Seal, Flag, and Motto Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 28, 2025; 1:00PM

Commission Members in Attendance via Zoom:

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

Opening Remarks:

- Co-Chair **Kate Fox** opened the third meeting of the Seal, Flag, and Motto Advisory Commission at 1:03 P M
- **Ms. Fox** introduced Dr. Robert Powers as Secretary Patrick Tutwiler's designee
- **Ms. Fox** reviewed the meeting agenda
- **Ms. Fox** took a roll call
- **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 April 29, 2025
- **Ms. Solomon** would like it to be reflected in the previous meeting minutes that she is not sure about the role and work of the Commissioners on the Commission, and would like to request some time during this meeting for her to make some comments
- **Ms. Fox** took a roll call regarding the motion on the floor to approve the meeting minutes with the addition of Ms. Solomon's Comments
- Motion passed and meeting minutes approved with the addition of Ms. Solomon's comments at 1:08 PM
- **Ms. Fox** moved to an update from the Co-Chairs

Update from Co-Chairs:

- **Ms. Fox** shared a presentation with the Commission which included the following information:
    - Public Submission period opened on 5/8/25 and is closing on 6/18/25
    - There are 436 public submissions to date

    - RFQ for Creative Services soliciting a request for proposals from graphic designers open to vendors on the statewide contract opened on 5/13/25 and closes on 6/6/25
    - Update on timing for Commission's deadline extension was submitted by Sen. Lewis
    - Review of Draft Commission Timeline and Public Hearings
- **Ms. Solomon** asked who is going to be doing the draft scoring rubric as well as the selection of the graphic designer. She continued with asking questions regarding process, who is presenting to the Commission, and how each of the individual commissioners will be involved in this process
- **Ms. Fox** noted that once the deadline for submissions is closed, we will share all the submissions for seal, flag and motto will be submitted to Commission members for review
- **Ms. Solomon** reiterated her question regarding what the process is, and asked who will share the deck of all the designs and concepts and provide a timeline
- **Ms. Fox** noted to Ms. Solomon that we can review what the criteria are
- **Ms. Solomon** asked who is the 'we' and if the Commission is responsible for providing the criteria asking for the details of how this is going to happen
- **Ms. Fox** noted that EOED and EOE staff will work together to provide criteria that the Commission will react to, but happy to change course if that's what the Commission would like
- **Ms. Solomon** stated that she doesn't feel like she's a commissioner, and that she feels like a rubber stamper. She went on to state that she believes that there is very little input other than in these meetings and is frustrated because she feels like this is important and the group needs to think about "why we're doing this and how we're doing this."
- **Ms. Anderson** noted that she seconds Ms. Solomon's statements and believes that a scoring rubric is needed for these submissions, and that she would like a little more clarity about where the Commission is headed
- **Ms. Melikechi** stated that she would like to clarify what MOTT stands for
- **Ms. Fox** stated that it stands for the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism
- **Ms. Melikechi** said that she also wants to second Ms. Solomon's concerns, as she has reviewed the report, and found it hard to find on the website
- **Ms. Fox** indicated that if there is interest in creating subcommittees, that subcommittees can be developed
- **Ms. Confuorto** specified that she appreciates all the work being done on the Advisory Commission and requested a little extra time for her agency to review the timeline and process once sent to the group
- **Ms. Melikechi** noted that the feedback button on the bottom of the seal, flag and motto site is for mass.gov in its entirety, and that members of the public should be utilizing the email address on the website to provide feedback instead
- **Ms. Fox** thanked Ms. Melikechi for flagging this
- **Ms. Fox** stated that a subcommittee to review and recommend criteria will be created and inquired if Ms. Solomon, Ms. Melikechi, and Ms. Anderson would like to be a part of it, who all replied that they would
- **Dr. Powers** stated that based on the conversation from the previous meeting and feedback from members of the public who provided input on this, that EOE and EOED would like to put forward for the Commission's review, to have five public hearings to ensure that we have good geographic reach. Dr. Powers went on to state that the public hearings would take place throughout Massachusetts: One in Western, MA, one in Central, MA, one in Northeast, MA, and one in Southeast Massachusetts, along with an additional virtual hearing

- **Dr. Powers** noted that EOE will work with partners in public higher education on the meeting locations
- **Ms. Melikechi** stated that she would like to recommend that these meetings are hybrid and that the Massachusetts Office on Disability has a platform on their website to assist with choosing accessible venues

Update on the History of the Seal, Flag and Motto:

- **Dr. Powers** summarized the Special Commission Relative to the Seal and Motto of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Final Report (2023), pp. 31-38, providing a brief overview of the history of the seal, flag and motto, which Dr. Powers noted have gone through many iterations:
    - The earliest Massachusetts Bay Colony seal, authorized by the 1629 Charter, was oval-shaped and depicted a Native Person holding a bow and a downward-pointing arrow. Standing between two pine trees, the Native Person had a word balloon reading "Come over and help us", referencing a biblical passage and used by colonial authorities as a propaganda tool to convert Indigenous Peoples and establish "praying towns"
    - Following the start of the Revolution, a committee on July 28, 1775, proposed a new seal. An initial design with an "Indian holding a Tomahawk & Cap of Liberty" was replaced with an "English American holding a Sword" and the Magna Carta. The 1775 report also introduced the motto "Ense petit placidam sub libertate quietem"
    - With the adoption of the 1780 Constitution, a new seal symbolizing independence was sought. A Council Order from December 13, 1780, laid out details for a design that replaced the English American figure with a Native Person as the central element
    - The current design was codified by statute in 1885, and the artistic rendering was produced by Edmund H. Garrett and approved in 1898
- **Ms. Fox** asked the Commission about their thoughts on the length of the public submission process
- **Ms. Solomon** noted that it's important to inform the public about the long history and specific harms and the move to change the flag and why
- **Ms. Anderson** stated that she agrees with Ms. Solomon's astute observation of the decades-long harm of the state seal, flag, and motto, and important criteria that needs to be listed for people to learn this for anyone who has an interest in this
- **Ms. Solomon** noted that the Advisory Commission is talking about changing the flag and seal because it is offensive yet observed that the seal is at the top of the slides being presented and stating that it is sad and ironic

Presentation from Ted Kaye, North American Vexillological Association

- **Mr. Kaye** stated that the goal of his presentation is to share his experience and best practices, noting that he wrote the book "Good Flag, Bad Flag" about the flag redesign and the adoption process. Mr. Kaye stated that he believes it's 10% design, and 90% politics and PR
- **Mr. Kaye** noted that he helped the state of Utah, and gave this talk to the state of Minnesota, and hopes that his experience is this group.
- Notes on **Mr. Kaye's** presentation are as follows:

    - Goals- of a good flag design and things to keep in mind: understand the club of good state flags that you want your state to join. Seals and flags have different purposes- the seal belongs to the government, and the flag belongs to the people
    - Seals- are meant to be complex, and there is no need to coordinate the design of the seal and the design of the flag. Flag design guidebook sets out 5 different guide points- simplicity, symbolism, 2-3 colors, no lettering/seals, distinctiveness
    - Purposes of a flag- signaling at a distance not a representative of state's culture, secondary- ritual and ceremony, heritage/values
    - Tips- view from a distance, imagine various uses, consider other state examples, avoid clever or cute, make sure it's timeless and simple
    - Treat submissions as suggestions that can be tweaked, combined, or polished, key concept tie to the state discernability at a distance, key concept- beyond aesthetics/meaning
    - The 5 basic principles of flag design- Keep it simple- should be so simple that a child can draw it from memory, symbolism, use 2-3 colors, limit the colors of the flag to three, and work well in grey scale, no lettering- never use writing of any kind or an organization's seal which is meant to be put on paper, be distinctive
    - Public involvement- seeking submissions, consulting the public early to crowd source the designs to inform efforts as a Commission and build public support
    - Common challenges- wanting too much on the flag, something for everyone, expecting immediate recognition of the flag, fearing simplicity
    - Reviewing designs- select designs based on potential, rather than quality, consider sorting the submissions into three groups- red light- discard, yellow card- keep and tweak, green light- ok as is
    - Process- use submissions to inform, not dictate final designs, get expert help in polishing final designs
    - Flag design is a very specialized field, bring in flag design experts, and there are North American Vexillological experts who will work pro-bono with professional designers
    - Remember that discernible/memorable, consider other state examples, simple, involve experts
- **Ms. Solomon** noted that the movement to change the flag is decades old, very complex, and that there are many people who have been working on it for decades
- **Mr. Kaye** stated that the North American Vexillological Association has been allies with members of Massachusetts and beyond on this very issue
- **Ms. Melikechi** noted that we live in a digital world and is pleased to hear the simplicity for accessibility purposes. She went on to ask Mr. Kaye if he has any other accessibility related points
- **Mr. Kaye** stated that there is a two-hour version of this lecture, additionally noting that there are ways to test flags for color blindness
- **Ms. Solomon** noted that flag and the seal are not the same, but in Massachusetts they are legislatively the same, and went on to note that the group would miss an opportunity if four centuries of harm is not addressed
- **Mr. Peters** noted the history of the flag, and before the Revolutionary War, a time that it was believed Indians were subdued. He went on to note that taking the sword off would at least take the symbolism away, and students of Massachusetts would always have those parts of history and know where Massachusetts came from as one of the first colonies
- **Ms. Solomon** stated that there is a legislative act that needs to happen
- Group Discussion regarding the purview of the Commission's work, which is to make a recommendation to update the statute

- **Ms. Solomon** stated that she would like to discuss why there are different thoughts from the indigenous community on how to honor the indigenous community. She went on to note that folks are really concerned that taking the indigenous figure off the flag will continue the decades of erasure that has happened within Massachusetts. She then proposed to the Commission that there should be criteria that signals the long history of the indigenous people in Massachusetts that can do some healing, as well as solve the issue of making sure that people who have endured despite multiple attempts to erase us, that it can be accommodated
- **Ms. Solomon** went on to state that she believes that the underlying issue is that we don't want to be further erased from the Commonwealth, and asked the Commission, how do we put these two things together that fulfils the needs of the Commonwealth as a symbol and does not erase thousands of years of indigenous history? She observed that she believes the group should think about the why and what we want to project and how we want to help the healing
- **Mr. Kaye** noted the different points of view for symbolism, and that there are two opportunities for change with the flag and the seal
- **Ms. Anderson** stated that without the sword, it does not accurately depict the history of war, genocide, dispossession and removal. She went on to observe that there needs to be a vigorous educational component for the indigenous lense and component.
- **Ms. Anderson** noted that the survey results from the Final Report of the Special Commission on the Seal and Motto of the Commonwealth are important, and that survey results showed that indigenous people did not want to have representation on the flag or seal. She started that this Commission should make a clear effort for education
- **Ms. Solomon** stated that she believes that the state missed an incredible opportunity to ask for an educational component in the submission process. She went on to ask the Commission members if there something that can be done to inform people why we are changing the seal, flag and motto, and why we are here. She stated that educational programs shouldn't be just in the schools as it affects the entire Commonwealth, and believes we should be engaged in a real robust educational public campaign around this and that there's a need for the Commonwealth to commit to the educational process
- **Ms. Fox** stated that we are committed to the educational process, and it hasn't been undertaken just yet
- **Mr. Peters** observed that the sword has always been a historical piece and believes that the sword should be removed
- **Ms. Fox** thanked the members of the public who attended this Commission meeting and for submitting ideas for seal, flag and motto. She noted that public comments are shared with commission members. She noted that an update on IP will be provided at the next meeting
- **Ms. Solomon** requested that sometime be set aside at the next meeting to look at some of the themes that are coming up in the public comments
- **Ms. Melikechi** asked inquired to the group about what the process is for Intellectual Property
- **Mr. Kaye** noted that in his experience, the usual process is that by submitting designs, that the individual understands that it may be altered, as well as agree to have their rights to the design given to the state, and believes that designers don't have to be compensated
- **Ms. Confuorto** stated that she would like to go on the record on behalf of the Massachusetts Cultural Council that she believes artists should be compensated for taking the time to do that work
- **Mr. Kaye** observed that he believes that a cash prize can be given for the winner
- **Ms. Fox** inquired if there were any additional comments

- **Ms. Solomon** stated that she is willing to provide more input and work, and feels this process is very important and should be taken seriously
- **Ms. Fox** stated that public comments can be submitted to massflagandsealfeedback@mass.gov

Adjournment:

- A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 2:26 PM. A roll call was taken, the motion was seconded and passed unanimously
- The meeting was adjourned

Action Items and Next Steps:

- Ms. Fox will follow up with an email including the items discussed during today's Commission meeting. These include:
    1. Convening a criteria development subcommittee meeting
    2. Public Comment review
    3. Proposed workplan for the following weeks and months