# Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

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

Other Councilors Present**:** Dicken Crane

DCR Staff Attendees: Matthew Perry, Paul Cavanagh

## Public Attendees: Olivia Oestreicher

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

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

She asked if Councilor Crane could share his presentation from the Joint Meeting held in February with the MassWildlife Board. Mr. Perry said he would ask Susan Sacco if the meeting was recorded to get a copy for viewing.

## Approval of Minutes

Councilor Canedy made a motion to approve the January 30, 2024 meeting minutes.

Councilor Collins seconded.

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

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Canedy: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Chair Wilson: Yes

The January 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 11 of the Central Highlands RMPs have been through internal review, and that 13 more will begin internal review starting April 1. He expects the review to last six weeks, wrapping up in May so it is done before the main part of the spring and summer seasons.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the Blackstone Complex RMPs are still on hold and have been since the fall because of an issue that involves the way a section of the RMPs was written by Visitor Services and the expectations of the Deputy Commissioner. Mr. Cavanagh believes that the RMP program has found a way forward, and they are waiting to hear back on the suggestion they proposed.

Chair Wilson asked if there was anything that the Council could do about the situation.

Mr. Cavanagh said that a vote or a comment about moving forward could be helpful.

He reported that they are getting ready for the Belle Isle Marsh RMP and that they met to inquire within the agency the status of various projects at the property. He said that this is a step that hasn’t been taken before for RMPs and that before the public meeting, they want to know everything that people in the agency have been doing over the past five years at Belle Isle.

After the Central Highlands RMPs under internal review come back, they will begin the 31 Lakes Region RMPs.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the way public meetings are held has changed, and that there are now outreach plans, ASL interpreters, and bilingual announcements involved in all of them. He said that they have the money to do these new processes, and that he is going to meet with Dan Cushing who does public meetings for the agency. Once the new process is settled, there will be a meeting held for Belle Isle followed by the public meetings for the Blackstone RMPs.

Chair Wilson asked if it is Mr. Cavanagh’s office’s responsibility to comply with these new standards.

Mr. Cavanagh said that he is not sure yet and that is why they are meeting with Dan Cushing to find out more.

The RMP Dashboard has been updated. Mr. Cavanagh said that it is the same information as was there before, but it is now structured differently and redone to increase accessibility. He also said that the State Library now requires all documents submitted to it be accessible as well, and that will include final RMPs going forward.

Councilor Canedy asked what the interpretive text issue with the Blackstone RMPs is.

Mr. Cavanagh responded that the Visitor Services department does the Interpretive Themes section of RMPs and bases the section on National Parks Service (NPS) standards. Some people in the agency believe that the section should be more flowery and brochure like, and that the NPS standards are more mechanical. He said that they have proposed that the other portions of the plan written by the RMP program can be more flowery and “markety” and that they can keep the interpretive section the way it is.

Councilor Canedy asked if the audience for the section being debated was for staff.

Mr. Cavanagh said yes, but that there is also a public aspect to it that they want to be conscious of.

Councilor Canedy said that they should urge that the RMPs be moved along.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the Council’s urging could help, and that the plans are at the point that they can be released to the public.

Chair Wilson asked if Mr. Cavanagh could send the committee an example of the language he is referring to. She asked if this is something that they can talk about in the Committee Report for the full meeting, or have Council Chair Buckley bring up in a discussion with the Commissioner.

The Committee concurred.

Mr. Cavanagh said that he hopes that the program’s suggestion to move forward will make a discussion by the Council unnecessary.

## Revisiting Legislative Amendment Proposals

Chair Wilson said that from the last meeting, it seems like the Committee isn’t sure if they want to pursue more complex changes, or if they would weigh down the easier fixes. She said the proposed fixes are staggering terms and changing their lengths from seven years to five years.

Councilor Collins said that Representative Simon Cataldo has offered to sponsor the changes.

Chair Wilson asked if they would need a senate sponsor as well and if Senator Brownsberger should be contacted. She said she would talk to Council Chair Buckley.

Councilor Collins asked if this is something that should be discussed at the next full meeting of the Council.

Chair Wilson said that it would be good to have the Council approve it before moving it forward.

Councilor Canedy said that sections 3 and 3A should be considered for change too.

Chair Wilson said that the plan is to have the changes made in two phases, saying that a bigger change like that may slow down the simpler changes to the terms.

Councilor Canedy agreed.

Councilor Crane suggested Senator Paul Mark may be able to help.

Chair Wilson said that she will talk to Council Chair Buckley about the best way forward.

## Rodenticide Use in Parks

Councilor Collins said that there are issues that arise around rodent control, especially with rats and the use of black boxes that you may see around towns and urban areas. He said that the poison used to kill rats then affects the predators that eat the dead rodents. He said that there are questions around DCR and how these rodenticides are used. He said that DCR can be a leader here, and that the questions he has are about DCR’s management practices and how DCR can be a leader in integrated pest management.

Councilor Canedy asked if these are used for mice as well.

Councilor Collins said maybe, but that it is mostly for rats.

Chair Wilson asked Mr. Perry or Mr. Cavanagh if they are familiar with the agency’s policy.

Mr. Cavanagh said no, but that since it needs to be a licensed applicator it needs to be contracted to an outside company.

Chair Wilson asked if this is a topic that people are interested in and if Mr. Perry can bring some answers back to them and then they can go to the full council.

Mr. Perry said that he would talk to the Operations team and the Natural Resources team to gather information for the committee.

## Topics and goals for 2024

Chair Wilson said that the remaining legislative amendments can be a topic for the committee to focus on this year. She said that once the terms are changed and staggered, they will have to work with the governor’s office for an orderly transition.

Councilor Collins asked how many current members are in their second terms.

Chair Wilson said that Councilor Dennis Smith is.

Chair Wilson added that one other topic that they could talk about is about the DCR Rangers and how much enforcement they should be doing when it comes to issues like unauthorized trails, pets off leash, and carry-in, carry-out policies. She said that they don’t want to be a police state, but that things should be enjoyable for everyone that uses the parks. She said that this is a hot button issue right now in the Fells where the Friends of the Fells kicked off the “Be Kind!” campaign. She said that it seems promising, but that she was copied on a letter from local legislators that said they are not seeing a difference and what DCR’s plans for the program are. Mr. Perry and Deputy Commissioner Zach Crowley will be attending the Fells Caucus meeting on April 30 to discuss more. She asked Mr. Perry if he could address the issue.

Mr. Perry said that he recently met with representatives of the Friends of Fells and the Friends of Blue Hills to try to find a way to continue and expand the “Be Kind!” initiative.

Chair Wilson asked if in Mr. Perry’s role, can he offer enforcement to the friends groups.

Mr. Perry said what he is able to offer is on the public education side.

Chair Wilson said that the legislators are looking for more teeth and that there will probably be questions at the caucus meeting about the role of the rangers. She said that there has been discussions about rangers at the State House and whether that should be a DCR function.

Councilor Collins asked that if through “Be Kind!” and the larger conversation about the fells, are the friends groups monitoring and are there metrics on behavior and whether changes are being achieved.

Chair Wilson said that there is data from the Friends that was collected while the initiative was being created. She asked that Mr. Perry report back at the May meeting of the committee.

## Public Comment

Olivia Oestreicher introduced herself and said that she was at the meeting on behalf of Mass Audubon taking notes.

## 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)