# **January 16, 2025 Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present: Dicken Crane, Susan Smiley, Ann Canedy, Jack Buckley, Jeff Collins, Phil Doherty, Laura Jasinski, Melissa Harper, Kevin O’Shea, Vivian Ortiz, Susan Smiley, Dennis Smith, Jennifer Wilson

Council Members Absent: Ted Dooley

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Matt Perry, Dan Driscoll, Wendy Pearl, Robert Lowell, Kevin Hollenbeck, Ilyse Wohlberg, Chloe Gotsis, Ale Enchandi, Mackenzie Greer, A.J. Tourigny, Paul Cavanagh

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Alexis, BG, Bill Boles, Cabell Eames, Charles Stone, Christine Liu, Chuck Anastas, David Alden, Ellen Arnold, Joyce Sandvik, Karl Dziura, Lawrence Tucker, Nicole Freedman, Peter Sutton, Sarah Freeman, Wendy Machmuller, Chip Jones, Lee Toma, Jun Seung Lee

## Call to Meeting, 9:00am – Chair Dicken Crane

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo thanked the Council and officially welcomed Chair Crane and Vice Chair Smiley into their new roles.

### Memorial Drive Upgrades

At the end of December, DCR’s Design and Engineering team wrapped up work on more than $1.75 million in safety upgrades for pedestrians and cyclists along Memorial Drive in Cambridge, stretching from Magazine Street to Audrey Street via the BU Bridge rotary. These improvements include widening the shared-use path leading to the BU rotary, reconfiguring wheelchair ramps and median islands at the Memorial Drive and BU Bridge intersection, restriping crosswalks, and reducing the speed limit to 25 mph along the BU Bridge corridor. While the project is substantially complete, Commissioner Arrigo said there are few pieces that they continue to work on including replacing 700 linear feet of Boston Pattern Fencing, as well as milling, overlaying, and restriping the Commonwealth Avenue side of the BU Bridge.  In addition to these upgrades, DCR just hosted a public meeting for the 95% design of the Memorial Drive Phase 3 project and are currently reviewing public comments.

### Arborway Update

DCR’s Design and Engineering team hosted a public meeting to present the 25% design of the Arborway Improvement Project. Commissioner Arrigo said that this project was initiated in 2019 and has had a robust public process engaging with local stakeholders to finalize the design alternative. Program Engineer John Cavanaro presented the project along with our contractors at Howard Stein Hudson. The meeting hosted nearly 300 people, one of the largest public meetings to date, and they were able to ask questions and share comments about the project. The public comment period will be open for the next three weeks. Once the comments are reviewed, DCR will work to complete the project design. For more info on the project, you can visit the DCR Arborway Improvement Project webpage, and you can also view the recording and chat from the public meeting on our website.

### Reopening of the Melnea A. Cass Recreation Center

The reopening of the upgraded Melnea A. Cass Recreation Center in Roxbury was celebrated in December, highlighting significant improvements including a new athletic floor, upgraded equipment, a sound system, and interpretive panels honoring the center’s namesake - civil rights activist Melnea A. Cass.  These enhancements create a more accessible and versatile space for recreational and educational programs, serving the needs of Roxbury families. Commissioner Arrigo said that the reopening celebration was a tremendous success, bringing together the community, local officials and members of Melnea A. Cass’s family to highlight the center’s vital role in providing a welcoming space for people of all ages to gather and connect. He thanked Executive Director Chris Sumner, Antonio Menefee, Amarri Jackson, Vanessa Dale, and all the seasonal staff for their hard work in ensuring both the celebration and renovations were a success.

### Crossing Guard of Joy

Bill Beardsley one of DCR’s beloved crossing guards in Melrose has become a local favorite for his creative holiday costumes. From Santa to Cupid, he brings cheer to students while ensuring their safety. He was featured in a news story on Boston 25 that Commissioner Arrigo encouraged everyone to check out and see the joy he brings to students and their families!

### Fill the Boat

Central Region Director Jennifer Stowe and District Ranger Dave Furey proudly delivered a generous donation of toys to the Massachusetts Environmental Police's "Fill the Boat" toy drive. The toys, collected by staff from both the Central Region and Wachusett Reservoir, were selected with a special focus on encouraging outdoor activities. Commissioner Arrigo thanked DCR’s colleagues at MEP for organizing this wonderful annual event and said the agency looks forward to participating again next year.

### DCR Fire Participates in Holiday Parade

DCR’s District 1 Fire Control team brought some cheer to Mashpee Commons "Season of Illumination" parade on December 14 by decorating the 1-6 brush breaker with lights and inflatables. They even brought Smokey Bear along for the fun. Even amid the holiday festivities, Smokey took the opportunity to remind the public that "only you can prevent wildfires."

### Kwanza Celebration in Fall River

Fall River Heritage State Park held its first observation of Kwanzaa. The staff partnered on a sewing workshop with the Bristol Black Collective, a regional cultural organization. The workshop attracted 240 visitors to the Visitor Center and 45 participants. Each participant created their own table runner out of traditional African fabric patterns.  Kwanzaa events are intended to embrace African heritage culture, through a celebration of the seven principles, with the goal of strengthening community bonds.

### DCR Fire Control Team Participates in Training

In December, DCR firefighters participated in the M-410 Facilitative Instructor class at Joint Base Cape Cod.  This 40-hour training program is designed to help students become effective facilitators by focusing on student-oriented adult training techniques and improving overall training quality. The course also meets the National Wildfire Coordinating Group instructor requirements. Commissioner Arrigo said that as we see the devastation that is happening right now in California, it is more important than ever for the team to be prepared, and trainings like this help do just that.

### MA Climate Conservation Corps

The Climate Conservation Corps, a partnership between DCR, the Student Conservation Association, and AmeriCorps, recently completed a four-month season working on service projects across the Central Region. Their work included projects in Moore State Park, Erving State Forest, Holyoke Heritage State Park, and the Southern New England Trunkline Trail. The 9-person crew made significant contributions to our system including improving more than 23 miles of trail, constructing or repairing 22 water bars, building 73 box steps, 9 stone steps, and contributing 4,500 service hours to public lands in Massachusetts. Commissioner Arrigo remarked that the season also marked the start of nine new conservation careers.

### Historic Preservation Corps Recognition Ceremonies

The Historic Preservation Corps, a collaboration between DCR, the Student Conservation Association, and the National Park Service, wrapped up its 10-month program with a recognition ceremony at Wompatuck State Park on December 13. Corps-members worked on various DCR projects, including window sash rehabilitation at Tanker Bay in Bradley Palmer State Park and the Mill Building at Moore State Park, as well as historic door reconstruction at Castle Island’s Fort Independence and the Deer Barn at Manuel Correllus State Forest. The team also rehabilitated a CCC-era privy at Beartown State Forest’s Wildcat Trail. The 16 members of the Corps gained valuable preservation skills, wrapping up the season as highly trained young preservationists.

### Student Conservation Association

In December, the Student Conservation Association completed work on refreshing the blazes and performing brush cutting along the 7-mile Reservoir Loop Trail at Whitehall State Park.  The team faced all kinds of weather, from a wintry mix at the start of the week to heavy rain and midweek temperatures reaching 60°F, followed by dry and cold conditions.  Despite the challenging conditions, the team remained upbeat and positive, always maintaining their professionalism and dedication and Commissioner Arrigo thanked them for their hard work.

### DCR Secures $183M in ARPA Funding

Commissioner Arrigo announced that DCR designated its $183 million in ARPA 1.0 and 2.0 funding, to projects across the agency including 197 external earmarks and dozens of contracts and agreements. This significant achievement was led by Capital Budget Director Ryan Prentiss and Capital Planner Jaycee Cox, with crucial support from the Finance Team, the Contracts and Procurement Team, and our Division Business Managers, D&E Team, Legal Team, and Trails Team. He said this funding will drive key improvements to our parks and outdoor spaces, strengthening our commitment to enhancing the public's recreational experience.

### Capital Planning and Program Delivery (CPPD)

DCR has completed the CPPD process redesign with consulting firm Argus and the procurement of technology was completed in December 2024 and awarded to Stellar Services. The next phase of technology implementation begins soon and is estimated to take 8-10 months. A contract employee begins January 27th and is responsible for integration and training of the new technology.

### First Day Hikes

January 1st marked DCR’s 34th Annual First Day Hikes. Commissioner Arrigo said that this big event would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and dedication of the great DCR staff, adding that thanks to their efforts, and despite rainy weather, the participating parks welcomed nearly 2,000 participants to our parks across the state, from South Cape Beach to Great Falls, to start off 2025 by hiking a total of over 3,400 miles.

### Update on Indigenous Peoples Coordinator Work

Commissioner Arrigo gave an update on the work of Leah Hopkins in her new role as Indigenous Peoples Coordinator. He said that Leah is working on an internal needs assessment survey as well as a Tribal Outreach Plan and is also working on “Best Practices for Tribal Engagement” for staff as part of a training program.

### Fireside Chats

For the second winter, the Fireside Chats program series will be taking place at Breakheart Reservation beginning next week. The chats will be happening weekly on Wednesdays, starting on January 22 and running through February 26. Commissioner Arrigo said that they’ve got a great group of DCR staff members lined up to share their expertise and experiences at our parks by the fire.

### State of the Commonwealth

Commissioner Arrigo said that he will be attending Governor Healey’s State of the Commonwealth and is excited to hear what the Governor has planned for the coming year and how DCR fits into that plan.

### Research Symposium

DCR’s research symposium is planned for February 11 and 12 and this year will include presentations from DCR staff being given in a “SLAM!” format where staff will give 3–5-minute presentations with a maximum of 3 slides related to research in the conservation, preservation, and recreation fields. These are not pitches or project proposals but rather an exercise in ‘free thinking’ and an opportunity to communicate an idea with your colleagues. Commissioner Arrigo said that this has become a great annual event for the agency, and he hope that some of the council members will be able to join again.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Buckley asked about Governor Healey’s recently announced $8 billion transportation initiative and whether DCR is part of the package.

Commissioner Arrigo said that they are working to let people know that DCR has an important network of transportation assets and that the agency should be in line for some of the funding. He said it is an ongoing conversation.

Councilor Collins asked how DCR ensures racial and ethnic diversity in groups like the Student Conservation Corps.

Commissioner Arrigo responded that they have made efforts in Gateway Cities and other cities that have demographic diversity. He said this is especially true in cities where DCR has a presence that can be leveraged like in Lawrence, Lowell, and Fall River. He said that he also thinks about connections that can be made between Summer Nights and the Conservation Corps. He said that it is an ongoing process, but that they’ve made strides with municipalities and organizations like Lawrence Boys and Girls Club. He noted that DCR will be at the MMA conference mostly focusing on lifeguard recruitment and that those efforts happen at a local level.

Councilor Jasinski said that she participated in Memorial Drive phase three public meeting and that it was a well-attended and productive meeting. She said it especially highlighted how community feedback had been integrated into changes. She asked what internal work has been done to standardize or improve responses to community feedback.

Commissioner Arrigo said that it is something that they have been working to do and thanked Councilor Jasinski for recognizing it. He said that there are regional partnership coordinators that work as a buffer between the agency, especially the design and engineering team, and the people in the regions who can help provide feedback. He said that the coordinators can take feedback in as opposed to project managers who are focused on the technical aspects of the work. He gave credit to Dan Cushing, DCR’s director of Public Engagement, who works behind the scenes to make the public meetings happen and has perfected the agency’s ability to make sure that everyone who attends the meetings gets everything they need, whether it is a follow-up email or more information. He said that there is more work to do to build the regional team, and that jobs have been posted to hiring additional coordinators.

Councilor Canedy said that she is very pleased to see that the Melnea Cass Recreation Center is back up and running as a recreational facility, its originally intended use for the at-risk youth of the community.

Chair Crane Crane asked about the ARPA money that Commissioner Arrigo mentioned and whether it had all been spent.

Commissioner Arrigo said that it has not all been spent yet, but that DCR has hit all of the deadlines and will be spending the money over the next few years.

Chair Crane asked if federal money from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) will follow the same process.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he can follow up on that.

Councilor Smiley asked if there was an opportunity for the Council to help in regards to the transportation funding.

Commissioner Arrigo said that it is still an ongoing conversation and that he will keep the council updated.

Councilor Smiley said that she is very excited to hear about the Regional Coordinator positions being hired and asked if there was a timeline for when the new positions will be on board.

Commissioner Arrigo said that the Boston and South Regional Coordinator positions have been posted, and that the new Director of Partnerships is coming on board soon. He said that roughly between the next month or two the coordinators should be hired, and that they are hoping to have the Deputy Commissioner of Policy and Administration and be fully staffed in that department by the spring.

## Regular Business I

### Presentation on DCR Parkways Master Plan – Dan Driscoll, Director of Green Transportation

Mr. Driscoll presented to the council on DCR’s Parkway Master Plan.

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

Councilor Smith complimented Mr. Driscoll on the presentation and said that since he started on the Council, his outlook on this topic has changed. He said that things are moving in the right direction, and that things mentioned in the presentation like bike markings on the pavement seem like cost effective ways to make improvements. He asked about data around accidents between cyclists and pedestrians and whether or not eBikes have had an effect on these kinds of collisions.

Mr. Driscoll said that they have some data but that a lot of accidents of that nature go unreported. He said that most cyclists yield to pedestrians, and that sometimes pedestrians may be inadvertently going onto a bike facility and that they rely on people respecting each other and the rules. He said that for eBikes, they are allowed on paved shared use paths, but that they can only be pedal assist eBikes that can’t go over 20mph. He said that they do sometimes see faster eBikes on the paths and that they are working on education to prevent that, adding that the City of Cambridge has banned eBikes around Fresh Pond and that is something that DCR could also do at its own facilities if it needed to.

Councilor Collins said that he was really excited by the progress that has happened over the past five years. He commented that he was thrilled to see Vision Zero as a goal, but that he suggested changing the language from striving for Vision Zero to being committed to Vision Zero. He asked how Mr. Driscoll would describe Vision Zero as a state of adoption in DCR official policy.

Mr. Driscoll said that it is a part of DCR’s policy and that he can work with Ombudsman A.J. Tourigny and the Commissioner to have it on the forefront of the stated policy. He said that there were a lot of slides that weren’t part of the presentation for time sake that shows data on how they are working to achieve Vision Zero. He said that he is working with colleagues to lower speed limits and reduce lanes on DCR parkways which all go towards the goal. He agreed with Councilor Collins that commitment is a good word to use.

Councilor Jasinski said that she thinks reengagement with stakeholders about the Parkways Master Plan is really important. She said that it is a large project to undertake, and that she encourages and wants to hear about how community engagement is going to ramp up around the plan going forward.

Mr. Driscoll said that it is a good point, and that they are starting to pull out what they’ve accomplished in the plan because they don’t think that the advocates are aware of what has been done at this point. He said that they were meeting with advocates at least every six months before the Covid-19 pandemic, and that it is something that they should consider doing again.

Councilor Wilson said that it is good to know all the work that is going on and that there is progress with the plan. She said that consistency and predictability can be a good feature of safety and that signage and markers on roads can be confusing because of all the different groups involved on the roadways such as DCR, MassDOT, and municipalities. She said that wayfinding is a big piece of that as well. She asked what DCR is doing for the parkways for wayfinding and signage and how they are working with other agencies and municipalities.

Mr. Driscoll said that they have been proactive on wayfinding and that there is a wayfinding master plan that they have worked on with MassDOT to point people towards different landmarks and points of interest. He said that they are trying to eliminate having too much vertical signage and finding ways to paint wayfinding directly on the pavement. He said that he can provide the wayfinding manual with the council. He agreed that things can be confusing and that they need to be more proactive about education and working with the Registry of Motor Vehicles so that all markings being used are being shared with drivers so they know what they mean.

Councilor Ortiz thanked Mr. Driscoll for keeping in touch for people that are using the Neponset Greenway and for going on a ride on the trail with them. She suggested using the term users in the place of advocates when describing stakeholders. She asked about posting speed limit signs on bike trails for people who use eBikes. She followed up on Vision Zero and said that it is important that staff is also educated on Vision Zero and what it means.

Mr. Driscoll thanked her for her comments and agreed that users is a good term to use. He said that for the speed limit, when regulatory things like that are put out, it becomes something that needs to be enforced and its not clear how it will be. He said that speed limits can change based on trail use and time of day, and that you don’t need a license so police can’t identify you, but that they will continue to think it through. He agreed that education on Vision Zero is important.

Councilor Ortiz recommended that the speed limit could be a suggestion and not an enforceable regulation.

Councilor Buckley said that this was a great, informative presentation and that it answered a lot of questions that he had. He said that it’s important for DCR to share this vision more broadly. He added that transparency around the capital budget is critical, so people understand why there is a hierarchy of projects and how decisions on them are made and that at the next meeting, the council should discuss sending a communication to the Commissioner on Vision Zero and urge the agency to commit to changing the language.

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Smith moved to approve the December meeting minutes.

Councilor Buckley seconded the motion.

#### Roll Call on the Approval of the Minutes

Councilor Smiley – Yes

Councilor Canedy – Abstain

Councilor Smith – Yes

Councilor Wilson – Yes

Councilor Ortiz – Yes

Councilor Collins – Yes

Councilor Harper – Yes

Councilor Doherty – Yes

Councilor Buckley – Yes

Councilor Crane – Yes

### Presentation on Blackstone Complex Resource Management Plans – Paul Cavanagh, Resource Management Planner

Mr. Cavanagh presented on the Blackstone Complex Resource Management Plans (RMPs).

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

Councilor Collins thanked Mr. Cavanagh. He asked about the policy of seeking public input on closing more than 25% of trails and how that applies when the majority of the trails being closed are unauthorized. He said that it should be that unauthorized trails do not contribute towards the percentage and should be closed by discretion.

Mr. Cavanagh said that through discussions with the Trails and Greenways program and that it is the requirement that needs to be followed. He said that if it wasn’t over the 25% threshold, they would have the discretion to just close down the trails, but in Sutton, there are things that need to be addressed and it is an outlier. He said that once trails get established, whether with appropriate regulatory review or not, people come and use them and don’t know that they are unauthorized and they become part of the park experience so there is push back when they are being closed. He said he understands the concern, and that a trails plan is warranted for some of these properties, but that it may take a while because of the team’s current workload.

Councilor Wilson reminded the council has been hearing from Paul as he has been working on these RMPs and that everyone had the opportunity to attend the public meeting and review the drafts prior to the presentation. She said that they will vote on approval for the RMPs at the next meeting.

Councilor Smiley said that she thinks that DCR should share its public process for outreach and comments with MassDOT.

### 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. The following members of the public gave comments:

Karl Dziura, Conway

Sarah Freeman, Jamaica Plain

Lawrence Tucker, Snowmobile Association of Massachusetts

Ellen Arnold, Upton

## Regular Business II

### Committee Updates

#### Policy Committee

The Policy Committee will be holding a joint meeting with the Conservation Committee on February 4th and will hear from DCR staff on Landscape Designations and rodenticide use.

#### Stakeholders

The Stakeholders Committee will be meeting on January 24th at 8am.

## Adjournment

Councilor Buckley moved to adjourn the meeting.

Councilor Smith seconded the motion.

Councilor Crane thanked everyone for joining 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>