# **July 24, 2025 Meeting Minutes**

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

Council Members Absent: Phil Doherty, Jennifer Wilson

DCR Staff Attendees: Nicole LaChapelle, Matthew Perry, Kendra Amaral, Alexandra Echandi, Megan Shave, Paul Fahey, Amanda Lewis, Chloe Gotsis, Ilyse Wolberg, Jacob Loitherstein

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Alex Cassie, Ali Badrigian, Andres Ripley, Chip Jones, Christian MilNeil, Christine Liu, Chuck Anastas, Craig Della Penna, David Alden, Doug Pizzi, Jen Mergel, Lawrence Tucker, Sarah Freeman, Scott Morrill, Steven Greenberg, Suzanne Gall Marsh, Wendy Machmuller

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

## Introduction of Commissioner Nicole LaChapelle

Commissioner LaChapelle introduced herself to the council. She said that she was Mayor of Easthampton for seven year, grew up in Western Mass, and now lives in a house with a view of Mount Tom State Reservation. She said that she is excited to be Commissioner of DCR and to work with the Council. She invited Deputy Commissioner Kendra Amaral to give an update on what has been happening at DCR.

## DCR Report – Deputy Commissioner Kendra Amaral

Deputy Commissioner Amaral thanked the Council and said that it was nice to meet many of them in June at their meeting on Peddocks Island.

### Fourth of July Recap

Deputy Commissioner Amaral spoke about the July 4th holiday, saying that hundreds of thousands of people are welcomed to DCR property to celebrate the holiday, noting that this year was especially important as we approach the 250th anniversary of the founding of our country. She spoke about the Pops concert and fireworks on the esplanade, and other celebrations that took place in Waltham, Lynn, Fall River, and Plymouth. In addition to the special events, people also flocked to DCR beaches, lakes, mountains, and forests to enjoy a day in the great outdoors. Deputy Commissioner Amaral thanked DCR staff who helped coordinate all these events and that spent their holiday working so that others could enjoy it.

### Learn to Camp Weekend

On July 19 and 20, DCR held its annual learn to camp weekend at Otter River. It was fully booked and the 16 families that participated had a great time. This is the second year that the program was held with support from the Bronco Wild Fund. Families learned basic camping skills, went on hikes with DCR staff, had s’mores and stories around the campfire, and learned to fish with our colleagues from MassWildlife. L.L. Bean generously donated a family camping package with a 6-person tent, 4 sleeping bags, 4 sleeping pads, and a camping lantern. This was raffled off at the end and a family from New Bedford were the lucky campers who received it! Deputy Commissioner Amaral thanked all the staff that helped to make this great event possible, especially Amy Wilmot, Hannah Jordan, Jennifer Stowe, Kevin Hollenbeck, Simon Schreier, Jason Hunt, Julie Martin, Jameson Dillon, Brandi King, and the entire staff at Otter River State Forest.

### Memorial Drive Lane Closure -Mount Auburn Building

Commissioner Amaral gave an update on the closure of a section of Memorial Drive due to concerns around the structural integrity of the building at 221 Mount Auburn Street also known as the Riverview Condominium Building in Cambridge.

* In coordination with the City of Cambridge and out of an abundance of caution due to these concerns, we closed the right lane of Memorial Drive westbound between Hawthorn Street and Gerrys Landing Road.
* While the city is working through their process to demolish the building this section of Memorial Drive will remain closed.
* Despite the closure, both eastbound lanes and the left westbound lane of this segment of Memorial Drive will remain open to traffic.
* And we’re recommending pedestrians and cyclists traveling through the area use the Paul Dudley White Bike Path or the crossings at Hawthorn Street and Gerrys Landing Road.
* Additionally, the opening Riverbend Park on Sundays will not be affected by this closure.
* We also do not anticipate any impacts to the planned construction of the Memorial Drive Phase III improvements that are expected to begin this fall.
* At this point we don’t have a timeline of when the road may reopen but we will continue to update you and the public when we have more information.

### Mass Ready Act

Deputy Commissioner Amaral spoke to the council about the Mass Ready Act and its proposed impact on DCR and the work the agency does.

She said that bill, S.2542, was referred to the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and that members of DCR’s senior team attended a hearing that was held on the bill.  Lieutenant Governor Driscoll, EEA Secretary Tepper, and Administration and Finance Secretary Gorzkowicz testified at the hearing and answered questions on the bill from the committee. Deputy Commissioner Amaral noted that the bill is wide ranging and deals with funding for projects and several outside sections which make changes to DCR’s legislation. The bill includes

* $764 million for DCR improvements to roadways, bridges,  multi-use trails, recreational facilities, parks, campgrounds, beaches and playgrounds.
* $308.1 million is also included for the design, construction, maintenance repair, removal, and improvements of state owned or abandoned dams, including;
	+ $191 million for coastal improvements,
	+ $44 million for dam safety, inspection, and maintenance,
	+ $50 million for flood control,
	+ $93.8 million for stormwater management and environmental remediation.
* The bill also includes language that codifies how reserves will be designated for DCR parkland and water supply land, including a majority vote by the Stewardship Council.
* The outside sections include provisions that consolidate and clean up predecessor agency authority. This includes moving authority granted in Chapter 92 (MDC) and Chapters 132 and 132A (DEM) to Chapter 21.

Additionally, the outside sections include the transfer of roadway sections identified following the 2011 Parkway Study and consistent with the objectives identified in Special Commission Report and the Strategic Readiness Initiative.

* The roadways identified for transfer to MassDOT in Boston, Cambridge, Medford, Revere, Somerville, and Lynn are currently under a maintenance agreement with DOT.
* The roadways in Allston-Brighton, Stoneham and Melrose are identified for transfer to their respective communities.

Deputy Commissioner Amaral noted that EEA Undersecretary Stephanie Cooper will be joining the meeting and can provide additional information, answer any questions and discuss a letter of support for the bill.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Chair Crane said that it seems like there will be some time before the Mass Ready Act is voted on and that there will be time for amendments as the process moves on. He said that this is the beginning of the work.

Councilor Smiley thanked Deputy Commissioner Amaral for the report and for all the great work that has been done over the past month at DCR.

Councilor Jasinski welcomed Commissioner LaChapelle. She thanked DCR for working with the City of Cambridge on the Memorial Drive closure. She asked if this will change the phase three construction updates, and if it does change, how the public will be notified.

Deputy Commissioner Amaral said that there have been conversations with the contractor that received the bid for phase three and have gone through what the situation currently is. They do not feel like it will impact construction and they will be in communication with them in case anything changes, and will notify the public the same way they did with the lane closure.

## Regular Business I

### Presentation on DCR Trail Master Plans, Alexandra Echandi, Senior Trails and Greenways Planner and Megan Shave, Senior Inland Ecologist

Ms. Echandi and Ms. Shave gave a presentation on DCR Trail Master Planning efforts.

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

Councilor Buckley thanked Ms. Echandi and Ms. Shave for the presentation. He said he would like to see a follow up presentation of trail funding and how the program works with towns.

Councilor Jasinski asked if there could be an opportunity for broad coordination among partners where people can learn from others about helping with maintenance and outreach and asked if there were tools to help coordinate between groups that have agreements with DCR.

Ms. Echandi said that there are ways to build these relationships. She noted that groups like the Appalachian Mountain Club maintains long distance trails and has an MOU that is more comprehensive and long lasting. She also said that she believes MassWildlife is issuing licenses to maintain trails on their properties.

Councilor Collins said that he finds it disturbing that 20% of trails on DCR property are unauthorized and that the number approaches over 50% on some properties. He said that to address this issue they need more staff time on the properties to monitor and maintain them. He said that he is wary of attempting to bring unauthorized trails into the authorized trail system because it might be motivation for people to continue to build rogue trails. He said that he looks forward to hearing more about investments that will help get this issue under control.

Chair Crane said that stopping rogue trails will largely be through communication with stakeholders and building relationships with them.

Councilor Smiley asked how communications happens with stakeholders and whether there is anything that the Stakeholders committee can do to help.

Ms. Echandi said that all trail maintenance and building of trails needs to be approved by the Head of State Parks which is Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis. She said that they haven’t actively reached out to partners, but that there are groups like the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) who they have spoken to. She said that it might be a good issue to present at a future Trails Conference.

Chair Crane asked if permitting is one of the significant roadblocks for trail work.

Ms. Echandi said yes, especially when it comes to maintenance of authorized trails, it becomes a question of who is going to pay and apply for the permits to do the work.

### Discussion of the Mass Ready Act with EEA Undersecretary Stephanie Cooper

Chair Crane welcomed Undersecretary Cooper to the meeting and thanked her for joining. He asked where the ideas in the Mass Ready Act came from and who had influence when crafting the bill.

Undersecretary Cooper said that they started working on the bill in August 2024 with agencies and EEA looking at authorization and working with Administration and Finance to see what is left to be spent. They then looked at goals such as land conservation and considered how much would be needed to get to those goals. She said that there is always the optimal full investment versus what is possible. For policy, they considered where authority needed to be changed based on policy initiatives that are being worked on or proposed through the bill. They also heard from stakeholders including the statewide bond coalition, and many others who contributed. She said that the priorities were consistent with what they were hearing across the board, strengthening infrastructure, protecting water and nature, and investing in local economies. They acknowledged that the legislature will make changes to the bill as it moves through the process, and that things that were not able to be included may be later on.

Councilor Buckley said that he noticed in the bill that there are a number of parkway dispositions and that these can be controversial. He asked how they were vetted to make sure they are not controversial.

Undersecretary Cooper said that they looked at the Parkways Masterplan from 2011 and recommendations from the Strategic Readiness Initiative to see what assets would be better managed by other entities. They proposed six segments to be transferred to MassDOT that are all under care and control of MassDOT currently, and three segments that are proposed to be transferred to municipalities. DCR’s Ombudsman A.J. Tourigny consulted with MassDOT and local leaders to make sure there were no concerns with the proposed segments.

Councilor Buckley said that with the reserve language that calls for the approval of the council, there were landscape designations created by the agency several years ago and approved by the council and that the council currently puts a lot of effort into the approval of Resource Management Plans and that he would like to know how all of the pieces fit together.

Undersecretary Cooper said that the provision included in the Mass Ready Act provides an administrative process for how reserves are designated. This was based on the Forest as Climate Solutions initiative. The Landscape Designations that were done resulted in DCR State Parks division creating 100,000 acres of reserves at the agency level. The update to Landscape Designations came up at the same time as Forests as Climate Solutions, and out of this the criteria for reserves was refreshed and there was a review to make sure that things are consistent across the three divisions, State Parks, Water Supply, and the Department of Fish and Game. She said in terms of RMPs, when the plans are being worked on, the designation of land is taken into account and that recommendations are consistent with management guidelines. Climate oriented management guidelines were created for state lands through Forests as Climate Solutions.

Councilor Buckley asked if there is a piece of property that is going to be a reserve, then it will come before the council and will require a landscape designation that also comes before the council, and if this is the same act because the two processes are accomplishing the same thing.

Undersecretary Cooper said that original landscape designations were done for the whole system, and now the process for new reserves comes before the council, and a reserve designation is just one type of landscape designation.

Chair Crane asked about the Forest Reserve Science Advisory Committee and how it is changing, and how their work fits in with the council.

Undersecretary Cooper said that it has been updated to the Forest Reserve Science and Technical Advisory Committee, and it now advises for all three divisions. The committee advised on the recently updated criteria for all three divisions, and she said it would make sense for the Council to want to speak with them to understand the criteria.

Councilor Collins asked about the updates to Chapter 61 and the language that DCR will consult with the Department of Housing. He asked how this consultation will work and whether there is a pathway for Chapter 61 land to end up as housing.

Undersecretary Cooper said that the process for DCR is subordinate to the municipality involved, but that it runs in parallel. She said that the consultation with Housing and Livable Communities helps to make sure that priorities are aligned.

Councilor Jasinski asked if there was a map of roadways being transferred that can be shared with the council.

Undersecretary Cooper said that she is not sure what is available, but something can be created for the council.

Councilor Jasinski suggested that for the letter that is being considered regarding the Mass Ready Act, they should separate the line items from the outside sections and just send support for the line items to the Committee on Natural Resources.

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Buckley made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 26, 2025 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Jasinski seconded the motion.

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

Councilor Smiley – Yes

Councilor Canedy – Yes

Councilor Jasinski – Yes

Councilor Smith – Yes

Councilor Collins – Yes

Councilor Ortiz – Yes

Councilor Harper – Abstain

Councilor Dooley – Yes

Councilor O’Shea – Yes

Councilor Buckley – Yes

Councilor Crane – Yes

The June 26, 2025 meeting minutes were approved.

### Approval of Letter to Joint Committee on Natural Resources regarding the Mass Ready Act

Councilor Collins moved to approve the letter to the Joint Committee on Natural Resources regarding the Mass Ready Act addressing only the funding lines, to be sent before the July 29, 2025 deadline for public comment.

Councilor Buckley seconds the motion.

#### Roll Call on the Approval of the letter

Councilor Smiley – Yes

Councilor Canedy – Yes

Councilor Jasinski – Yes

Councilor Smith – Yes

Councilor Ortiz – Yes

Councilor Collins – Yes

Councilor Harper – Yes

Councilor Dooley – Yes

Councilor O’Shea – Yes

Councilor Buckley – Yes

Councilor Crane – Yes

The letter was approved and will be sent to the Joint Committee on Natural Resources.

### 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 Crane invited members of the public for comment.

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

* Chip Jones, Snowmobile Association of Massachusetts
* Doug Pizzi, Mass Parks for All
* Andres Ripley, Neponset River Watershed Association
* Christian MilNeil, Streetsblog Massachusetts

## Regular Business II

### Nominating Committee Appointments

Chair Crane appointed the following council members to the Nominating Committee:

* Jack Buckley
* Jeff Collins
* Dennis Smith

### Committee Updates

#### Policy and Conservation Committees

The committees have been holding joint meetings and will be meeting to hear more about rodenticide use on DCR properties. The conservation are identifying issues that they are interested in pursuing including trails and the state biodiversity goals.

#### Stakeholders

Councilor Smiley reported that the Stakeholders Committee will be having a transition in leadership and a new chair will be taking over.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor Buckley recognized the passing of Betsy Shure, a lifelong parks advocate and driving force behind the Muddy River Restoration Project and the National Association of Olmsted Parks.

## Adjournment

Councilor Buckley moved to adjourn the meeting.

Councilor Smiley seconded.

Chair Crane 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>