# **September 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present: Dicken Crane, Susan Smiley, Jeff Collins, Ted Dooley, Dennis Smith, Jennifer Wilson, Laura Jasinski, Melissa Harper, Kevin O’Shea, Vivian Ortiz

## Council Members Attending Virtually: Phil Doherty

Council Members Absent: Jack Buckley, Ann Canedy

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Matthew Perry

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Chris Mancini, Bill Boles, Chris Egan, Jenn Paluzzi, Marzie Galazka, Sean Fitzgerald, Denis LaForce, Sarah Freeman, Andres Ripley, Christine Liu, Bill Gibbons, Wendy Machmuller

## Call to Meeting, 9:00am – Vice Chair Melissa Harper

Vice Chair Harper welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roll call of councilors present. She gave remarks about DCR’s Summer Nights program, the agency’s social media campaign about “Storrowing,” and the recent cases of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) that have been happening in the area and how DCR is responding to them.

Vice Chair Harper invited Swampscott Town Administrator Sean Fitzgerald to speak.

Mr. Fitzgerald welcomed the Council to Swampscott and thanked them for having him at the meeting. He spoke about King’s Beach and the seawall, protecting the area, and taking care of the outfall area to ensure that the beach is safe for visitors.

Vice Chair Harper thanked Mr. Fitzgerald for his remarks.

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo thanked the Council and said he was excited to be in Swampscott overlooking several of DCR’s coastal properties. He let everyone know that the next edition of the quarterly newsletters “Dispatch from the Parks” will be coming out soon.

### Welcome New Staff

The Commissioner announced that as the agency has been working through the ongoing hiring controls, DCR has been able to hire several key positions including new General Counsel Bob Fitzgerald, Director of Strategic Readiness Fran Blanchard, and Chief State House Ranger Brian Heslin. He said that they are continuing to work on hiring and backfilling a number of positions to ensure the necessary staff at parks and properties.

### 2023 Water Quality Report Card for Greater Boston’s Rivers

DCR’s Deputy Chief Engineer Rob Lowell attended the 2023 Water Quality Report Card for Greater Boston’s three rivers announcement event, representing the agency and the role it plays in the management of these rivers. The report, released by the Mystic River Watershed Association, Charles River Watershed Association, and Neponset River Watershed Association, highlights the significant progress made over the past decades in improving the rivers’ water quality. These continued efforts are crucial for further improving water quality and ensuring that the rivers remain healthy and supportive of recreational activities and vibrant ecosystems.

### Smokey Bear Celebrates 80th Birthday

Smokey Bear has been celebrating his 80th birthday this summer with a series of events across Massachusetts. At Mount Wachusett State Reservation, visitors took advantage of the rare opportunity to climb to the top of the fire tower, discover the true story of Smokey Bear, and learn about the critical work our fire crews do. Halibut Point also joined in the festivities with a special event that highlighted Smokey's enduring legacy, and DAR State Forest hosted a Smokey Bear event, offering tours inside the fire tower and celebrating Smokey’s contributions.

Smokey Bear was also invited to throw out the first pitch at the Red Sox game on Sunday, August 11. Smokey was accompanied by Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis, Fire Program Coordinator Alex Belote, District 12 Fire Warden Margaret Carnevale, Patrolman Brian Everett, Fire Fighter Connor Shults, and Fire Fighter Chris Huling, as well as colleagues from the US Forest Service. During the game, the Forest Fire Control team had a table on the concourse to teach Sox fans about the importance of fire prevention.

### Storrowing

The beginning of September marks Move-In Weekend in Boston, and Commissioner Arrigo said that the DCR communications and engineering teams worked hard again this year to try to prevent "storrowing" incidents with a social media campaign and expanded "Cars Only" signs. He said that Governor Healey joined in on the fun to raise awareness about low bridge clearances on Storrow Drive, Soldiers Field Road, and Memorial Drive, and added that there were no storrowing incidents during Move-In weekend.

### Conservation and Recreation and Leadership Fellows

DCR’s Conservation and Recreation Leadership Fellows completed their 12-week fellowship with DCR and Salem State University presenting their final presentations on August 22 at Lawrence Heritage State Park. The presentations covered a variety of topics including accessibility, trails, and conservation marketing and their work will greatly benefit the agency and our future work. Commissioner Arrigo said that Lt. Governor Driscoll sent a video message that was played at the graduation ceremony recognizing the fellows for their hard work.

### Floating Wetland Visit

In early August, DCR staff joined Councilor Laura Jasinski, who is also Executive Director of the Charles River Conservancy (CRC), on a site visit to the floating wetlands CRC installed in partnership with DCR in June 2020.  The Commissioner said that this first of its kind floating wetland in the Charles River was installed to understand how floating wetlands can mitigate water pollution, support a healthy and diverse environment, and create new physical and programmatic paths for river access. The floating wetland is also used for educational programs for young people and community engagement, and CRC recently installed a fish camera that displays activity under the wetlands and is powered by a small solar panel. For more information, check out CRC’s [floating wetland webpage](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/thecharles.org/floating-wetlands/__;!!CPANwP4y!QcRSxdHhU88St65nDsxgss68kthX00qgjSYW_8JQglEo10-Ye8jH2jGmMsei80_SQmVb9LTEJRf3G0QZ6DGZdfXyFgZy$).

### Wildland Firefighters Help Battle Western Fires

On July 19, DCR deployed a 20-person crew of DCR and Department of Fish and Game (DFG) wildland firefighters to the Northern Rockies to help battle fires burning in Lincoln/Helena, MT region, with one of the DCR firefighters joining a Connecticut Wildfire Crew in Oregon.

The weekend of August 10, DCR and DFG sent another crew of state wildland firefighters to Boise, Idaho, to help battle ongoing blazes in the Pioneerville area. The 21-person crew was comprised of 18 DCR wildland firefighters and three from DFG. Commissioner Arrigo shared that both teams returned home safely, and thanked them all for their outstanding efforts and dedication to public service.

### Congressional Staff Visit at Breakheart Reservation

A group of 18 Congressional staff members visited Breakheart Reservation during their New England Tour to observe the area's unique geological features, including its precariously balanced rocks. During their visit, staff from the U.S. Geological Survey provided an insightful overview of the organization's efforts in monitoring seismic activity and discussed the regional variations in seismic conditions across the country. The visit offered a valuable opportunity for the staff to learn about geological phenomena and the important work being done to understand and manage seismic risks.

### “Did You Know?” Event

On July 18, DCR staff partnered with colleagues from EEA and DEP to engage the community in a “Did You Know?” event at Holyoke Heritage State Park. The event brought community members together with staff from our state environmental agencies to learn about the programs DCR offers for families and children including swimming, camping, the Summer Nights program for young people, and the Greening the Gateway Cities program, as well as tips on recycling. This was the first of what is expected to become a series of events connecting EJ communities to the services and programs we offer at the EEA agencies.

### DCR’s Family Camping Weekend

During the weekend of July 13 and 14, 19 families were hosted at Myles Standish State Forest for a DCR Family Camping Weekend. These families bravely ventured into camping for the first time, creating lasting memories and learning valuable outdoor skills. Commissioner Arrigo said that it was great to see a new generation of DCR stewards discover the fun of spending time together in nature, rain or shine, in this case rain. Throughout the weekend, families participated in skill-building sessions such as safe campfire management, campfire cooking, a family fishing clinic, and hiking basics. They also enjoyed various programs like ponding, storytelling around the campfire, making s’mores, and meeting live animals. A grant from Bronco Wild Funds allowed the families to borrow tents and camp stoves for the weekend. The Commissioner thanked Amy Wilmotfor coordinating the event.

### Learn to Swim

Commissioner Arrigo followed up on an update he gave at the last meeting about the Learn to Swim program. He said that this year, DCR held three two-week sessions at 14 pools across the state serving nearly 1,100 kids.

### EV Charging Grant

The Commissioner announced that DCR was recently awarded a $1.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Discretionary Grant Program. The funding will be used to launch the Public Access Electric Vehicle Charging Program which will include a pilot program to install up to 40 EV charging stations at selected DCR properties across the state and implement a maintenance plan, as well as develop educational and interpretive materials. This program aligns with the ongoing efforts of the Office of Climate Resilience that integrates climate resiliency and decarbonization into all DCR projects, programs and overall agency operations.

### Summer Nights Wrap Up

Commissioner Arrigo said that this summer marked another successful season of Summer Nights programs across the Commonwealth, noting that in total, 100 Summer Nights partners offered over 2,250 programs and served over 22,000 youths at 125 different locations, making it the biggest year of Summer Nights ever. The summer kicked off with two different events, one in Boston with Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, and the second in Holyoke with Governor Maura Healey. DCR will be holding a virtual wrap up event later this month with partners to thank them for their hard work this summer and to look forward to 2025.

### BHI Cleanup

For two weeks, DCR is partnering with the Center for Coastal Studies, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Boston Harbor Now for a once-in-a-generation cleanup of marine debris at five of the outer Boston Harbor Islands. The Commissioner said that this effort is the culmination of nearly two years of planning and organizing and includes several funding sources, including a portion of a $2.7 million NOAA Marine Debris Grant with funding provided by the Inflation Reduction Act awarded to CCS for a multi-year coastal cleanup project, $150,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and an additional $35,000 from DCR, and $80,000 from US Fish and Wildlife through their Natural Resource Assessment and Restoration program on behalf of the natural resource Trustees for the Bouchard B-120 oil spill.

As part of the project, on September 16, 17, 18, and 19, DCR will host “adventure cleanup” volunteer opportunities. Commissioner Arrigo said that if anyone is interested in participating, to please sign up through the volunteer page on the DCR website.

### Mishoon Burning

In June, the Nipmuc community crafted a traditional charcoal dugout boat, known as a mishoon, at Lake Quinsigamond. Several DCR staff members worked closely with the Nipmuc community to ensure the ceremony could be performed safely while honoring the tribe's cultural sovereignty. The Nipmuc generously allowed DCR’s staff and the public to observe their practice, offering a unique opportunity for the community to witness and learn about an important aspect of the tribe's heritage.

A video of the process can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjDCeQhQwUs>

### Eliot Tower Completion

Earlier this summer, DCR celebrated the reopening of Eliot Tower and Pavilion at Blue Hills Reservation. This project was a $1 million investment and the first comprehensive rehabilitation of the tower since 1939, including work on the building’s mortar, rebuilding the rear chimney, replacing the fireplace and adding an accessible ramp and new safety features. Two of the great-grandsons of Charles Eliot, the tower’s namesake and the architect of many of Greater Boston’s landscapes, attended the reopening ceremony.

### Beartown Camping

After a four-year closure, the Beartown State Forest campground was reopened this summer. During the closure, DCR made more than $350,000 improvements, including the installation of two brand new bathrooms equipped with running water and flush toilets, several new water spigots throughout the site, and updated tables and grills. Internet connectivity was also added at the contact station to better assist campers and a new year-round staff position was created to ensure improved visitor service.

### RMPS

Commissioner Arrigo briefly spoke about Resource Management Plans (RMPs). He said that RMPs are so important to the agency and act as guidelines for the maintenance and operations of DCR’s properties, adding that they are currently meeting internally to discuss the program and ways to streamline the approach to the plans and to get them before the council on a more regular basis. He said that these foundational documents and their approval are an important part of the Stewardship Council’s function, and that he looks forward to working with our team and the council on making these improvements.

### EEE

Commissioner Arrigo said that there have been a few events that have been moved or cancelled in response to the uptick in EEE cases. He said that the agency has been partnered with the Department of Public Health (DPH) to make sure that DCR properties are up to DPH’s guidance and that visitors are receiving the guidance on how to be safe. He added that DCR has put out notifications about the issue.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor O’Shea said that he would like to know about events like the ribbon cutting ceremony at the Eliot Tower in the future so he and other councilors can attend.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he will work with Mr. Perry to get invites to events over to Councilors.

Councilor Jasinski said that she knows new Director of Strategic Readiness Fran Blanchard and is excited that she was hired for the role. She said that Fran has a big picture view and can conceptualize how things work operationally. She also asked the Commissioner how long it took to go from four summer nights partners to over 100 partners.

Commissioner Arrigo said that the program started in 2014 so it has been 10 years to get to that number.

Councilor Jasinski said that she would like to know more about the program and how it works.

Commissioner Arrigo said that they have worked to leverage the state contract system to taken on partners and potentially have them do programming outside of the Summer Nights program. He said that the team has done a great job and that Julie Martin has done a great job getting partners to buy into the new contract.

Councilor Smiley said that she said recalls the program was planning to expand to other Gateway Cities and wanted to know if that happened.

Commissioner Arrigo said yes, that four or five gateway cities were added and more cities were added out in the western part of the state.

Councilor Crane asked about RMPs and their connection to Landscape Designations. He said that there was supposed to have been a landscape designation update since it is supposed to happen every 10 years.

Commissioner Arrigo said that the designation efforts are ongoing and that Director of Forest Stewardship Peter Church is leading them.

Councilor Ortiz echoed the sentiments about knowing about events that are happening. She asked about parking at Ryan Playground in Mattapan.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he didn’t know specifics but that he could find out.

Councilor Ortiz said it is important to remind people about public transit options to travel to parks like the Ryan Playground.

Councilor Collins asked if there were efforts to review some of the Summer Nights programs that have modest attendance for efficiency.

Commissioner Arrigo said that with Summer Nights, some of the smaller programs that get less money serve more niche interests and communities, giving the example of a digital marketing program that is geared towards young girls that had five participants last year, but provided those five participants with a great experience and something that wasn’t being offered elsewhere.

Councilor Dooley gave congratulations on the EV charging grant that the agency received. He said he would like to hear updates at future meetings on the rollout of the grant and the decisions of which facilities will get the stations.

Commissioner Arrigo said that they are looking at how they can have regional equity across the Commonwealth with the grant.

Councilor Ortiz mentioned that she would like more clarification on trails about what it means when signs say “no motorized vehicles.” She noted that she is seeing eBikes on the trails, but also mopeds.

Councilor Smiley asked if the “Did You Know” event was set up by EEA.

Commissioner Arrigo said yes, that this was the first event of its kind and that it was hosted at Holyoke Heritage State Park but run by EEA and other environmental staff from across EEA’s agencies who were there to give info to residents.

## Regular Business I

### Presentation from Save the Harbor/Save the Bay – Chris Mancini, Executive Director

Mr. Mancini presented to the council about Save the Harbor/Save the Bay’s work and collaboration with DCR.

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

Councilor Ortiz asked Mr. Mancini about Tenean Beach in Dorchester.

Mr. Mancini said that the official stance is that the beach is not a swimming beach, and because of its location at the mouth of the Neponset River, it is a hard issue to tackle to make it one. He said that despite this, there has been great work done to the beach and park to make it a climate resilient green space.

Councilor Smiley said that they have been waiting for this presentation for a while, and that it is everything that they envisioned it would be. She thanked Mr. Mancini for his energy and enthusiasm.

Mr. Mancini said that the work of the organization is not about the beaches, it is about the people and that it is important to protect beaches for people to be able to use.

Councilor Wilson thanked Mr. Mancini for saying that DCR is good to work with, noting that this perception may have not always have widely held. She gave credit to Commissioner Arrigo for this and asked that he keep saying it to legislators and other decision-makers so they know how good it is to work with DCR.

Mr. Mancini said that is the motivation behind the hearing that is held by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, to let legislators know.

Councilor Jasinski asked how big the staff is at the organization.

Mr. Mancini said there are 10 people that work there.

### Approval of Minutes

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

Councilor Dooley seconded the motion.

The July 11, 2024 minutes were approved with Councilor Ortiz abstaining.

### Public Comment

Vice Chair Harper invited members of the public for comment. Comments were given by the following:

* Bill Boles, Sandwich
* Chris Egan, Mass Forest Alliance

[Guidelines for Public Comment are available on the DCR Stewardship Council website.](https://www.mass.gov/doc/dcr-stewardship-council-public-comment-guidelines/download)

## Regular Business II

### Discussion of the Comment Letter on the Biodiversity Executive Order

Councilor Collins spoke about a letter written by the Conservation Committee regarding Executive Order No. 618: Biodiversity Conservation in Massachusetts and its implementation. He said that MassWildlife asked for public comment by the end of August, but he spoke with Deputy Director Eve Schluter, and she said it would be good to get comments from the council even if it was after the deadline. Councilor Collins welcomed comments from the council about the letter.

Councilor Smiley asked if under the “Protect” section of the letter, could recreational opportunities be added.

Councilor Collins suggested that the second bullet be changed to say something about land conservation and recreation.

Councilor Crane supported this change, saying that recreation is part of the biodiversity goals.

Councilor Jasinski said that she supports it as well, but that it is also important for some land to have less human interaction. She said that there are other tools and data that might be helpful under the Protect section.

Councilor Collins suggested adding something about monitoring progress about biodiversity metrics.

Councilor Jasinski said that she would like to see a way to activate others to help with the monitoring of progress and that it might tie in with Councilor Smiley’s point about recreation.

Councilor Crane said that to the point Councilor Jasinski made about some areas where there needs to be less human interaction, it can be achieved by highlighting where recreational opportunities are currently available or being created. He said there should be investment in those places to help protect the other places.

Councilor Ortiz asked whether something could be included about wildlife friendly transportation, and the use of digital billboards that have a negative effect on habitat and wildlife.

Councilor O’Shea moved to approve the letter with comments that were made incorporated.

Councilor Jasinski seconded the motion.

The motion was approved.

### Committee Updates

#### Conservation

Councilors Collins and Crane reported that the committee is talking about getting a presentation pertaining to the impacts on conservation resources. They would also like a presentation from the Scientific Advisory Committee on forest reserves.

#### Policy Committee

Councilor Wilson reported that the committee heard from Director of Natural Resources Eric Seaborn in August about the agency’s policy regarding rodenticides and that they would like him to make a presentation to the full council at an upcoming meeting. She also said that she had a phone call with Commissioner Arrigo regarding the RMP program, and with a good reminder from Councilor Crane about the Landscape Designations process.

#### Stakeholders

Councilor Smiley reported that the Stakeholders Committee held a listening session on August 12 that had lots of participation from the public and was well attended by DCR staff. She thanked Commissioner Arrigo for his support of the session. She said that she is excited to present at the upcoming Trails Conference happening in October.

#### Finance

Vice Chair Harper reminded everyone to get any comments on the FY26 Budget Letter to Mr. Perry so it can be sent to Secretary Tepper.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor Smith asked if there was a way to kindly get a message across to park user about picking up after their dogs and going slowly on eBikes. He referenced the Be Kind campaign that is happening at the Middlesex Fells.

He also reminded the council that many of their terms are expiring in about six months and that it is important to plan ahead about whether or not they are interested in serving another term.

Vice Chair Harper said that she will reach out to members to gauge interest in reappointment.

Councilor Wilson said that their work getting terms to go from seven years to five years through a legislative change has fallen off, and that it can picked up again to make it more attractive to serve on the council.

Councilor O’Shea said that he was at Malibu Beach and was worried about the state of the boardwalks there and whether or not they are wheelchair accessible. He said he wants to make sure that they are safe and accessible for all.

Councilor Dooley thanked the council for coming up to the North Shore and to see King’s Beach which he has talked about at council meetings in the past. He said it would be helpful to hear from Save the Harbor/Save the Bay every year after their report on beaches is released.

## Adjournment

Councilor Smiley moved to adjourn the meeting.

Councilor Collins seconded.

Vice Chair Harper thanked everyone for attending 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>