

STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL OVERSIGHT STRATEGY

Legislation (M.G.L. c. 21, s. 2G): “The stewardship council shall develop an oversight strategy of park management plans, capital planning and policy development. Such oversight strategies will be published annually and after a 30 day public comment period will be finalized and submitted to the Secretary of Environmental Affairs. Such oversight plans must be prepared and submitted 45 days prior to the submission to the legislature of the governor’s annual budget.”

The Stewardship Council first assembled on September 28, 2004. Since that time, the Stewardship Council has refined its role and its mode of operations within the broad charter of its enabling legislation, choosing to operate at a policy-level in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities for the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), while also serving as a forum for discussions with the public over DCR-related policy issues at its monthly meetings.

Accordingly, the Council has set out a three-part agenda that drives its activities:

- Overseeing the transformation of the DCR organization into a high performance model for park and conservation agencies in other states.
- Overseeing DCR’s meaningful progress toward the delivery of one, and then more, world class parks in the Commonwealth.
- Establishing widespread public support for DCR and for the resources it manages.

Upon this platform, the Council has formalized its own practices and procedures and continues to focus on effectively overseeing and intervening in the policy-level affairs of DCR, as outlined below.

1. **Park Management Plans:** The Stewardship Council established a Resource Management Planning Committee chaired by Henry Lee, which worked with DCR staff to create an overall strategy for completing the Resource Management Plans (RMP’s). This plan was reviewed and approved by the Council during its meetings in the summer of 2005. Once funded, this plan will ensure that the considerable backlog of RMP’s will be handled through a logical and transparent public process. Going forward, the Stewardship Council will continue to:
 - a. Seek funding to support the fulfillment of this fundamental responsibility of the Council.
 - b. Monitor progress of those few RMP’s already in production to ensure completion according to processes and standards that the Council deems acceptable.
 - c. Review and approve all RMP’s as they are completed.

2. **Operational and Capital Planning:** The Stewardship Council established a Finance Committee to oversee the development and management of DCR’s operating and capital budgets. This committee, chaired by Whitney Hatch, has regular meetings with DCR’s Deputy Commissioner of Administration and Finance to keep informed in this area and intervened with the Legislature on behalf of DCR during this past year’s budgeting process. Looking forward, the Council will continue to:
 - a. Be briefed by DCR on both the legislative process for operating capital authorization, and DCR’s internal process for submitting budget requests. In particular, the Council will consider the criteria used in determining projects that are submitted by DCR to the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs for approval for spending.
 - b. Review the annual operating and capital spending plans once they are developed by DCR.

Working with these inputs, as well as its evolving understating of DCR, the role and the status of the agency, the Stewardship Council shall serve as the final approval authority, before DCR’s annual submittals of its:

- a. Annual Budget
- b. Annual Report

3. **Policy Development:** The Stewardship Council established a formal Policy Committee for policy review, now co-chaired by Julian Agyeman and Laura Johnson. Previously, external policy issues had been brought to the attention of the Council on an “ad hoc” basis by DCR staff and by members of the public.

The Council will continue to rely on an interdisciplinary DCR group to review all external policies that may substantially affect the public. During the past year the Council approved the Committee’s guidelines for determining what kinds of matters are, and are not, appropriate for consideration by the Council.

Looking forward, through its Policy Committee, the Council will continue to be proactive in its policy oversight role through:

- a. Continuing to expect DCR to consult the Council on any external policies that require public input.
- b. Maintaining a formal schedule for review of external policies.
- c. Maintaining an agenda for reviewing a list of: (1) policies in progress at DCR; and (2) policies expected to be addresses at DCR during the next calendar year.

Furthermore, The Stewardship Council will continue seek advice from its Policy Committee to further define its own overarching role as it moves forward in time.