# **October 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present: Jack Buckley, Dicken Crane, Jeff Collins, Phil Doherty, Ted Dooley, Dennis Smith, Jennifer Wilson, Kevin O’Shea, Vivian Ortiz

Council Members Absent: Susan Smiley, Laura Jasinski, Melissa Harper, Ann Canedy

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Matthew Perry, Chloe Gotsis, Ilyse Wolberg, Brenna Galvin, Mackenzie Greer, Mary Cardwell

EEA Staff Attendees:Kurt Gaertner, Stephanie Cooper

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Chris Egan, Amanda B, Andrea, Arthur Freedman, Ben Pierce, Bob, Buzz Constable, Celeste Venolia, Chris Redfern, Chuck Anastas, David Aldman St. Pierre, Eric Klose, Glen Ayers, Jac-Lynn Stark, Judy Roth, Karl Dziura, Kate Conlin, Lawrence Tucker, Linda Werbner, Lori Kotkowski, Megan Dixon, Sarah Freeman, Cabell Eames, William Erickson

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

Chair Buckley welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roll call of councilors present. He said he attended the October 8th meeting for the Blackstone Complex Resource Management Plans (RMPs). He complimented Resource Management Planner Paul Cavanagh for the job that he does in the meetings saying that he does a great job of laying a foundation of the RMPs and then talking through the details of the complex. Chair Buckley noted that a comment was made at the meeting that the Councilors should consider meeting in-person when approving an RMP in the geographic area covered by the plan. He gave a reminder of the upcoming MassTrails Conference on October 26th, noting that he and Councilor Susan Smiley will be presenting. He thanked the councilors for being flexible and moving the meeting a day to Friday to accommodate the Commissioner’s schedule. He said it is great to have a Commissioner that wants to meet with the council.

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo thanked the Council for having him. He said it is one of the best times of the year in the parks when the weather cools down and the leaves begin to change.

### Fall Foliage Map

DCR released a brand-new interactive fall foliage map which gives information on when and where in the state the foliage will be at its peak. Commissioner Arrigo said that people from all around love to travel to DCR parks to see the leaves changing, and they are trying to make it as easy as possible for them with this new map, and with the other information on the website highlighting the best areas for viewing.

### MV Meeting

On Wednesday, October 10, members of the DCR senior team and Commissioner Arrigo held a listening session with the community and elected officials on Martha’s Vineyard in regard to management of the Manuel Correllus State Forest.

### Memorial Drive

DCR’s Design and Engineering Division currently has a range of planned safety and accessibility improvements along Memorial Drive from Magazine Street to Audrey Street via the BU Bridge rotary. In the short-term, these improvements consist of:

* Widening of the sidewalks leading to the BU rotary to provide a 12-feet-wide raised shared-use path for a total of approximately 1200 linear feet on the river side of Memorial Drive.
* Improving and reconfiguring wheelchair ramps and median islands at the intersection of Memorial Drive and the BU Bridge.
* Replacing nearly 700 linear feet of existing Boston Pattern Fence.
* Restriping the crosswalks to include the green paint for the bike crossings, and
* Implementing a speed limit reduction to 25 mph along the BU Bridge corridor.

DCR has been working over the last year to design these improvements and construction on these improvements began the week of October 8 and will last until Thanksgiving. In the long-term, DCR is working with MassDOT on the Reid Overpass project that will redesign the intersection of Memorial Drive and the BU Bridge. This project also involves the installation of new signal equipment.

### Staff News

Commissioner Arrigo announced the hiring of Chris Sumner as executive director of the Melnea A. Cass Recreation Center, Roxbury Heritage State Park, and the Dillaway-Thomas House and John McMillen as Chief Financial Officer. Chris brings strong connections to the Roxbury community and decades of experience leading youth, young adult, family and senior-focused nonprofits with more than 30 years of experience in community relations, executive management, operations, and program development. John began his career in state service as the Environmental Budget Analyst at the Executive Office of Administration and Finance. He has served in various fiscal roles within the Energy and Environment Secretariat including as DCR Budget Director, EEA Fiscal Director, and DOER Finance Director.

### Completion of Bash Bish Viewing Areas

Commissioner Arrigo said that work at the Bash Bish Falls viewing areas has officially been completed. Following the overwhelming crowds in 2020, temporary barriers were put in place to restrict access to the falls for both public safety and to protect this incredible natural resource.  A comprehensive redesign was initiated that would enhance the visitor experience while addressing public safety concerns, rare species protection, steep grades, and erosion issues, all in coordination with New York’s adjacent Taconic State Park.  The final landscape design not only offers breathtaking views of the falls but also safeguards the sensitive ecology surrounding the area. Improved visitor circulation has significantly reduced injuries and rescue incidents at this site.

### Mass Pike Allston Project

The DCR Design and Engineering team has been part of a working group with colleagues at MassDOT as they figure out the project to move the Mass Pike to grade along Soldiers Field Road in Allston. The agency’s Landscape Design team has become more involved in the working group as they look at the area called “the throat” that runs along the Charles River and will be the thinnest area of parkland on the stretch that will open up into a larger park area. Goals for the park design include relating the character of the parkland to the adjacent Esplanade and Basin, creating a buffer between the park and Storrow Drive to minimize noise and visual impacts, to create spaces for gathering and events, and to maximize the tree canopy.

### Big E

Commissioner Arrigo spent the day at the Big E for Massachusetts Day and connected with folks from all over the state while showcasing all that DCR has to offer. He said that over the course of the Big E DCR had over 5,000 visitors to their booth to learn about DCR properties and the work they do across the state.

### Girl Scouts Love State Parks

On September 14 and 15, over 350 Girl Scouts and their families participated in programs across 14 DCR parks, designed to help them earn their nature-based badges. Activities included hiking, ponding, fishing, flower arranging, and more. Commissioner Arrigo thanked staff across all 14 parks that helped make the events a success.

### Student Conservation Association

In September, DCR began crew training with the Student Conservation Association. The 10 crew members and two leaders began by mastering basic carpentry skills at Blackstone Heritage State Park. They quickly put their new skills to use, installing a series of box steps to enhance access on the Southern New England Trunkline Trail in Franklin. Their training continues at Moore State Park followed by park improvement projects through December at various locations, including the SNETT, Moore State Park, Erving State Forest, Mt. Grace State Forest, Wendell State Forest, Holyoke Heritage State Park, Quabbin Park, and Prince Walker Cemetery.

### Cultural Resources Training Pays Off

While installing a new boardwalk at Moore State Park in Paxton, Student Conservation Association (SCA) volunteer Thomas uncovered a projectile point. Thanks to recent training from the Office of Cultural Resources, the SCA team wisely paused their work and reached out to DCR archaeologists for further evaluation.  This remarkable find, estimated to be between 400 and 1,000 years old and located just three inches below the surface, underscores the value of training volunteers to identify significant artifacts.

### 37th Fishing Festival

On September 14, Harold Parker State Forest hosted the 37th annual Fishing Festival. The event, which is co-sponsored by MassWildlife, welcomed about 100 children and 30 adults for a great day of fishing at the park. The Friends of Harold Parker also participated keeping a campfire ablaze and providing a BBQ lunch for this in attendance.

### DCR Stewardship Corps

On Thursday, September 12, DCR launched the second year of the DCR Stewardship Corps at Lawrence Heritage State Park, teaming up once again with the Lawrence Boys and Girls Club. DCR is expanding the program with more field trips to parks and opportunities for hands-on learning.

### Quinapoxet Mussel Relocation

Commissioner Arrigo said that last month, the Wachusett Division of Water Supply Protection team, MassWildlife, the Division of Ecological Restoration, Trout Unlimited, and Fitchburg State University worked together with 17 volunteers to relocate 1,536 Eastern Pearlshell mussels from the Quinapoxet River, which is set for dam removal, to a suitable upstream habitat. These mussels, which thrive in cold water with trout or salmon and are sensitive to pollution and temperature changes, benefit greatly from DCR’s watershed protections.

### Backpack Giveaway at the Cass Center

The Cass Center recently hosted a backpack giveaway for the community, thanks to DCR’s Summer Nights partnership with Score4More and Senator Liz Miranda. The event gave away 200 backpacks, each filled with essential school supplies, including notebooks, pencils, pens, erasers, folders, binders, rulers, and crayons.

### Announcing the Innovation Awards

Commissioner Arrigo said that during his time at DCR, he has been impressed by the ingenuity and expertise of the staff across agency and that he is excited to share that they’re launching a new program to unleash staff creativity and further the agency’s mission with the Innovation Awards. He said that the goal of this program is to provide an opportunity for DCR staff to submit ideas for cutting edge projects or innovations that can be piloted in the year ahead. Awards between $5,000 and $100,000 will be given to fund the chosen initiatives and to track successes and measure their impacts. This year, the theme of the program is aligned with the climate goals in our core principles.

### Boston Harbor Island Clean Up

In partnership with the Center for Coastal Studies (CCS), DCR helped lead an historic, once-in-a-generation cleanup of five islands in Boston Harbor: Great Brewster, Middle Brewster, Outer Brewster, Calf, and Lovells Islands.  Under the guidance of Senior Coastal Ecologist Jorge Ayub and Boston Harbor Islands Director of Operations Belle Procaccini, DCR collaborated with federal and nonprofit partners for months to make this landmark initiative a reality. Staff and volunteers collected 95 one-ton super sacks of debris, including Styrofoam, plastic bottles, buoys, lobster traps, tires and other industrial and marine debris materials. After the collected materials were sorted in Hull, local artists and fishermen were given the opportunity to repurpose usable debris.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Collins asked about Memorial Drive and the improvements being made. He said that the recent death of cyclist John Corcoran raises a broader issue of the Stewardship Council understanding high priority and hazard areas in the parkway system and what resources are needed to address the issues. He also asked about updates for data on accidents and close calls on the roads and how the data is informing capital planning and updates, and if the council could get regular updates.

Commissioner Arrigo said that DCR has a good foundation with the Parkways Master Plan, and some of the challenges come from funding. The total cost in 2020 to accomplish the entire master plan was $250 million then and has only gone up since then. He said it is a priority for the agency, they are trying to address short term fixes, given the challenges that they have going out to bid and the public process which can take years. They are looking for other areas that can be addressed internally for the short term and trying to figure out how to move forward with the long-term fixes of the master plan.

Councilor Collins said he would like to work with the Commissioner and Chair Buckley on planning a presentation on this.

Commissioner Arrigo added that this was mentioned in the Strategic Readiness Initiative and that some of the data analysis that Councilor Collins may be able to be addressed through the SRI and can be a way to give regular updates to the council.

Councilor Ortiz thanked Councilor Collins for bringing up the subject. She said that as a person who is trying to get people to find joy in biking, things like this sets her back and that she would like to talk about planning forward like Councilor Collins mentioned. She mentioned that a few weeks ago, several people who use the Neponset Greenway were invited to ride with staff from DCR which allowed for conversations on the ground with people who use the trail on a regular basis so they could share challenges they face. Councilor Ortiz said that she thinks the best way to plan is to ask the people who are using the spaces before the infrastructure is added. She said that she wants to work together to get ahead of these kinds of things happening.

Chair Buckley said that what happened is awful and that there is some legitimate criticism of DCR, but when he hears elected officials criticizing DCR, he is reminded that for decades the state has failed to fund the state parks at DCR. He said that it is the direct responsibility of some of those individuals and that they need to provide the funding and capacity for DCR to do its job.

## Regular Business I

### Presentation Forests as Climate Solutions – Undersecretary Stephanie Cooper, Assistant Secretary Kurt Gaertner

Undersecretary Cooper and Assistant Secretary Gaertner updated the Council on the Forests as Climate Solutions initiative.

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

Councilor Smith asked how municipalities factor in to the plan going forward, and that for the 3 million acres of forest land in the state, how much is made up of municipal and federal land.

Assistant Secretary Gaertner said that municipalities are important to the conversation about forestry and that they have reserve proposals coming from cities and towns. There are lots of existing forest holds in municipalities including town forests, and that the annual town forests event is coming up.

Undersecretary Cooper added that programs about technical assistance and helping to embrace climate solutions continue to collaborate with municipalities.

Councilor Crane said that there is very little federal land in Massachusetts, and that most of it is controlled by the Army Corps of Engineers. He asked about the steering committee that was mentioned and how important their role will be in determining what becomes reserves because there are competing efforts to make those decisions. He asked if the committee will be making the decisions on what becomes a reserve and where on the spectrum it will land and whether the decision will be based on science.

Undersecretary Cooper said that the state will ultimately decide what becomes a reserve, and that although they will take input from experts, the state will make the final decision.

Chair Buckley said that “the state will decide” sounds kind of vague, and asked who decides the issues about cutting plans and reserves. He said the public needs to know where to direct comments.

Undersecretary Cooper said she was not being vague intentionally. She added the DCR, Department of Fish and Game, and Masswildlife lead by their commissioners and directors, and EEA Secretary Rebecca Tepper are all part of the administration which will ultimately make the decisions. Undersecretary Cooper said that major initiative swill be in alignment with the administration which is ultimately led by the Governor.

Chair Buckley said that it concerns him that science decisions are being made by people who are not scientists, but that he is glad to know.

Councilor Collins said that one of the slides showed the continuum of forest management with 1% management and 99% active, but that they also talked about 10% forest reserves, so the graphic is more of a binary and not a continuum so he would be interested to know what is between “reserve” and “active forest management.”

Undersecretary Cooper said that it was a good suggestion to show what is between, and that they are trying out different types of graphics to explain and represent what is being done.

Assistant Secretary Gaertner mentioned that the other major federal land holder in the state is the National Seashore on Cape Cod.

Councilor Wilson asked about the Landscape Designation process which was paused as Forests as Climate Solutions was being done, and what they see as different in the revamped process now as opposed to before the initiative started. She added that when Landscape Designations was first created, that was when DCR greatly increased their reserves.

Assistant Secretary Gaertner said that everyone seems happy with how reserves were designated in the Landscape Designation process and that they are looking at it as something that was a model for things going forward and they are talking about how it will be done with lands under different divisions.

Councilor Wilson said that before the pause, the agency sought public comment on the Landscape Designations and she would like to know if they are being reviewed.

Assistant Secretary Gaertner said yes, they are, and that Director of Forest Stewardship Pete Church and his team are working on reviewing them.

Chair Buckley said that he would like to see fires mentioned more. He said that lots of places thought they were exempt from fire and are now finding that they are not. He said that since they are creating a giant carbon bank, they don’t want to lose it to fire, and that somewhere there should be a strategy.

Assistant Secretary Gaertner said that that salvage policy and public safety policy will touch on fire, and that there is conversation internally on reserves about prescribed burns and the use of fire as a management tool.

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Smith made a motion to approve the minutes from the May 9, 2024 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Ortiz seconded the motion.

### Roll Call on Approval of Minutes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Chair Dooley: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Councilor O’Shea: Yes

Councilor Buckley: Yes

The September 12, 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 members of the public

* Glen Ayers, Greenfield
* Karl Dziura, Conway
* Amanda B, Lynn
* Andrea Amour, Swampscott
* Arthur Freedman, Swampscott
* Sarah Freeman, Jamaica Plain
* Buzz Constable, Lincoln
* Lori Kotkowski, Lynn

## Regular Business II

### Committee Updates

#### Nominating Committee

Councilor Smith reported that the committee has met and will present the following slate for officers at the December meeting:

* Chair – Councilor Dicken Crane
* Vice Chair – Councilor Susan Smiley
* Secretary – Councilor Ann Canedy

He said that any member can submit a nomination, and that nominations can be submitted from the floor at the meeting when the slate is being considered.

#### Policy Committee

Councilor Wilson reported that the Blackstone Complex Resource Management Plans (RMPs) are making their way towards the council for approval. There was a public meeting held for the RMPs on October 8, and the public comment period is open until October 31st. The Committee has been talking with Paul Cavanagh for process updates. She added that they are working with the Conservation Committee to get a presentation to the whole council about rodenticide use on DCR property.

#### Stakeholders

Councilor Dooley reported that the Stakeholders Committee met, and that the summary of the last listening session was finalized. The committee discussed the 2025 calendar for meetings and decided that once a quarter in-person meetings continues to be a good schedule and discussed whether or not to continue the State House meeting in December.

#### Finance

The committee plans to meet with new CFO John MacMillan.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor Crane said that he is attending the grand opening of the Greylock Outdoor Center in Adams.

## Adjournment

Councilor Collins moved to adjourn the meeting.

Councilor Smith 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>