# **December 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present: Jack Buckley, Dicken Crane, Jeff Collins, Phil Doherty, Ted Dooley, Dennis Smith, Jennifer Wilson, Kevin O’Shea, Vivian Ortiz

Council Members Attending Remotely: Phil Doherty, Jennifer Wilson

Council Members Absent: Ann Canedy

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Matthew Perry, Julie Martin, Leah Hopkins, Amanda Garms, Paul Cavanagh, Chloe Gotsis

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Rae Ettenger, Christine Liu, Sarah Freeman, Kat Powers, Jen Klein, Daira Clark Santollani, Jeffrey Meyers, Regina Fink, Josh Ageloff, Wendy Machmuller, Chris Egan, Katherine Tolley, Kaego Ndiweka, Doreen Bargoot, Nicole Freedman, James Hearsum, Galen Mook, Joe Creason, Gracie O’Leary, Andrea Amour, Arthur Freedman, Emerson Gagnon, Caroline Reeves, Andrew Sharpe

Public Officials Present: Representative James Arena-DeRosa, Representative Steve Owens

Virtual Attendees: Alexis, Christine Sullivan, Derek Dunlea, Doug Pizzi, Matt Hartman, Maureen, Lawrence Tucker, Neil Rhein, Susan McPherson, Suzanne Gall Marsh, Buzz Constable, Susan McPherson, Jun Seung Lee, Amanda B, Mazrimas

## Call to Meeting, 9:00am – Chair Jack Buckley

Chair Buckley welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roll call of councilors present.

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo thanked the Council for having him. He acknowledged Chair Buckley and Vice Chair Harper for their service in their positions and joined State Representative Arena-DeRosa to present Chair Buckley with a citation, and also presented a citation to Vice Chair Harper on behalf of State Representative Meschino. He then gave an update on recent happenings at DCR.

## Introducing Leah Hopkins

At the November meeting, Commissioner Arrigo spoke about the hiring of Leah Hopkins to serve as DCR’s new Indigenous Peoples Partnership Coordinator and this month, Ms. Hopkins was in attendance to introduce herself. Ms. Hopkins gave brief remarks to the council.

## Performance Recognition Program

Commissioner Arrigo spoke about the Performance Recognition Program which was celebrated on November 19 the Worcester Visitors Center.

He said it was truly special to come together and celebrate all of their hard work, dedication, and commitment to the agency’s mission that the recipients displayed.

This year’s recipients include five individuals and two teams from across several regions and departments of DCR:

* Pieter Visser, Forest & Park Supervisor II, Tolland State Forest
* Jussara Batista, Office Support Specialist I, Water Supply Protection
* Kevin Podkowka, North Berkshire District Management Forester
* Sean Gaffney, Field Operations Team Leader, Hampton Ponds Complex
* Dylan Shyne, Forest & Park Supervisor III, Hopkinton State Park
* The DCR Sign Shop: Helene Campbell, Sean McCarthy, Raymond Messina, Jarod Fossa, Mark Saulnier
* Wachusett Reservoir Watershed Rangers: Captain Sean Flood, Lieutenant Andrew Leahy, Lieutenant Graham Parnaby, Ranger Keith Vicari, Ranger Jason Taylor, Ranger Mike Schultz, Ranger Kiara Huntress, Ranger Robert Busa

## Go Green on Black Friday Hikes

Commissioner Arrigo said that this year’s Go Green on Black Friday hikes were a success. Six scenic hikes took place across the state at beautiful locations, including Blackstone, Blue Hills, Borderland, Great Falls Discovery Center, Lawrence Heritage, and WBNERR. He said that with nearly 300 miles hiked, this event showcased the stunning beauty of DCR’s parks and public lands. He thanked the staff who led the hikes—Sherine Hamade, Dan Byrnes, Paul Clifford, Janel Nockleby, Jude Messier, and Matt Hagopian— and everyone who helped plan and support another successful year of our Go Green on Black Friday hikes.

## First Day Hikes

On January 1, Commissioner Arrigo invited everyone to kick off 2025 with a hike in one of DCR’s beautiful parks.  This year, there will be First Day Hikes at 14 locations across the Commonwealth – from the Berkshires to Cape Cod, offering families and residents a great way to start the new year with fresh air, stunning scenery, and a sense of community. Last year, DCR welcomed a record-breaking 3,600 people for First Day Hikes at 13 DCR parks. First Day Hikes, which started 34 years ago in the Blue Hills with 400 participants, has grown tremendously over the years.

## DCR Hosts Joint Training with Federal Agencies

The DCR State House Security Program, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), recently hosted two training sessions focused on bombing prevention and awareness. These sessions brought together federal, state, and local personnel responsible for public safety and infrastructure protection. The goal of these sessions was to enhance participants' ability to recognize potential threats and identify suspicious items. One of the sessions took place at the historic Botume House in the Middlesex Fells in Stoneham, offering a unique and fitting location for this important training. Commissioner Arrigo said that this partnership between state and federal agencies ensures that DCR personnel are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively detect threats and maintain public safety.

## Greening the Gateway Cities

Last month, the Urban and Community Forestry Team gathered at Beaver Brook Reservation in Belmont to celebrate the incredible success of this year’s Greening the Gateway Cities tree planting program. Staff from across the state came together to plant a ceremonial tree, explore the beautiful Beaver Brook tree walk, provide valuable feedback, and enjoy a well-deserved potluck lunch. Commissioner Arrigo said that despite the challenges of the drought, the program exceeded expectations, with over 5,500 trees planted across 23 Gateway Cities this spring and fall.

## Cass Reopening

Commissioner Arrigo invited everyone to a ribbon cutting celebrating the grand reopening of the Melnea A. Cass Recreational Complex on Friday, December 20. He said that after months of exciting upgrades, they are ready to showcase the transformation of this community hub, and that the ribbon cutting will highlight several exciting improvements that will make the center better than ever, including a state-of-the-art athletic floor, upgraded athletic equipment, enhanced WiFi connectivity, a refreshed entrance lobby.  They will also unveil a new interpretive paneling to share the story of the Complex and its namesake, Melnea A. Cass. In addition to showcasing these major upgrades, the event will introduce new Executive Director, Chris Sumner, who will be leading the charge in expanding the center’s programs and services for the Roxbury community.

## Winter Adaptive Skating Launches in Holyoke

DCR’s Universal Access Program (UAP) kicked off the Winter 2024-2025 Adaptive Skating Season last Sunday at the Henry J. Fitzpatrick Rink in Holyoke. The event drew around 50 participants, including 10 families and individuals of all ages and abilities. In partnership with Holyoke Rows, the event offered inclusive skating fun for everyone, with adaptive equipment such as ice sleds, skates, skate walkers, and more. Commissioner Arrigo said that this season, UAP will offer adaptive skating at rinks across the state, including locations in Brockton, East Boston, Fall River, Gardner, North Adams, and Worcester. These free sessions require pre-registration.

## Skating Rinks

DCR officially opened five of our indoor skating rinks in the Boston area, including locations in Charlestown, the North End, Dorchester, Hyde Park, and South Boston. Additionally, the Kelly Outdoor Rink in Jamaica Plain will open in mid-December and remain operational through mid-March, weather permitting.

## Annual Parking Pass

On Black Friday, DCR launched its 2025 Annual Parking Pass available for $60. This pass provides unlimited parking at most DCR parks statewide from January 1 through December 31, making it easier for visitors to enjoy outdoor recreation year-round. For seniors aged 62 and older, a lifetime parking pass is available for just $10. To purchase your pass or for more information, visit the DCR Annual Parking Pass webpage.

## Celebrating a Milestone in the Charlesgate Park Revitalization

Last month, Commissioner Arrigo joined Jason Santos, DCR’s Director of Transportation, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, Charlesgate Alliance, Rep. Jay Livingstone, and other community members to celebrate the upcoming removal of the "North Wall" beneath the Bowker Overpass at Charlesgate Park. Originally built in the 1960s, the wall’s removal will open up more parkland and improve views of the Charles River and Esplanade, connecting visitors to Boston’s larger greenspace network.

## Metropolitan Beaches Commission

Last month, Commissioner Arrigo testified before the Metropolitan Beaches Commission at their annual hearing.  He spoke about the work DCR has done over the last year to improve access and inclusivity at its 15 Metro Boston beaches including enhanced multilingual signage and Universal Access programming and outreach. The Commissioners expressed appreciation for DCR’s responsiveness, communication and willingness to form strong partnerships.

## Partnership Matching Fund

Commissioner Arrigo gave an update on DCR’s Partnership Matching Fund, saying that they are currently working through a backlog of projects on the list that they’re committed to, hoping to finish in FY2025.nHe said that they are expecting the new Director of Partnerships to begin soon and that they will help manage this process. In addition, they will be working with the new director of partnerships to re-envision the process and program, making it more streamlined and easier for both partners and staff. The Commissioner also said that as they enter the new year, DCR is focused on refreshing the agency’s partnership model more broadly, working to make the program more robust which will include an efficient way to run the partnership matching program.

## Reflecting on 2024

Commissioner Arrigo wished the Councilors a wonderful holiday season and thanked them for their partnership, collaboration and guidance over the last year. He then reflected on the past year, saying:

“2024 presented challenges from the extreme heat waves this summer that bled into a very, very dry fall and wildfires raging across our forests, but along the way our incredible staff stepped up time and again. During the summer, our Operations Team came together to open our pools early, when possible, to provide families with relief from the heat waves, and throughout October and November, our incredible wildland firefighters worked around the clock battling blazes to keep our lands and communities safe.

We also made great progress and I’d like to highlight just a few things:

We kicked off the year with more than 3,000 people welcoming in the new year with a hike in our state parks.

We reopened Mohawk Trail State Forest Campground for winter camping after a $1.4 million renovation.

We welcomed families to witness the rare near-total solar eclipse with free programming and glasses at eight of our state parks in April.

We celebrated the 10th anniversary of our signature Summer Nights program, by expanding the programs largest year yet with more than 100 organizations providing free programming to thousands of young people across the state.

We welcomed beachgoers to our beautiful beaches with new multilingual signage.

We won a $1.2 million grant to install up to 40 electric vehicle charging stations at parks across our state.

We led a historic once-in-a-generation cleanup of five key islands in the Boston Harbor.

We welcomed a new Executive Director to the Cass Recreation Center and as I mentioned earlier our first ever Indigenous Peoples Partnership Coordinator.

We awarded more than $400,000 to seven environmental justice communities to expand the urban tree canopy.

And we rounded out the year last month, by celebrating the completion of a $14 million project that extends our 3.7 mile segment of the Blackstone River Greenway to the Massachusetts/Rhode Island border.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor O’Shea mentioned the state of the boardwalks at urban beaches in Boston and the need for them to insure accessibility. He asked Commissioner Arrigo about an oil spill that occurred in the Muddy River, for an update on investments in the agency’s two golf courses, and the issue that is happening at the DCR headquarters that is preventing employees from going in.

Commissioner Arrigo said that there are currently bedbugs in the main DCR office and that they are working with MassDOT and DPH to get guidance and welcome back staff safely into the space. He said that for the spill in the Muddy River, DCR is working with DEP and EEA collaboratively to resolve the issue. He said that this is more in the wheelhouse of those agencies to respond and do the fact finding on the impact and that he will keep the council updated. For golf courses, Commissioner Arrigo said that the Leo J. Martin golf course had a plan for a partial irrigation system, but that has been revisited to make sure it makes sense. He said that if they are going to make an investment, they don’t want it to be for just a portion of the golf course and that the plan has been revised and they are accepting bids for a larger irrigation system. They have also engaged with golf course maintenance contractors to make sure that they will be ready for the upcoming season.

Councilor Jasinski said that she is glad to hear that there is a Director of Partnerships coming on board. She said that she looks at the Partnership Matching Funds program as an opportunity to show how partners function with DCR and that it gives larger partners the chance to take some of the administrative burden off of the agency.

Commissioner Arrigo said that when there is a refreshed partnership model, they will come to the council to present, adding the matching fund program is a small piece of a much broader plan.

Councilor Collins asked for an update on the Memorial Drive safety enhancements and the commissioner’s thoughts on a presentation about assessment data and Vision Zero in relation to DCR parkways.

Commissioner Arrigo said that they hoped to have the job done before Thanksgiving but there were delays around materials, but that the project should be done later in December. He said that DCR has a Parkways Masterplan that they need to execute on, and that they need to figure out how it fits into the capital budget and how plans are prioritized within that budget.

Councilor Harper followed up on the roll out of the agency’s new partnership model, saying that the Stakeholders Committee has spent a lot of time listening to friends and partners and how they work with DCR. She said the committee would value the opportunity to review the materials and the model and provide feedback and insight before it gets rolled out.

Councilor Smiley said that she seconds Councilor Harpers statement.

Councilor Dooley said that he noticed IDDE outfall testing during the wet weather yesterday which he was glad to see. He said that he knows that the agency puts together an annual report for discharge detection, and that he hopes for a presentation on the report sometime during the summer months. He said he was surprised how many IDDE areas there are in the system and it would be good to see the work being done around them.

Chair Buckley said that he spoke with Councilor Collins after the last meeting and that they’d like to work on bringing some consistency to presentations done by DCR staff. He said one thing specifically they’d like to see is an org chart for the presentations and where the presenter and their work sits in the agency. He added that he noticed Dylan Shyne was presented with a PRP award and that he was glad to see that. Chair Buckley said that he met Dylan last year at Park Serve Day and that his enthusiasm and engagement with park users was great and that he was what anyone would want in an employee.

## Regular Business I

### Presentation on DCR Summer Nights – Julie Martin, Director of Visitor Engagement and Programs

Julie Martin gave a presentation to the Council on the DCR Summer Nights program.

### After the presentation concluded, Councilors were given the opportunity for questions and comments.

Councilor Smiley thanked Ms. Martin for the presentation and recognized her for her hard work on the program. She said that she remembers when this program first started and that to see how it has grown is great.

Ms. Martin said that she calls it a “feel good program,” and that she can go out and see the work having an impact from all the smiling faces on the kids that participate.

Councilor Wilson said that a benefit years ago was that participants would be provided with a healthy snack or meal, and she asked if this was still the case.

Ms. Martin said yes, many partners do provide food to participants.

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor O’Shea made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 14, 2024 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Collins seconded the motion.

The November 14, 2024 meeting minutes were approved.

### Public Comment

[Guidelines for Public Comment are available on the DCR Stewardship Council website.](https://www.mass.gov/doc/dcr-stewardship-council-public-comment-guidelines/download)

Chairman Buckley invited members of the public for comment.

### Comments were given by the following members of the public

* Rae Ettenger, Appalachian Mountain Club
* Sarah Freeman, Jamaica Plain
* Wendy Machmuller, Friends of Fairstead
* Chris Egan, Mass Forest Alliance
* Andrea Amour, Save King’s Beach
* Arthur Freedman, Save King’s Beach
* Caroline Reeves, Muddy Water Initiative
* Cat Powers, Mass Parks for All
* Galen Mook, MassBike
* Andrew Sharpe, Authentic Caribbean Foundation

## Regular Business II

### Election of Officers for 2025

Councilor Dennis Smith, Chair of the Nominating Committee, presented the following slate for Council Officers:

* Chair – Dicken Crane
* Vice Chair – Susan Smiley
* Secretary – Ann Canedy

Councilor Smith said that there is an opportunity for councilors to nominate from the floor, but no other nominations were given.

Councilor Smith moved to approve the presented slate for council officers for 2025.

Chair Buckley seconded the motion.

The slate was approved and the new officers will take on their roles at the January 16, 2025 meeting.

### Committee Updates

#### Policy Committee

Councilor Collins reported that the committee met with Paul Cavanagh to discuss RMPs and have been tracking the progress and pace on behalf of the council. The committee also discussed learning more about Vision Zero and how that is included in the Parkways Master Plan. They also talked about the Strategic Readiness Initiative and tracking the goals in it.

#### Stakeholders

Councilor Smiley reported that the Stakeholders Committee was very active getting the dates and locations together for the 2025 meetings, spoke about partnership presentations, and are excited about the new positions that are being hired to work with partners.

#### Conservation

Councilor Collins said that the committee continues to find its feet and that they have been discussing issues they’d like to pursue. They are waiting on the administrations biodiversity goals to be released for review.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor Smith said that the council is going through a transition with a change in membership and that they need to plan as much as they can for what the council’s needs will be. He said that they should look at the makeup of various committees and give thought so they stay on the right track.

Council Ortiz said that if anyone was looking to do a First Day Hike to consider joining her and others at Pope John Paul Park.

Councilor Crane said that he feels like the comments given today reflect that DCR has been responsive to public’s support and effort of the public to guide them. He said it was encouraging to hear this kind of feedback and that they can use it as a launching point to continue their work.

Councilor Collins said that he wants to make sure that the people from Save King’s Beach hear back from the agency on the issues they brought up. He thanked Chair Buckley and Vice Chair Harper for their time as officers and thanked Councilor Crane and Councilor Smiley for taking on these roles.

Councilor Smiley thanked Councilor Harper for her work on councilor terms and for making sure that there is consistency and continuity with the council.

Councilor Dooley congratulated Chair Buckley on his retirement from the position and said he is excited to work with Councilors Crane and Smiley. He seconded what Councilor Collins said about Save King’s Beach.

Chair Buckley congratulated Councilors Crane and Smiley on their new positions and thanked everyone for their support while he was chair. He said that this is a working council, that state parks are important, and that with the Governor’s approval, he would like to continue to serve on the council.

Eric Helmuth from Senator Brownsberger’s office sent his regards on behalf of the Senator who was out of state and could not attend. Senator Brownsberger and his staff helped arrange the accommodations for the meeting.

## Adjournment

Councilor Dooley moved to adjourn the meeting.

Councilor Smith seconded.

Councilor Buckley thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting.

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

### The following letter was presented to the DCR Stewardship Council from Rae Ettenger on behalf of the undersigned DCR Friends and Partner groups.

December 12, 2024

Distinguished Members of the Stewardship Council of the Department of Conservation and Recreation,

Thank you so much for hearing our comments here today in support of the tremendous work being accomplished by the DCR under the leadership of Commissioner Arrigo. My name is Rae Ettenger, I use they/them pronouns, and I am the Appalachian Mountain Club’s New England Conservation Policy Specialist. I am grateful to be speaking here today on behalf of 20 Friends groups and organizations that work closely with and rely on DCR staff, to carry out their organizations’ respective goals.

Our communities and volunteers know when the DCR is struggling just to get by and when the agency is thriving. Under the leadership of Commissioner Arrigo, in combination with the continual increases to DCR’s general operating budget, our organizations have seen many improvements within DCR’s communications, transparency, and operations that improve the quality of the Commonwealth’s natural and recreational resources.

Our organizations are incredibly grateful to the Healey-Driscoll Administration and the Legislature for continual increases to DCR’s operating budget that have allowed the agency to staff up to pre-pandemic levels, engage in data- and research-driven land management decisions, and shift towards retaining full-time employees (as opposed to relying on seasonal workers).

As DCR works to expand access to the outdoors for all residents of the Commonwealth, their mandate is larger than ever before. In addition to the agency’s positive impact on our $16 billion annual outdoor recreation economy, DCR is a critical resource for Massachusetts communities facing the threat of global climate change. Today, we are here to celebrate and empower the continuation of the hard work being done by DCR staff, as they are both the reason we are able to successfully collaborate with the Department and they are in desperate need of additional capacity. Clearly, DCR needs all of our continued support because there is much more work to do.

Thank you again for hearing our comments today in support of DCR’s work under the leadership of Commissioner Arrigo. Our organizations are looking forward to working with the Stewardship Council, DCR leadership, the Healey-Driscoll Administration, and the Legislature to continue DCR’s success.

Please direct any questions or requests for additional information to Rae Ettenger at rettenger@outdoors.org.

Signed,

Heather Clish, VP, Conservation and Recreation Advocacy [Appalachian Mountain Club](https://www.outdoors.org/)

Laura Jasinski, Executive Director [Charles River Conservancy](https://thecharles.org/)

Doug Pizzi, Executive Director [Mass Parks for All](https://www.massparksforall.org/)

Jen Klein, PhD Executive Director [Friends of the Blue Hills](https://friendsofthebluehills.org/)

Chris Redfern, Executive Director [Friends of the Middlesex Fells Reservation](https://www.friendsofthefells.org/)

Robb Johnson, Executive Director [Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition](https://massland.org/)

Linda Relson, President [Watertown Community Gardens](http://watertowngardens.org/)

Samantha Woods, Executive Director [North and South Rivers Watershed](https://www.nsrwa.org/) [Association](https://www.nsrwa.org/)

Andrew Sharpe, Chairman [Authentic Caribbean Foundation Inc.](https://www.authenticcaribbeanfoundation.org/)

Patrick Herron, Executive Director [Mystic River Watershed Association](https://mysticriver.org/)

Becky Kalagher, President [Bay State Trail Riders Association](https://bstra.org/)

Abby Oliveira, Senior Land Use and Sustainability Planner [Longwood Collective](https://www.longwoodcollective.org/)

Andres Ripley Greenways, Program Director [Neponset River Watershed Association](https://neponset.org/)

Jodi Valenta, Massachusetts State Program Director [Trust for Public Land](https://www.tpl.org/state/massachusetts)

Doug Lawrence, Chair [Friends of Callahan State Park](https://www.friendsofcallahan.org/)

Sarah Freeman, Representative [Arborway Coalition](https://gatewaytothearborway.blogspot.com/)

Karen Mauney-Brodek, President [Emerald Necklace Conservancy](https://www.emeraldnecklace.org/)

Jen Mergel, James & Audrey Foster Executive Director [Esplanade Association](https://esplanade.org/)

Steven Nutter, Executive Director [Green Cambridge](http://greencambridge.org/)

Caroline Reeves, Co-Founder [Muddy Water Initiative](https://www.muddywaterinitiative.org/)