

Seal, Flag, and Motto Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes

Thursday, August 28, 2025; 2:00PM

Commission Members in Attendance via Zoom:

- Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary, Executive Office of Education, Co-Chair
- Kate Fox, Executive Director, Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, Co-Chair
- Lilia Melikechi, Communications and Training Manager, Massachusetts Office on Disability
- Summer Confuorto, Traditional Arts Programs Officer, Massachusetts Cultural Council
- Elizabeth Solomon, Member chosen by the Executive Director of the Commission on Indian Affairs
- Rhonda Anderson, Member chosen by the Governor
- Ben Haley, National Register Director at the Massachusetts Historical Commission
- Brian Boyles, Executive Director, Mass Humanities
- Jim Peters, Executive Director, Commission on Indian Affairs
- Dr. John D. Warner, Jr., State Archivist, Secretary of State or Designee

Opening Remarks:

- Co-Chair **Ms. Fox** opened the meeting of the Seal, Flag, and Motto Advisory Commission at 2:02PM
- **Ms. Fox**- took a roll call
- **Ms. Fox**- went through the agenda and began with an update from the co-chairs. She noted that nine advancing submissions were referred to as finalists, but they represent round three and the highest scoring submissions in the process. Ms. Fox also noted that the word finalists would be stricken
- **Ms. Fox**- called for a review of the meeting minutes and entertained a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting which occurred on July 29, 2025
- Motion passed, roll call taken, and meeting minutes approved at 2:06PM. Ms. Fox noted that the minutes would be posted on the website mass.gov/sealflagmotto

Update from Co-Chairs:

- **Mr. Tutwiler**- thanked the Commissioners for their thoughtful review of getting the group to this point in the process. He noted that the Commission has reached a pivotal milestone of three flags, three seals and three mottos that the people of Massachusetts will have a chance to provide public feedback on. Mr. Tutwiler acknowledged that the process may seem fast paced, but that the Commission is following the Legislature's charge for the group to move with intention
- **Ms. Fox**- stated that since the Commission's last meeting, that work has continued to move forward and has included posting submissions on the Commission website for public viewing as well as working with the Office of Disability to format all text to be made accessible. She continued to note that the first round of submissions are being reformatted and updated so that they are fully accessible, emails have gone out those

selected for second-round review, and a graphic design agency has been selected, ERG, who will be supporting this process in its next phase. She then turned it over to Mr. Tutwiler to speak about the Education Subcommittee

Education Subcommittee:

- **Mr. Tutwiler**- stated that the Education Subcommittee will form to develop recommendations for programs that will help inform residents and create a brief historical set of materials. He continued to note that the Subcommittee will meet at least twice a month to prepare for the upcoming hearings, and that an email will go out to the Commissioners who have expressed interest
- **Ms. Fox**- acknowledged that Mr. Peters joined the Commission meeting after the roll call

Public Hearings:

- **Ms. Fox**- reviewed the work that the Commission had done to date, which began in March of this year, and noted that there will be the addition of public hearings scheduled in September and October, continued monthly commission meetings, and a Legislative extension until December 15 which will allow more engagement. Ms. Fox continued to note that the first two hearings that were sent to Commission members for September 8 and 11 have been postponed, and that additional hearings will be added in October, with a forthcoming email regarding other public hearings scheduling. She reminded Commissioners that their participation is critical to the success of this Commission

Review of Finalists:

- **Ms. Fox**- presented slides on top three seals, and opened the floor to thoughts from Commissioners
- **Ms. Solomon**- expressed concerns regarding that the Commissioners haven't had any discussion on the designs that have come forward based on the scoring of the rubric and stated that she does not believe that it's enough to have a quantitative process, as this represents the entire state and will be in place hopefully for a long time. She continued to acknowledge the timeline set forth for the Commission but stated that she believes there needs to be discussion within the Commission. Ms. Solomon went on to note her concerns on the scoring rubric, and issues of good design which have had much higher ratings or influence as opposed to the specific content. She requested that the scoring be redone, weighing the actual content and how it represents the state so that it's more equal to the design element
- **Ms. Anderson**- agreed with Ms. Solomon. She stated that she believes the current rubric is nice but suggested its clumsiness. She discussed her scoring techniques and noted that there were submissions that needed tweaking and was concerned that there weren't enough submission options scored based on the flawed rubric
- **Ms. Melikechi**- noted that there were motto submissions that were grouped
- **Ms. Fox**- stated that she wanted to ensure Commission members also had a chance to comment on the three seals that came from the process
- **Ms. Confuorto**- stated that she believes it's difficult to assess the rubrics ahead of the actual scoring, and felt that there was a lot in the rubrics geared toward design instead of content, and noted that if a design wasn't ideal, she scored lower in other areas as well
- **Mr. Boyles**- acknowledged that there is a gap between the seal and the flag and feels that it is something to be clarified because they need to be in a relationship
- **Mr. Haley**- stated that he would like to go on record that based on discussions and general process or desires that the seal should be derivative of the flag

- **Ms. Anderson**- noted that she is ok with seals and flags matching and is also ok if they do not match as well
- **Ms. Fox**- presented slides on top three flags
- **Mr. Warner**- stated that he trusts the process, noting that there are some issues with the rubrics, but concurred with Mr. Haley that the seal and flag should be close in design. He continued to state that if these are the top picks based on numbers that people put in, then the group should move forward with these top selections that were identified
- **Mr. Peters**- acknowledged the native theme and stated that he believes the submissions have changed the theme dramatically. He continued that he is thinking about the history of the state and how it is represented and is hung up on leaving the original seal and flag alone and only changing the motto or taking the sword off and changing the motto. He asked the group if it was too late to think about that
- **Ms. Anderson**- stated that option was part of the submissions and it didn't make it through
- **Ms. Solomon**- stated that she believes the group should be cognizant of the reasoning behind the redesign in the first place. She continued that she believes it is a mistake to keep the current flag from a standpoint of history and show of respect for the Native community of Massachusetts. Ms. Solomon then stated that she thinks it would be a mistake and disrespectful not to incorporate something from the Native community in the flag or the seal and asked the group to keep in mind how this started in the first place
- **Mr. Tutwiler**- noted that he is appreciative of the group's feedback
- **Ms. Fox**- acknowledged the thoughtfulness and work that went into many of the public submissions that were received and wants to thank people that sent their submissions. She noted that there are descriptions that came in with the submissions, and feedback has been received through the seal, flag, and motto email account with thoughts on what the iconography could be. She asked the group if anyone has concerns about the submissions that have scored the highest points in the rubrics and if there are elements that can be worked with
- **Ms. Anderson**- stated that she believes that using a mayflower can be harmful to the Indigenous community, and suggested calling it a strawberry or a heart flower to give it more meaning for the Indigenous community
- **Ms. Fox**- acknowledged that the opportunity for feedback, and that these submissions don't need to be the final options as there is a creative services agency that can turn the submissions into potential new state symbols
- **Ms. Confuorto**- echoed what Ms. Anderson mentioned about the mayflower and potential harmful connotations to Native communities, and stated that she liked the idea of the different flower that's representative of Massachusetts
- **Ms. Fox**- Noted that there was a submitter of petals that were being connected to the shield
- **Mr. Boyles**- stated that he believes it would be helpful if the group can agree that some presence of Indigeneity should be represented, and that it's an important step to narrow the focus
- **Ms. Anderson**- suggested incorporating color such as purple, to represent the Indigenous community
- **Ms. Solomon**- noted that of all the designs that were chosen, she believes they were pulled together through AI means, or someone that was able to put together a design that made sense visually and noted that she believes that the designs that didn't look professional were incredibly disadvantaged in the process. She asked the Commissioners what the next steps would be and if the rubrics were going to be relooked at
- **Ms. Fox**- noted that with that, she would like to discuss the public hearings schedule and format, and asked the group if they had any other thoughts on the seals, flags, and mottos that were seen today

- **Ms. Solomon**- stated that the group needs to discuss next steps and thinks it would be problematic without talking about next steps. She continued that she agrees public hearings are important, but that there are decisions to be made about the nine submissions to move forward with. She then asked the group if there would be a discussion on Indigeneity, and stated that she believes that the group would not be its job if it did not talk about that, and wants to open it up to the rest of the Commission
- **Mr. Peters**- asked the group how much public hearing comments have influenced whether we are in the right direction or not
- **Ms. Fox**- stated that she believes that public comments have significant influence and that is why the Commission will be taking the options to the public hearings
- **Ms. Confuorto**- asked how that would be possible from these options, and then asked if design elements would be changed
- **Ms. Fox**- stated that it is a starting point and that the public will bring a constructive process that will eventually develop these emblems and how they represent the state, while hopefully incorporating all the points from today
- **Ms. Solomon**- stated that she would like to know if the rubrics would be relooked at based on the way that submissions were scored, and continued to state that she believes the Commission should be making a decision on what the responsibility is to the local Native community and feels that there has been no conclusion in terms of the suggestions that have been made
- **Ms. Fox**- asked Ms. Solomon if she would like to make a motion to rescore the rubric so that it's equal to all the other design elements, which would apply to the second-round submissions
- **Mr. Boyles**- stated that there are seals, flags, and mottos that the group is suggesting surface, and the group should have a conversation about what sort of content is important
- **Ms. Fox**- stated that she would like to honor Ms. Solomon's motion
- **Ms. Anderson**- thanked Mr. Boyles for noting the other contenders and wondered about one of the submissions that she believes to be stunning which didn't make it could be due to the current rubric. She continued to state that it's not lost on her that there were Indigenous artists that had submitted incredible work
- **Ms. Fox**- asked Commission members if anyone would like to second Ms. Solomon's motion
- **Ms. Anderson**- stated that she would like to second Ms. Solomon's motion, and inquired if there was a different way to look at the submissions to ensure due diligence
- **Ms. Fox**- inquired if Ms. Solomon is proposing rescore or recalibrating the scores, or changing the rubrics
- **Ms. Solomon**- asked a clarification question regarding the meaning of recalibration and then asked the group what they thought the flag, seal and motto should represent. She noted the former Commission's survey, and stated that as a Native person, time is just time, and that the most important thing is getting this process right
- **Mr. Tutwiler**- reiterated that there is a timeline for the Advisory Commission's report that the group is doing its best to respect, and stated that valid points have been raised around weighting, and that historically, the submissions were scored and stated that he believes that leaning into themes doesn't feel as clean as going back and rescore
- **Ms. Fox**- reiterated that the date has been given to the Advisory Commission by the Legislature, and that an extension has already been provided. She continued to state that she would like to ensure that the report that is expected out of this is submitted by its deadline
- **Ms. Anderson**- pondered to the group if the content score might be representative of the Indigenous community and also noted that she took complicated seals vs. easily replicated seals into consideration when scoring

- **Ms. Solomon**- stated that she is not sure if rescoreing makes sense if different people were scoring things on what they personally felt was best
- **Mr. Peters**- reiterated that he feels that due diligence would be taking the sword off to the seal and flag
- **Ms. Solomon**- stated that she would be withdrawing the motion

Action Items and Next Steps:

- **Ms. Fox**- stated that she believes the work of the Education Subcommittee will help frame the public hearings as there is a lot of misunderstanding and muddiness, and noted that there would be four in-person, and two virtual hearings with people always welcome to provide feedback
- **Ms. Fox**- went over the public hearing structure and that consistency across all hearings would be followed with a presentation made by the Commonwealth on the history, educational components, process overview, and background provided on how the Commission has arrived at its current status
- **Ms. Fox**- stated that she will send a follow-up email with additional Commission meeting dates in September and October, and that she would share the work of the Education Subcommittee

Adjournment:

- **Ms. Fox**- made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and a roll call was taken; the motion was seconded and passed unanimously
- The meeting was adjourned at **3:09PM**