# **May 5, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present: Jack Buckley, Dicken Crane, Susan Smiley, Jeff Collins, Dennis Smith, Melissa Harper

Councilor Members Present on Zoom: Phil Doherty, Kevin O’Shea, Jennifer Wilson

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Matthew Perry, Chloe Gotsis, Matt Villamaino, Kevin Hollenbeck, Stuart Conner, Joe Rotondo

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Jeff Miller, Sara Freeman, Chris Egan, Denis LaForce, Mike Duclos, Bill Boles, Doug Pizzi, Peter Sutton, Domenic P., Buzz Constable, Lawrence Tucker, Suzanne Gall Marsh, Christine Liu

## Call to Meeting, 9:00am – Chair Jack Buckley

Chair Buckley welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roll call of councilors present. He invited Matt Villamaino, Central Regional Interpretive Coordinator, to speak about the Worcester Visitor Center.

He then gave an update on his activities over the past month. Chair Buckley said that he was able to attend the Whitehall State Park Park Serve Day event on April 20 and said it was a well-attended event that he enjoyed. He noted that there are a number of private docks around the lake that he would like to be addressed saying that people walking on the trails that come across these docks may think it is private property. Chair Buckley said that he also had the opportunity to speak about the role of the council at UMass Amherst to a forestry class and said he had a good discussion with the students.

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo thanked the Council for having him. He said it was great to be in Worcester at the Blackstone Heritage Visitor Center, a beautiful building highlighting Worcester’s rich history, and serving as a gateway to the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park which runs from here down to Pawtucket, Rhode Island. 

He wished everyone a happy National Bike Month and gave a shout out to Councilor Vivian Ortiz who is Boston's first bicycle mayor.

He told the council about the release of the new quarterly newsletter, “Dispatch from the Parks,” which was sent out last week.  He said it was created as a way to share the exciting work being done at DCR and preview fun things we’ve got coming up. 

Last, he mentioned that last week marked his one year anniversary as Commissioner, adding that he

was proud of what’s been accomplished in a year and is grateful for the support and guidance from the Council.

He then gave an update on recent activities at the agency.

### Park Serve Day

April 20, DCR held its annual Earth Day/Earth Week clean up, Park Serve Day, at 39 DCR properties across the state and drew in more than 2,700 volunteers to help clean up and beautify properties, despite the rainy weather. Commissioner visited Leominster State Forest, the Mass Central Rail Trail in Sterling, Dunn Pond State Park in Gardner, and Otter River State Forest in Templeton, and had a great time helping out staff and volunteers with raking, planting flowers, and spreading mulch. EEA Secretary Tepper and members of her team at EEA, including her Chief of Staff Kathleen Skarin, volunteered at the Middlesex Fells Reservation where they helped to plant a tree.   

In total, volunteers logged over 5,000 hours, collected 1,400 bags of trash, built dozens of birdhouses, planted flowers and trees, and helped with numerous other projects to prepare DCR for the busy spring and summer seasons.

### Greening the Gateway Cities

On April 26, in celebration of Arbor Day and end of Earth Week, Commissioner Arrigo joined Governor Healey and Secretary Tepper in Chicopee to celebrate the 40,000th tree planted as part of the Greening the Gateway Cities program (GGCP).  Over the last 10 years GGCP has increased the urban tree canopy in 23 of the 26 gateway cities across the state.

Governor Healey and Secretary Tepper also announced a new program called Cooling Corridors that will build on the success of GGCP and expand this important work to non-gateway cities across the state so that all Massachusetts residents can experience the benefits of increased tree canopy.

### Fleet Electrification

During Earth Week, one of DCR’s latest efforts to reduce the agency’s carbon footprint, electrifying its fleet, was highlighted. So far, DCR has 15 Ford F-150 Lightnings in the fleet and about as many electric vehicle charging stations.  To highlight this effort, the communications team made a YouTube video featuring staff using these new electric trucks.

### Road Trip Out West

On April 18, Commissioner Arrigo and his son Jack headed out West to visit some of DCR’s Western Mass properties. He met with staff and got to see firsthand some of the work being done at properties in the region.

### Marathon Monday

Commissioner Arrigo highlighted the work of DCR staff that worked along the Boston Marathon route last month, helping ensure the globally renowned event ran smoothly from the start to the finish line. DCR collaborated with the Boston Athletic Association, Massachusetts State Police, and Boston Police to create a safe environment. The Commissioner recognized staff from the Charles River Complex, DCR Rangers, Fleet, and personnel from the Mystics, Neponset, Southwest Corridor, Wachusett, and Nickerson for their expertise, dedication, and hard work ensured the enjoyment and safety of the runners, their families, friends, and thousands of spectators.

### Mountainside Bakery and Café wins Preservation Award

The Mountainside Bakery & Café at Wachusett Mountain has been chosen by Preservation Massachusetts for the 2024 Mayor Thomas M. Menino Legacy Award. The Mayor Thomas M. Menino Legacy Award recognizes preservation projects that are transformative, catalytic, embrace the community, create partnerships, and revitalize the best of the past to make something good for the future. The team from the cafe is being recognized for their preservation efforts on the former Superintendent’s House at Wachusett Mountain Reservation in Princeton. The house, originally built in 1903 for the Reservation’s first Superintendent Guy Chase, had been vacant for over 30 years. However, since 2018, the house has undergone significant restoration and is now a thriving bakery, café, and community space made possible through DCR’s Historic Curatorship Program.

### Leadership Academy

Last week, DCR held its annual Leadership Academy in Leominster. The Academy is a day-long professional development training program, open to all staff. The day brings people together from across the agency to collaborate and learn from each other and presenters. It is designed to energize and inspire, and to offer tools and techniques to achieve and foster professional development and personal growth. This year’s theme was “Healthy Leadership,” which allowed staff to explore personal health, the health of resources, healthy organizations and teams, and healthy communities. It also marked the 20th Anniversary of DCR’s mission statement that, along with the core principles, guides the work the agency does. DCR’s first Commissioner Kathy Abbott came to celebrate the mission statement.

This year’s keynote speaker was Rhonda Anderson, a Native American silversmith, herbalist, and activist from the Inupiaq-Athabascan nation in Alaska now living in Western Massachusetts. She is the co-founder and co-director of the Ohketeau Center, the only Native founded and run cultural center in all of Central and Western Massachusetts. 

### E-Bikes on DCR Property

Commissioner Arrigo briefly went over E-Bike regulations in Massachusetts which were asked about by the council.

### Cass Center

Commissioner Arrigo updated the Council on the Cass Center and the capital improvements planned. In partnership with the local delegation, DCR held a virtual public meeting on Monday, April 29 to gain feedback from the community on capital improvements that will be made to the center. The public is invited to submit feedback on the improvements until May 13. Operations for the Cass Center will transfer back to DCR in early June, in time for the pool to open on June 22 for the summer season, and work to begin on these improvements. The details of these improvements are under discussion with the delegation and the Roxbury community, but they include upgrades to the facility’s athletic flooring, equipment upgrades, new tree plantings, and repairs to the roof with new solar panels added. These upgrades are going to allow us to provide improved services as a community center in addition to recreation and athletic programming. 

### Budget

Commissioner Arrigo updated the council on the recent House and Senate budgets, saying that DCR was level funded to the Governor’s recommendation that provided the agency with an increase over FY2024.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Smith thanked the Commissioner for his great communication and said that he enjoyed reading the quarterly newsletter. He said he was interested in seeing if there would be any feedback from people on it. He also said he was at Shawme-Crowell for Park Serve Day despite the rain, and enjoyed volunteering there. He mentioned that there was a Boy Scout troop also there to volunteer and that this was a great collaboration.

Commissioner Arrigo agreed and said in the future they would also like to work with faith communities, as well as Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops.

Councilor Harper asked how the organizations that use the facility for programming have been involved in the discussions and process that the Commissioner spoke about.

Commissioner Arrigo said that they have been in constant contact with them since it was announced that the center would be used as a shelter, and they will be involved with the conversations surrounding the capital improvements.

Commissioner Harper asked what the increase to the budget was for the agency

Commissioner Arrigo said that he didn’t have the exact numbers, but that for the current fiscal year DCR received a 12% increase, and while it wasn’t that big, it was another 3 to 4 percent on top of that 12%. He said that the biggest change that has happened is the movement of seasonal staff to full time. He said that longterm seasonal staff provided an administrative and personal burden with no real savings, so they are working to move as many longterm seasonals as they can to full time.

Councilor Crane asked about capital expenditures and how that was addressed in the budget.

Commissioner Arrigo said that there are two parallel processes, and that the budget that is being talked about is the operating budget. He said that there is a different process for the capital budget and they are preparing for it now. He said they are looking at $150 million for the capital budget.

Councilor Crane asked about the Capital Dashboard.

Commissioner Arrigo said they are still moving through the process with contractor Auribus, and they are hoping to wrap up by the end of next June when they will be able to roll out the full dashboard.

Councilor Smith said that with the controlled burns happening at Myles Standish, there has been great communication with the residents of Plymouth so no one is alarmed by the smoke and that it has been greatly appreciated.

Councilor Smiley said that she is grateful for the Commissioner’s attention to Central and Western Massachusetts during the last year. She asked if the electrified vehicles that were highlighted were new or were retrofitted.

Commissioner Arrigo said that the vehicles were purchased new and he wasn’t sure if the program to retrofit vehicles is there anymore.

Councilor Smiley said that she was glad to hear the update about the Leadership Academy and was excited by the energy and enthusiasm around the event.

Councilor Collins thanked the Commissioner and staff for their work on large scale events like the Boston Marathon and the Head of the Charles, and that he was at the National Rowing Championships over the weekend that takes place at Quinsigamond State Park in Worcester.

Chair Buckley thanked the Commissioner and congratulated him on being at the agency for a year. He said that he appreciates how Commissioner Arrigo makes a point of thanking staff and how that makes a difference for the culture of the agency.

He said that 5,000 volunteer hours at Park Serve Day was impressive, and that they should suggest to the legislature that a fund should be created that matches the volunteer hours with money that can be used in parks. He also added that Dylan Shine was at Park Serve Day at Whitehall and was very nice and helpful and had a great relationship with the friends group.

Chair Buckley said that one year the Stewardship Council meeting was held at the Leadership Academy, and he would like to try to do that again next year.

He asked Commissioner Arrigo if the pause on forestry was still in effect.

Commissioner Arrigo said yes, it is, that there are still some final steps that need to be taken to move things forward and lift the pause.

## Regular Business I

### Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board Presentation - Peter Sutton, Pedestrian and Bicycle Coordinator, Mass DOT

Mr. Sutton presented to the council about the Massachusetts Department of Transportation’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board, bike safety, and bike trails across Massachusetts.

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

Councilor Collins said that he is a fan of the long-distance trails in the state including the Bruce Freeman trail. He said that since most trails go where railroads ran, what is the thought about trails that go along with current rails. He also asked about DOT and where they are on trails that aren’t on old railbeds.

Mr. Sutton responded that MassDOT and the MBTA allow for trails along rails under certain circumstances, but there are hard and fast rules about spacing which is a minimum of at least 25 feet from the rails. He said for trails outside of old railbeds, that is where the MassTrails grants are a great opportunity because they allow for municipalities to create new bike lanes and trails. He said that eight communities applied for grants that will advance the Mass Central Rail Trail during the last round.

Councilor Smith said that he enjoys riding on trails, and that he appreciates when a trail connects with a road. He said both roads and trails are important.

He suggested that someone could sell reflective vests that indicate the rule about giving cyclists four feet when passing in a car.

Councilor Harper asked if the events for Bay State Bike Month were available in a central location.

Mr. Sutton said yes and that he would share the links with everyone.

Councilor Smiley asked where the funding for the program came from, whether it was federal or state.

Mr. Sutton said they are funded by the state through the general appropriation.

Councilor Smiley asked if it was the goal of DOT to have all trails paved.

Mr. Sutton said that he prefers paved trails because they allow for accessibility and trails with stone dust can wash away. He said in general, they are willing to work with people in trail planning about what the surface will be.

Councilor Smiley asked that they keep in mind activities that can’t occur on paved roads when considering trail surfaces.

Councilor Smith asked what “improved trail” means in the context of E-Bike regulations.

Mr. Perry said he will get this information for him.

Councilor Smiley noted that there should be a caveat in the law that calls for four feet of space when passing cyclists, that motorists can’t cross the double yellow line and block traffic coming in the opposite direction.

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Smith made a motion to approve the minutes from the April 11, 2024 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Smiley seconded the motion.

Councilor Collins noted a change for Mr. Perry to make.

The April 11, 2024 minutes were approved.

### 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 Buckley invited members of the public for comment. Comments were given by the following:

Denis LaForce, Sutton

Chris Egan, Mass Forest Alliance

Mike Duclos, Stowe

Sara Freeman, Jamaica Plain

Bill Boles, Sandwich

Doug Pizzi, Mass Parks for All

## Regular Business II

### Committee Updates

#### Policy Committee

The committee met on April 30 and are gathering information on DCR’s use of rodenticides on their properties. Mr. Perry presented information he gathered from colleagues, and the council is interested in hearing a presentation about it at a future meeting.

#### Stakeholders

The committee met on May 3 and set a date for the next listening session which will happen on August 12 from 6:30pm to 8:00pm. This listening session is leading to a face-to-face meeting with friends and partners.

#### Conservation

The Conservation Committee is working to find times to meet.

#### Finance

The committee is planning a listening session for the public about the DCR budget in late May or early June.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor Harper said that the council and agency should work to leverage the increase in construction costs to increase the capital funding DCR receives.

Councilor Smiley made a motion to write a letter to Secretary Tepper that would encourage removing the moratorium on forestry.

Councilor Smith seconds.

The motion was approved.

## Adjournment

Councilor Collins moved to adjourn the meeting.

Councilor Smiley seconded.

Councilor Buckley thanked everyone for joining 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>