# Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present: Jennifer Wilson, Jeff Collins, Phil Doherty, Ann Canedy

**Other Councilors Present:** Dicken Crane, Jack Buckley

DCR Staff Attendees: Matthew Perry, Paul Cavanagh

## Public Attendees: Lawrence Tucker

## Call to Order and Welcome – Committee Chair Jennifer Wilson

Chair Wilson welcomed the attendees and went over the meeting agenda.

## Approval of Minutes

Councilor Collins made a motion to approve the November 28, 2023 meeting minutes.

Councilor Doherty seconded.

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

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Chair Wilson: Yes

The November minutes were approved.

## RMP Update

Paul Cavanagh, Resource Management Planner at DCR was welcomed to the meeting by Chair Wilson to discuss Resource Management Plans (RMPs) that are currently being worked on.

Mr. Cavanagh said that after the council approved the South Coast RMPs at the December 14 meeting, the rest of the work was finished and the RMP process has been closed,

For the Blackstone RMPs, Mr. Cavanagh reported that the issue for the past several months has been with the structure of the interpretive text in the plan. They have developed a new structure and more information about interpretive services than was included in the South Coast plans. Because they tend not to have public meetings during holidays, the plans have been on hold and Mr. Cavanagh is waiting for approval to release these RMPs to the public. He said that they are hopefully moving plans to the public within the next month.

For the Central Highlands RMPs, the first internal review has happened for seven drafts and eleven more plans were released to DCR employees for comments. It is being done in waves because Mr. Cavanagh said that they didn’t want to drop 31 plans at one time on staff. The plan is to move the rest of the plans forward by the end of March.

The Lakes District are in the initial stages, and they are working to figure out some boundary issues. They will begin to write the plans towards the end of the summer and will receive input by the end of 2024.

For Belle Isle Marsh, they are actively researching the property and correcting boundary data and are planning for an internal meeting in spring 2024.

Mr. Cavanagh said that they need to have the Blackstone RMP public meetings scheduled and held before they can move forward.

*After presenting, Mr. Cavanagh took questions and comments from the committee members.*

Councilor Buckley asked how much a discrepancy in the boundaries of the properties that they are dealing with.

Mr. Cavanagh said that it is sometimes tens to hundreds of acres and that Upton State Forest is the worst. They are working on it and have done a number of corrections already.

Mr. Cavanagh added that they hope to hold initial public meetings for the Lakes District in the fall and for Belle Isle in the spring. He said that they are making good progress on Central Highlands and that once the interpretive issue resolved, Blackstone will be moving forward.

Councilor Crane asked if there was any word on the Forestry Management Plans as they’re connected to RMPs.

Mr. Cavanagh said that when he met with the forestry staff, they told him that they are looking to create a statewide plan that would break the state into forest types with goals based on type. He added that he is not sure about the timing of that and that they are moving forward noting that they base RMPs on best existing information. He said that once forestry’s policy and plans are figured out, they will be incorporated that into the RMPs.

Councilor Buckley asked for Mr. Cavanagh to explain the delay related to interpretive services.

Mr. Cavanagh said that for the South Coast RMPs, the Interpretive Services Supervisor provided general information about themes, and it was decided after that the section should have a standardized format based on National Parks Service guidelines. For the central region, they Interpretive Services Supervisor provided information and when reviewed by Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis, it was not what she expected so they are now working to make it more in line with expectations.

Chair Wilson asked if they can begin to set target meeting dates for the RMPs as they move forward.

Mr. Cavanagh said yes, once the Blackstone RMPs move forward they should be able to figure out a schedule.

## Revisiting Legislative Amendment Proposals

Chair Wilson said that the amendments to the legislative language about the council were first approved by the council in 2020 and that a lot has happened since then. The council waited to take action because they wanted to see what the Special Commission said, go through the internal strategic planning process, and then the committee started the Strategic Oversight Plan. Through the Strategic Oversight Plan process, it became clear that everyone was alarmed at how many councilors have terms that end in 2025 and the discussion began again about changing term lengths from seven years to five years and staggering the terms amongst the councilors. She added that she has spoken with the Governor’s appointments office and that in order to achieve this, legislative action needs to be taken and that Councilor Chair Buckley has talked about putting the changes into a budget bill to move forward. She noted that half of the council was not there when the amendments were approved and that she would like to revisit them to discuss more.

A copy of the amendments was provided to the committee to discuss.

Councilor Buckley said that they should move forward by finding a friendly legislator that can strike section two and inset a new section with what they have written about terms and staggering.

Chair Wilson said that if there is a legislator that has language that they would prefer, they can use that.

Councilor Collins said that he wasn’t around for the conversation related to the environmental groups that are represented to choose the two environmental seats, but he is also interested in the other eleven other seats and who puts names forward.

Chair Wilson said that the original six groups listed were probably part of a political compromise to get legislation passed when DCR was formed, and since that time, other groups have proliferated that have a stake and it is worth revisiting to see if there should be a broader reflection of the groups.

Councilor Buckley said that other groups have matured and grown since it was originally written and might want to have a say in the seats.

Chair Wilson said the documents are a useful history and that they were supported by the stakeholders group and the special commission. She added that if the time is right, they can take more action on what was approved or just work to change the terms.

Councilor Buckley asked if they should get the council to approve the language before moving forward.

Chair Wilson said that the council has approved the language and that they can distribute them to remind everyone. She added that it would be good to put it on the council agenda to revisit and approve.

## Other Business

Chair Wilson asked for committee members to give her thoughts on other topics that they think would be good for the committee going forward into 2024. She said that they should go back and look at the Strategic Oversight Plan and see what was put in there. She also mentioned structuring the RMP calendar and timeline.

Councilor Buckley said that with the RMP process, sometimes roadblocks turn up, but that there should be some way of doing the plans systematically or routinely without getting delayed by staff. He suggested that the council can remind them that there is a process in place and that they can express concerns when delays happen.

Chair Wilson said that there is a dashboard, but it doesn’t show when a delay happens or what the delay is.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the dashboard was updated on January 23.

Councilor Canedy said that even with the dashboard, there are still delays. She asked how to prevent the process from stalling.

Chair Wilson said that they can ask DCR leadership to consider and commit to finishing RMPs in a certain way, and to ask the Commissioner what can be done to be helpful.

Mr. Cavanagh said that delays are the exception, not the rule and that when there are delays, they shift the entire series of RMPs that are being worked on. He said that delays sometimes occasionally pop-up, but that for the most park, they have work arounds that keep the program moving forward even when the delays occur.

Chair Wilson said that they should look at the Strategic Oversight Plan to see if it triggers any thoughts moving forward. She said that Mr. Perry can send the marked-up language to everyone before the next council meeting. She also added that she has been the chair of the Policy Committee for two-years and that if anyone else is interested in being the chair to let her know.

## Public Comment

Lawrence Tucker, member of the Snowmobile Association of Massachusetts and South Hadley resident asked if there was a suggestion for an improvement at DCR, what is the best way to move forward with it.

Councilor Buckley said that the best place to start is at the public comment period of the council meetings.

Councilor Canedy added that he can also send written comments to the council.

Chair Wilson said that he could also speak with the Stakeholders Committee.

Mr. Tucker thanked everyone for their suggestions.

## Adjournment

Chair Wilson thanked everyone for their attendance 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*](https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council)