



## MASSACHUSETTS RECREATIONAL TRAILS ADVISORY BOARD

**June 9, 2020**

Zoom-Based Conference Call

1:00 – 3:00pm

### ***Members Present with Representation:***

Tom Chamberland, Chair - Local Land Trust/Non-Profits  
Bill Boles – Mountain Biking  
Tim Craig – Youth Corps  
Joe Geller – Rail Trail Users  
Marianne Iarossi – Municipal Trail Planners  
Bridget Likely – Hiking  
Aaron North – Hiking  
Dick O'Brien – Community Trails and Greenways Groups  
Ben Phelps – All Terrain Vehicles  
Larry Tucker – Snowmobiling  
Mike White – 4-Wheel Drive Clubs  
Dick Williamson – Bicycling/Rail Trails

### ***Liaisons:***

Amanda Lewis – DCR MassTrails  
Libby Knott – DCR MassTrails  
Scott Morrill – EOEEA OHV Coordinator  
Christine Chisholm – DFW Land Stewardship

### ***Meeting Minutes:***

- I. Welcome
- II. 2020 Grant Process Review and Comments
- III. Recusal Procedure(s) and Bylaws Update
- IV. Membership Terms
- V. Other Business

### **Welcome**

- Approve Minutes from January 21, 2020 meeting  
Tom put forth a motion to accept meeting minutes from January 21, 2020 meeting. Chris abstained from vote. Motion was seconded and meeting notes were approved.

### **2020 Grant Process Review and Comments**

- Given our success this past March, Amanda suggested that we consider holding the review remotely in the future. COVID-19 dictated how we needed to manage this year's review, but given the efficiency we experienced we may want to refine and tweak and try this again in 2021.



- Dick W. reiterated that we should endeavor to make criteria plainly evident to applicants, as well as how each is weighted, in order to level the playing field.
- Bridget pointed out that applicants may have been confused as to what determines or defines an Environmental Justice Community, and to what degree their project may benefit adjacent an EJC, if their community isn't one. We may want to consider providing a link to an EJC GIS map so that applicants can easily identify area EJCs. Amanda noted that some applicants also exaggerate their proximity and impact on EJCs so it is a double-edge sword, and really up to reviewers to utilize maps and data to help them when scoring.
- Tom noted that we have a way to go in clarifying the accessibility component, especially hiking trails. Amanda is striving to enhance this and the program will take another step towards refining and defining this component to guide applicants in this next year's process. Joe added that instead of allowing a simple Yes or No answer to this section, that we require the applicant to explain fully why they comply, or why they can't but what they propose to do instead to be as accessible as possible. Amanda and Libby will work on language in the application to change in an effort to guide and educate the applicant in their answer. There is a goal to get some resource material and guidance up on the MassTrails website as soon as possible. But in the meantime, if any MARTAB member receives an inquiry about accessibility, please put them in contact with Amanda and/or Libby for guidance. Additionally, if you have content or wording that you believe will be effective in providing applicants some guidance, please forward to Amanda and Libby to incorporate into what they are working on. The time to do this is now as Amanda and Libby are working on program upgrades including online reporting, and pre-application resources and guidance.
- Ben added that he was hesitant that we had gone completely digital in our review process with regards to not delivering printed copies of applications. However, he ended up liking it. Amanda and Libby would like to really keep the process going forward as environmentally friendly as possible. The amount of paper, ink, and energy saved is well worth it when you consider the amount of applications we receive.

#### Recusal Procedure(s) and Bylaws Update

- Tom cited the obvious issue we should address if the pandemic or any other unforeseeable event restricts our ability to meet in person when it comes to our recusal procedures. We initially proposed language and processes from the condition of meeting in person. However, we did not have or anticipate needing a process of recusal when meeting virtually. We should consider adding language to address this. In the instance of our annual grant review, we adapted as best we could last-minute.
- A subcommittee to address the recusal language and bylaws update was formed. It is comprised of Dick O'Brien, Bill Boles, Ben Phelps, Mike White, and Libby Knott. Libby will organize a meeting soon to begin discussion of refining the recusal process. The subcommittee will review current suggest language, additional language and/or edits as they believe necessary, and then present to the membership on whole. The schedule for this is to aim for 2-3 meetings this summer/early fall. Then to share drafted language with the entire MARTAB membership prior to our October meeting with a commentary period. The hope being to have a final draft ready for a vote of adoption at that October meeting.
- Subcommittee will also look at term limits (see further information below)



## Membership Terms

- We have limited access to our file server and don't seem to have a current list of member terms. Libby shared the spreadsheet that we do have access to with all of the MARTAB members, and will send out again with the meeting. ***Please check both tabs for your contact information and your term information to confirm we have updated, accurate information. Send any updates or edits you may find to Libby.***
- Due to COVID-19 delays and challenges, Tom will remain Chair for now.
- Charlene has stepped down which elevates Kayla Prang from alternate to full member. Amanda has talked with Kayla about this.
- Amanda proposed keeping the 5-year term with a 1-year grace period. Upon term completion it is up to the MARTAB member to find his/her replacement. Joe warned about being mindful to not create a scenario where there would be complete or majority turn over. Maintaining a rolling term, staggered start for members coming on board will help avoid this.
- For Chair and Vice Chair the consensus is that a 1-year term for each is too short. Dick O. proposed a 3-year term. Tom doesn't see a problem with 3 years, but it should be 2 years at a minimum.
- Tom asked for Vice Chair nomination requests and stated that the board's structure is such that a Vice Chair is necessary for success. The position has gone unfilled for too long. After review of the VC's responsibilities, Tim nominated himself with Mike and Dick O. seconding. A roll call vote unanimously appointed Tim as Vice Chair.
- The Bylaws subcommittee will look at the following in addition to the recusal procedure(s):
  - Term length for members
  - Grace period for members nearing end of term
  - Length of tenure for Chair and Vice Chair
  - Does Vice Chair automatically become Chair? Or does that pose too long a tenure and obligation?
  - Cultivating new members; culling from trails network to fill vacant membership slots

## Other Business

### January Meeting – Tabled Items

- Trails Fest – Due to the pandemic we are going to table the discussion on MARTAB's potential involvement in this event. It potentially will not even take place this year and we will take it off our fall Agenda for now until some other trail organization takes up the discussion and planning again.
- Legislative Trail Caucus – Tom noted the fact that no one is meeting right now and he's not sure when meetings will resume at the State House. It could possibly be part of the Phase 4 re-opening but no one knows for sure. Dick O. asked if we can invite Don Burn to this conversation when we take it up again. We will leave on the Agenda for the fall meeting with the potential to set up a subcommittee when the time is right.



## Open Discussion

- Dick W. asked Amanda for a clearer definition on the parallel roles of MARTAB and the Inter-Agency Trails Team, especially with regard to reviewing the grant applications. Of concern, is that none of the applications first considered for the state funds were passed on to the RTP review if they were rejected for those state funds. Amanda broke down the distinction in this way:
  - All shared use pathways were reviewed for state capital funds; most of which are projects in the design phase not construction
  - All recreational trails were reviewed for federal RTP funds
  - It was determined that to keep the process as fair as possible, those applications rejected for state funds would not then have a chance at the federal funds as that would give those particular applications two bites at the piece of pie
- Larry noted that there is more money in the state pot this year than the RTP and wondered if there is a way to tap into that state money or to adjust. He noted that Motorized applications can only receive money through RTP and asked if it might be possible that Motorized can tap into the state funding in the future. Amanda pointed out that the reason behind the differences in funding level is that the state funds have been allotted to cover the *deficit* in funding for planning, design, engineering, and construction of shared-use pathway networks across the state, often much more expensive but just as critical to the overall trail network in Massachusetts. RTP funds cannot cover some of these activities. Additionally, MARTAB and the program can only fund a very small percentage of shared use path projects in order to assure funding for both motorized and non-motorized (natural surface) trail projects, which the program has always focused on more greatly than shared-use path networks, due to the recreational nature of those trails. If, in the future, the two funds get drastically lopsided, we can take up the conversation again at that time. Also, Amanda noted that Motorized has an advantage because the RTP regulations state that the grants awarded must be comprised of at least 30% Motorized. Historically, Motorized applications don't score very high and we tend to not receive a large quantity of these types of applications. If they scored higher, they would have the potential to take an even larger portion of the overall RTP funds than the 30% minimum. If anything changes, there is nothing holding us back from funding additional Motorized grants other than a lack of applications, and moreover a lack of well-researched and written applications paired with all the required documentation. It might be worth some advocacy to Motorized groups to help educate and instruct on grant writing techniques.
- Dick O. inquired about MassTrails' follow up procedure(s) to applicants who did not receive an award. He has been approached over the years by applicants who wonder why their projects did not score well enough to be awarded funding. Could we possibly formalize a process by which to send applicants in this situation the reviewers' comments to help them plan for future rounds, or other grant money opportunities? Amanda acknowledged that it is sometimes very helpful to receive feedback. However, it's a complicated issue with many different facets to it. First, not all



the reviewers write thorough, full-sentence comments, which is then not helpful to the applicant. To parse all of the meaning out of anecdotal, short comments, then to edit them into something coherent and constructive is not only a huge amount of work for Amanda and Libby to undertake, it also risks sending a biased account of the comments given that Amanda and/or Libby would have to try to objectively interpret someone else's review notes. Additionally, Amanda's letter to these applicants instructs each on how to contact her if they would like to go over their application's review. When an applicant does request this, she does due diligence beforehand in that she re-reads the application, looks at all supporting documentation submitted, and reviews all the individual scores and comments from the reviewers well in advance of having a conversation with the applicant. The process is very detailed and she goes to great lengths to provide supportive, educational, focused feedback that will help the applicant re-apply in the next round, or revise for any other grant funds they have an opportunity to apply for. All comments are kept for the public record, and can be requested anytime. Tom suggested that we revisit this issue in January prior to the next review round. Dick's point is that we are moving towards digitally capturing a lot of the program's information and perhaps this is a good opportunity to do the same for the review comments moving forward as part of transparency.

- Dick O. brought up a concern he has regarding the Miller's River Trail project not being built to ADA specifications that were part of the original scope. Amanda is planning a site visit in the near future to review what has transpired. She'll review her notes, too, as the finished project may have had to conform to some archeological restrictions that altered the ability to build accessibly. Dick reported that the path is washing out due to run off, and one entrance point is nowhere near being accessible. Tom added that we should give some thought to how we check on projects at their conclusions to ensure they were built according to what they proposed (and received funding for). Amanda has been working on some programmatic changes to build in some infrastructure towards this end. It will hopefully be easier to accomplish now that Libby is on board and they can divide the work. Ideally, as projects progress the reporting structure will raise any red flags and can be addressed ongoing. Towards the end, the grantee will have to have a site visit before submitting their final report and final reimbursement. The repercussions of not building the project to the approved scope, is that final reimbursement will not be made. We will add this to our next meeting agenda to discuss more.

**Meeting Adjourned 3:15pm**