increasing transparency about how decisions to invest are made, improving customer service re maintenance requests).

• Looking at ways to increase capabilities/progress to advance rollout of the DCAMM’s CAMIS asset management systems. We recognize that implementing CAMIS throughout the Park Operations statewide system to track constituent requests is a key component and we are looking at when that can be done [Goal of implementing in Spring 2022]. This helps not only internally – but also in helping with transparency and communication with those that reach out with concerns.

• One of the biggest takeaways from the report is the importance of DCR increasing transparency and public engagement, and we are looking at ways to do this.

• This effort will begin with the DCR website improvements.

The short-term plan is for DCR to engage an outside consultant (approved by EOTSS) to work on custom web development with the goal of improving the website that engages our customers in a user-friendly and efficient. [It is a refresh and repackaging of the content on the website].

The agency will hold a listening session to engage stakeholders for their input and we plan to continue those public conversations beyond the initial website refresh to make sure we continue to hit the mark.

Timeline – Phase 1: Initial improvements to be completed by in the first half of 2022.

 [Longer term plan: DCR will develop a long-term roadmap to make the DCR website a more service driven site that engages our customers across all platforms (tablets, mobile devices, etc.). The content will provide real-time data that drives our customers to the website for all their DCR needs.]

o DCR will launch a web-based tool to provide real-time online information about parking capacity at most of pools, waterfronts and other popular destinations. Visitors will be able to check the status of many of the DCR facilities in real time on a central webpage. [Timeline - Launched by May 2022].

Parkways

• The Report summarizes/reflects the public sentiment this Commission heard about managing the parkways as part of the parks and the importance of maintaining DCR’s role.

• As you know, DCR has completed its initial Parkways Master Plan which was released this summer and provides a roadmap for agency planning and spending. The tools created and assessments done of the majority of the system provide us as an agency with the plan for short term improvements and full-scale reconstructions.

• This plan will be the guide for our annual capital spending that is part of our budget.

• DCR and DOT will continue to work closely on management of DCR parkways and paths as we have done. We are closely partnered on snow and ice operations, even co-locating our teams in the Highway Operation Center for storm response and partnering on project including trails work and large-scale projects such as the Mystic Crossing between Somerville and Everett.

• Our focus as the larger Commonwealth team is to bring the best expertise and resources forward to care for these important assets. It is not just about custody and control by one agency but more importantly what is best for the people of MA who rely on these assets.

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**Regular Business I**

Approval of Minutes – December 9, 2021, Meeting

Chairman Walton entertained a motion to approve the minutes, which was moved and seconded. He called the roll on the adoption of the minutes, as indicated for virtual meetings:

Chairman Walton: Yes

Councilor Canedy: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Buckley: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Yes

The motion was adopted.

*Chairman Walton invited members of the public for comment, which was offered by the following:*

Catherine LeBlanc

Bart Bouricius

Janet Sinclair

Miriam Kurland

Georgy Cohen

Chris Redfern

Bill Boles

Lynne Man

Glen Ayers

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**Special Business I**

[Presentation](https://www.mass.gov/doc/friends-of-leo-j-martin-skiing-presentation/download) from Friends of Leo J. Martin Skiing – James Jampel, Board Member

Q&A –

Councilor Wilson thanked the Mr. Jampel for the informative presentation. She noted that her town has a Nordic high school ski team -- one of the 13 town teams. Many of those kids are new skiers, and that’s because the facility is affordable and accessible. To many parents, it’s a great first exposure to winter sports … a gem of DCR.

Councilor Buckley noted he drives by all the time. He referenced again the ARPA funds, which, the governor had proposed at $100million. With the legislature giving 15million, Councilor Buckley urged that the same presentation be made to the 13 towns’ legislators, asking why they only gave DCR $15 million?? It puts a point on the kind of things the Council is discussing.

Mr. Jampel indicated that one of his Friends’s group’s key points is legislative outreach. They’re not getting heard by legislature.

Councilor Smiley thanked Mr. Jampel for the wonderful opportunity to promote winter recreation. She’d like to see DCR embrace winter recreation investment and more collaboration across the Commonwealth

Councilor Smith asked whether, in this unique situation, is there any conflict between golf and skiers on turf being torn up and is there any? Mr. Jampel answered that in terms of coordination, to primarily prevent conflict, they work with staff of greens and tees. Pumps provide golf irrigation. The water usee for snowmaking is drawn from Charles, so the program is not a net user of water.

When asked whether this dual golf/skiing use occurs elsewhere, Mr. Jampel noted he is aware of it at a golf course in Minneapolis.

Councilor Collins expressed his appreciation for the great collaboration between the DCR and Friends organization, noting he took a course at the Martin Ski course. He state that the presentation was an important reminder for outdoor recreation as appropriate investments. He asked about the program’s capital planning and needs, and DCR’s support of them.

Mr. Jampel replied that for the larger monies, they know how to proceed. For other monies, whether it is capital or operating, when you get into mid-range, the process is not entirely clear to everyone. There is a donor who is making $250 [$250,000?] available … they want to donate to the state. It would be helpful if there were an easy way to get that approved and through quickly. As another example, if the groomer [equipment] is not working, it would be great if there were an easy way to address that.

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**Special Business II**

*Election of Officers*

Chairman Walton offered the following members put forward by the nominating committee to stand for officer seats:

Secretary: Ann Canedy

Vice Chair: Melissa Harper

Chair: Jack Buckley

Seeing no questions, he entertained a motion to adopt the slate. Councilor Collins motioned to approve the slate with Councilor Smith seconding. Chairman Walton called the roll on the adoption of the motion, as indicated for virtual meetings:

Chairman Walton: Yes

Councilor Canedy: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Buckley: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Yes

The motion was adopted.

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**Regular Business II/III –**

*Committee Updates*

*Finance Committee*

Chair Buckley formalized the annual budget calendar. Looking at deferred maintenance and capital is the next focus. Finance committee needs to raise the issue of ARPA for a second attempt

*Policy and Operations Committee*

Councilor Wilson commended with Paul Cavanaugh for his work on the RMP dashboard, noting not everyone on the Council has yet had an opportunity to approve an RMP. It is exciting that RMPs will be at the Council table soon for approval.

Councilor Wilson asked that if anyone has ideas on priorities related to recommendations of the Special Commission, to please let the policy committee know. The Committee still intends to provide advocacy with respect to hybrid and open meeting policy issues. Particultly after the events of last month caused disruption in a committee meeting, Councilors would like to pursue a conversation about meeting in person at least some of the time.

*Stakeholders Committee*

The Committee continues to seek to help DCR with interactions with public. The commiteee discussed how to make public comment in this setting and virtually. The group appreciates having different Friends groups interested in presenting. They are still working closely on Friends Gathering with Nick Connors and Jennifer Norwood, and the MOU process is ongoing.

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Extemporaneous Discussion on Meeting Format

Chair Walton explained an incident of a Committee meeting being Zoom bombed. DCR has employed a new virtual platform. He proposed a discuss about returning to in person meeting. In light of Delta variant, this was put on hold.

Councilor Smith indicated he thinks it makes sense to have in-person meeting in light of having been apart so long. He suggested trying to do so in Jan or Feb. Valuable to make sure we have a large space, not a traditional space to accommodate distancing.

Councilor Collins agreed with the value of meeting in person, alternating models, with increased accessibility for public and the opportunity to see DCR properties. He suggested meeting in a semi-outdoor space, and potentially asking attendees to do a rapid test beforehand and masking. We are seeing a rapid spike. In spring, we could meet outdoors.

Councilor Canedy noticed the Special Commission suggested having Committee breakout meetings be separate from regular meetings. She expressed support for that idea, if possible, to have those in person. Larger meetings could be held virtually for the public to attend.

Councilor Buckley also agreed that in person meetings have value, but with protections Councilor Collins outlined.

He advocated for a virtual presence at in person meetings, and the need to find a way to do that while also getting back to in person meetings.

Councilor Crane observed there is a seasonality for meeting outdoors. Dead of winter is more practical for virtual meetings, when it is more difficult to travel and there is definitely less opportunity to be outside. Maybe we should focus more on in-person meeting for later in the spring than January or February.

Councilor Ortiz indicated her agreement with all, advising with Council Crane to wait for weather to be less severe. Travel may be difficult. Having enough space and protocols. Some Councilors have to take time off, and need ample time and notice are needed to take a day off for travel.

Nick Connors informed the Council that the locations that have the most space are generally Heritage Parks—Fall River, New Bedford, Lawrence, Lowell. There is currently not anything in metro Boston, we’re not allowed at Cambridge Street.

Chairman Walton asked if DCR is having any meetings in person. Nick Connors shared that there had been a few, some outside. The Commissioner had two meetings in the office under City of Boston protocols

Councilor Wilson urged that the body just get something on the calendar. She shared that in her view, we may not all fully appreciate what we’ve been missing with remote meetings. Being a statewide board, it’s a lot of travel. But making a virtual meeting work with the technology is also time consuming, and it’s still not perfect.

Chairman Walton stated that it’s an experience (in person meeting) sometimes like ripping off the band-aid, with COVID, once you go ahead and do it, it’s so much more advanced.

Councilor Smith asked whether this was the kind of thing the policy committee would come back to us with a recommendation? The State House and it’s not yet open.

Councilor Crane observed that for those who rely on Mass Transit for meeting travel, that involves an additional set of risk assessments. Councilor Wilson observed that some Councilors had never met one another in person.

Chair Walton asked for further input on timing and location. He noted that there weremany considerations–as chair I try not to tip the scales, but there’s an element of inertia. He suggested exploring meeting in person in the next month, since we are already going through a transition. Other Councilors (Buckley, Crane, Smiley) shared their agreement that it was worth exploring.

Councilor Smiley moved that the Chair explore the opportunity to meet in person in January, seconded by Councilor Smith.

Councilor Buckley: Yes

Councilor Canedy: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Yes

Chairman Walton: Yes

Motion is unanimous.

After some further logistical/calendar discussions, Chair Walton proposed January 20 for the meeting date, and thanked the Councilors and public for a productive meeting, particularly the Friends group presentation stakeholders.

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**Adjournment**

Chairman Walton said he would keep the council informed and adjourned until January 20, 2021.

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*Please check the* [*DCR Stewardship Council webpage*](https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council) *for notice of upcoming meeting dates, times and location/connection information.*