# Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present: Jennifer Wilson, Jeff Collins, Ann Canedy, Phil Doherty

DCR Staff Attendees: Matthew Perry, Paul Cavanagh

## Call to Order and Welcome – Committee Chair Jennifer Wilson

Chair Wilson welcomed the attendees and went over the meeting agenda.

## Approval of Minutes

The August 29 minutes were deferred to be reviewed at the committee’s October meeting.

## Resource Management Plans (RMPs)

Chair Wilson welcomed Paul Cavanagh, Resource Management Planner at DCR, and thanked him for joining the meeting.

Mr. Cavanagh updated the committee on the progress of the South Coast RMPs, saying the good news is that there has been progress, but the bad news is that it always takes longer than expected. He said that the RMPs for the South Coast are done and that they have gone through all of the public comments and made changes based on them. He said that the hope is to get the RMPs in front of the Stewardship Council at its November meeting. There are some minor changes from Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis, and once those are made it will go to the Deputy Commissioner and Commissioner Arrigo for approval. Mr. Cavanagh said the plan is to get the RMPs to the Commissioner within the next two weeks, and after his approval, they will go to the Council.

The Blackstone Complex RMPs are in the internal review process. He said that there have been major changes that dropped the number of RMPs for the complex from seven to six because of internal discussion about two adjacent parks that act as one property. Mr. Cavanagh stated that this change causes a rewrite, and that he hopes the plans will go to the public in November.

The Central Highlands District RMPs are ready for internal review, but because of the number of plans involved, they will be broken into groups for the review, the Wachusett Complex and the Erving Complex. With the Blackstone Complex, drop-in sessions for staff to comment were held and those will be held again for the Highlands, with three meetings since they will be broken into smaller groups.

Chair Wilson asked if the Public Comment will also be held in three phases.

Mr. Cavanagh said no, that one longer session will be held. For public comment, it is usually friend’s groups or someone with comments for one specific property that attend. Internally, staff needs to look at every single one so it will be broken down for it to be more easily reviewed. He added that for the South Coast RMPs, the public comments were open for six weeks and 10 comments were received, and that none of the comments received were about all of the properties. The assumption is that this will be the same for the Central Highlands.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the review process is what is taking up the most time and gave the example of the Belle Isle RMP that’s internal review process is starting this week. He said that even though it is just one plan, the process is the same as if they were doing 31. Because of the location of Belle Isle and the threat of sea-level rise, the Mr. Cavanagh and his team have been asked to prioritize the RMP for the property. This includes months of internal and external review, and those are what take the most time and it has been difficult to find ways to shorten these times.

Chair Wilson asked where the prioritization of Belle Isle originated.

Mr. Cavanagh said that Deputy Commissioner Geigis and the Office of Climate Resilience requested it because the Friends of Belle Isle are bringing the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute to do an assessment, and it felt like the stakeholder group was getting out in front of the agency.

In addition to the other work, Mr. Cavanagh said that they are wrapping up site visits for the Lake District in Southern Berkshire County, adding that this fall they will wrap up the Highlands District and start the Lakes District.

Mr. Cavanagh said that he thinks that they may have taken on too many plans from the start, but the positive side of working on so many at once was having them all in development at the same time, working in different parts of the state and seeing how the new format works. He said that he believes they are getting a better RMP by working on so many at the same time.

Chair Wilson asked if the South Coast and Blackstone RMPs are in the old format.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the South Coast is not, but that the Blackstone RMPs were roughed out in the old format. Because of this, the Blackstone RMPs have a shift on how things are laid out in Visitor Services and Cultural Heritage. He said that since those portions were written, Visitor Services and Interpretation have changed the way that they present information.

Chair Wilson said that since the November council meeting is on November 9, would it be possible to get the RMPs two weeks ahead for review.

Mr. Cavanagh said that in the past, he has come to the meeting and presented the plans and then they are considered at the following meeting. He added that he is not on the November agenda yet, but he is hoping that they will be ready for that meeting.

Chair Wilson asked if any of the other Councilors had questions for Mr. Cavanagh.

Mr. Cavanagh added that he has thought of the Council when working on these, feeling like they have been looking over his shoulder asking when they will get them for review. He said that they have struggled finding a consistent flow.

Chair Wilson said that the Council does not doubt his responsiveness and that they appreciate all the work he is doing. She said that they are trying to take the pressure off of him and that they know he needs time, and that there needs to be prioritization from senior staff for the internal review process.

Mr. Cavanagh said that staff has been a little more cautious with the South Coast RMPs since they will be the first in the new format.

Chair Wilson asked if Mr. Cavanagh can highlight the changes between the old format and new format when presenting at the November meeting and to talk more about the caution of the agency.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the interest in the agency is a lot broader now since it is the first time they’ll be releasing in this format and they want everything to be correct.

Councilor Collins asked if going from long-term seasonal staff to full time positions improved the production of the plans.

Mr. Cavanagh said it has been incredibly helpful having John Daly and Aimee Graeber working full time now. He said that when they were long-term seasonals, there was a lot of work that went into the rehiring process every year, and not having to do that anymore has allowed more time to be focused on the creation of the plans. He said that they are truly working as a team and that it is nice to have continuous engagement of staff without any interruptions.

Councilor Collins asked for a clarification about something that was brought up during the South Coast RMP public comment session about the closure of a parking lot.

Mr. Cavanagh said he was referring to the Assonet Cedar Swamp, and that the parking lot has been closed for years and that they are recommending the reopening of it.

Councilor Collins thanked him for clarifying.

Mr. Cavanagh said that one of the interesting threads that came out of the written comment was six people associated with the Pocasset tribe offered history about the tribe and other instructional information. He said that these comments resulted in a number of edits for the RMPs, and added that they always try to engage with Native People, but this time especially they received great feedback from the members of the tribe.

## Strategic Oversight Plan

Chair Wilson said that they are not as far along with revisions of the plan as she hoped to be at this meeting, but they are still on track to approve the plan at the next Council meeting. She said that a number of the comments received were about the Stakeholders portion of the plan and that Stakeholders Committee Chair Susan Smiley and committee member Melissa Harper were reviewing the comments and will send her their changes.

Councilor Collins said that the committee is creating the plan within a river of work so they can’t say that what is in the plan is precisely what will happen, but can say that these are the parameters that the council will work in. He brought up the current review of forestry guidelines by EEA and new biodiversity goals and said he is struggling about how much to reference these issues when they don’t currently have the outputs.

Chair Wilson said that some comments that were submitted say the council shouldn’t be passive, and they can mention that they are watching the processes as they unfold.

Councilor Collins said that the way it is written now holds for him in the context of those comments, saying that they are committed to engaging with the agency and public comments on those decisions. The Council is interested in supporting stakeholder engagement, oversight of the budget, and the agency’s efforts to support biodiversity and climate change response, but there are a lot of specifics that can’t be named in the plan.

Chair Wilson brought up a comment about when you hear from someone advocating one side of an issue, you should hear from the other side as well.

Councilor Collins said it was good advice in general for a public body, but asked how the council seeks out someone who has the opposite view on something that they have been presented.

Chair Wilson says that they do seek information all of the time and look for presentations for meetings.

Councilor Collins asked how far they should go with these types of things and said they could preface that the operating principles are that the Council seeks to gather information through presentations for its oversight role.

Chair Wilson noted that the Council also gives the opportunity for public comment.

Councilor Canedy said that she doesn’t think that they need to hear from every interested party on every issue that they consider. She said that there are legitimate opinions on every issue but that the key word is legitimate, adding that they want to hear recognized evidence not just someone’s opinion.

Chair Wilson pointed out that even the EEA Forests as Climate Solutions is being criticized for not incorporating every view.

Councilor Collins asked if the Stewardship Council should be seen as simply a venue for public discussion, or if the presumption is that appointees to the Council come with some knowledge and thoughts on how the agency should operate. He asked whether they should add language or express in the plan broadly that through public comment and presentations from agency staff and outside groups, the Council seeks to understand different aspects of agency management.

Chair Wilson said that the plan is on track to be considered on October 12. One comment received was a question about including parkways in RMPs. Mr. Cavanagh said that if a parkway goes through an existing park or forest land it is included, but not as a standalone parkway. Chair Wilson asked Mr. Cavanagh for an example of one that is not considered.

Mr. Cavanagh said that historic connector parkways are not considered for RMPs. Roads to summit of mountains like at Greylock or Wachusett or through a park like in the Blue Hills are included. The other connector parkways have different guidelines that are followed.

Chair Wilson asked if the committee was comfortable saying that embedded parkways are included, and that then raises the question what happens to other ones.

Councilor Canedy said they can say that there is a separate management plan for other parkways.

Chair Wilson asked the extent to which the committee feels like they need to include comments in the report and if they should be in the appendix or if they should just recognize that they received them.

Councilor Canedy said that on documents she has worked on in the past, they have always included comments in the appendix.

Councilor Collins said that he would be okay not including comments.

Councilor Canedy said that documents like the Strategic Oversight Plan usually include them.

Chair Wilson said that a link to the comments can be provided on the website.

Councilor Canedy said that she thinks the comments are good and that she is not opposed to including them.

Councilor Doherty said that he thinks a link to the comments on the website is a good solution.

Chair Wilson asked Councilor Collins what he thought about changes that he has to make in terms of timing.

Councilor Collins responded that he will give the plan one more pass this week and asked what needs attention.

Chair Wilson said that listening to other points of view and the comment made about tree cutting need attention, and that the RMP portion should be reread to make sure it looks good. She said that she is ending the stakeholder comments to Councilor Smiley and Councilor Harper and will get in touch with them to see if they can get their revisions and have all changes done by the committee by Friday, September 29 with plans to get the edited plan to the entire council by Friday, October 6.

## Natural Resources Committee

Councilor Collins said that he spoke with Councilor Crane and that they are working on language for the charge of the Natural Resources Committee. He shared his screen to show the draft charge to the committee.

He said that they are considering what the name of the committee should be and are formatting the charge so it matches the ones for the other committees. He said that the committee would include the oversight of DCR’s conservation activities, that one of the environmental seat appointees would be included on the committee at a minimum and listed the responsibilities of the committee. He said that there has been discussion about what is the unique role of this committee and how it intersects with the policy committee, noting that the reference to RMPs was taken out of the charge.

Chair Wilson said that she thinks its great to have environmental councilor involved. She asked what specifically will be delegated to this committee that they will report back to the full council on. She said that finance, policy, and stakeholders have clear roles and that she doesn’t want it to look like this new committee is doing what the full council is supposed to do.

Councilor Collins responded that there are many things that the council has never heard about such as ecological restoration and land conservation, and that since the agency does a wide variety of things, it is important to have presentations that highlight that work. He said that it can spotlight parts of the agency in conversations with the commissioner to make sure that things are getting adequate attention. He added that the agency is pulled between the recreational aspect and the conservation aspect, saying that a lot of energy goes into that work, and that they want to highlight and elevate it, noting that in the context of reports coming out, it is even more important.

Chair Wilson said that as an example, the committee will hear about Massachusetts rare and endangered species and will go back and report to the full council about it, with the idea being that there are now four councilors who are more informed about that issue.

Councilor Canedy asked if it would conflict with what the Stakeholders Committee does recommending presentations for the full committee.

Councilor Collins said that they would work with Mr. Pery to get what the staff that is doing this work to present, and that the committee could work with the Finance Committee to see if it should be a priority.

Councilor Canedy said that this would be good to have because of ongoing work at the local level that could be brought statewide.

Chair Wilson said that if some presentations are too arcane for the full council, this committee could hear the presentation and see if it should be recommended for the full council going forward.

Councilor Collins said that he will send out the draft to the committee and will include Councilor Crane on the email.

## Adjournment

Chair Wilson thanked everyone for their attendance 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*](https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council)