

DRAFT Cannon Mountain Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: November 7, 2025

Time: 10:00 AM

Location: Franconia Notch State Park Headquarters

Attendance

Members present included Monica Mezzapelle, Frank MacConnell, Susan Ford, Thad Presby, Gil Talbot, Representative Suzanne Vail, and Brennan Ward. Others present were Jace Wirth, David Webster (Scribe), Interim Director Colin Capelle, and Commissioner Sarah Stewart.

Call to Order and Approval of Minutes

Frank MacConnell called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM, and a quorum was confirmed. Introductions were made by all members and attendees. Frank reviewed the governing statute and invited questions; none were raised. He then moved to approve the February 28th meeting minutes, which were reviewed. A motion to approve was made by Susan Ford and seconded by Representative Vail. All were in favor. Frank also noted that the August 8th informal tour did not require approval because no quorum had been present.

Season Pass Sales and Market Trends

Jace reported that season pass sales are pacing approximately four percent ahead of prior year. Growth in the young adult and teen pass categories remains solid. Commissioner Stewart asked about trends among New Hampshire resident pass holders and whether overall interest by NH residents has increased or decreased. Jace explained that NH resident pass sales had increased from prior year but hadn't grown substantially in several years and offered to research the overall health of the NH resident ski and ride market. Jace reported the three-tiered season pass rate structure has performed very well, shifting approximately \$800,000 in sales from the tier 2 (summer/fall) window into the tier 1 (spring) window, indicative of stronger advanced commitment, which was a core reason for the implementation.

Pass Refunds and Public Response

Jace stated that roughly \$26,000 in pass refunds have been requested to date, but only one refund was made due to the tram retirement. The majority of the remainder were a result of internal processing of pass upgrades. He reported that overall passholder reaction to the tram retirement has been neutral to positive. The committee held additional discussion regarding payment plans, multi-mountain pass structures, and how operations may evolve between the first and second years following the tram shutdown.

Employee Orientation, Training, and Retention

Jace reviewed this year's staff orientation and training efforts. New training initiatives include comprehensive changes to field training and the implementation of e-learning for all staff, with a focus on lift operations and frontline departments. Investments into grooming training have been made, with all grooming staff enrolled in workshops and a manufacturer-specific training program.

Jace noted these programs reflect Cannon's continued investment in employee development, performance, and guest experience.

Representative Vail asked about general wage competitiveness. Jace responded that Cannon's wages are generally not competitive with the broader industry in most departments. Sarah asked about non-pay strategies to attract and retain staff. Jace described the general perks and benefits available to staff, while noting that a mitigating factor with regards to Cannon's wage disparities is the strong retention rate of seasonal staff (approximately 70 percent), which he attributed to family connections, a strengthened workplace environment, and the lure of the mountain's history and heritage. Jace noted that new this year, the resort is also welcoming up to fourteen J-1 visa employees for lift operations, to solve some of the staffing issues experienced in that department in recent years. Generally, and given wages and employee origin and commute, housing availability and affordability in the local area remains a major obstacle to attracting and retaining both full-time and seasonal staff. Jace noted Cannon is exploring the potential for dormitory-style employee lodging using existing facilities.

Tram Structural Analysis and Retirement Event

Jace reported that SCJ Alliance and other consulting teams are ahead of schedule in their work, with field testing to be completed within the next two months and load analysis already occurring. Because the structural analysis is nearing completion, the Tram project team is beginning to outline resources necessary for a Request for Bids. He noted he will provide an update to the Capital Project Overview Committee with more information within the next two months. Jace also noted that the tram retirement event and associated social media communications received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Representative Vail praised the execution of the event despite the short planning window.

Facilities and Renovation Planning

Jace provided an update on facility renovation planning. Agency architects are currently working on plans for several buildings of concern. He invited the committee to participate in identifying and prioritizing renovation needs. Additionally, Cannon intends to supplement its internal review of all components and systems of the Cannonball, Zoomer, and Peabody lifts with a modernization study to be completed by a lift manufacturer, to verify investment plans and obtain more accurate cost estimates.

Budget Strategy and CMIF Planning

Jace discussed general budget strategy for the upcoming fiscal years. With the tram offline, Cannon will rely more heavily on alternative revenue-generating efforts, including expansion of catering and group programs, monetization of Artist Bluff, and scenic chairlift rides as alternatives. Jace also expressed an interest in establishing a formal mechanism to accept financial donations, which would align with long-term capital planning objectives and enable the resort to capture additional community support.

Capital Projects Review and Approval

Jace reviewed the list of active and proposed capital projects and provided an overview of the Cannon Mountain Improvement Fund (CMIF) statement, which reflected a projected balance of \$943,564 available for fiscal year 2026. Monica explained how bonding numbers and projections were developed and noted that Treasury concurs with the projected balance. Jace proposed funding all level one priority category projects in the detailed capital plan, numbered one through eleven, for a combined total of \$893,000 (not-to-exceed). Nine of the eleven projects are based on actual estimates, with an added fifteen percent contingency to account for items like unseen project costs and evolving tariff rates. Monica also commented on capital criteria such as the twenty-year replacement standard. It was also noted that total costs for projects three through five are expected to be split with already-awarded LWCF funds. Frank invited final questions on the proposed projects. Thad motioned to approve items one through eleven, and the motion was seconded by Susan Ford. All members voted in favor. Those projects as follows:

- \$150,000 General facilities major repairs, including bathrooms, flooring, doors, decks
- \$40,000 Tram Base terminal UST removal; above ground tank installation and piping
- \$75,000 Pipe addition (6") for new Eagle Cliff spur line, split 50/50 with LWCF funds
- \$50,000 Fischer valve addition (supply/install), split 50/50 with LWCF funds
- \$30,000 Pump 100 rebuild, split 50/50 with LWCF funds
- \$215,000 Pipe replacement (6") for Upper Ravine
- \$200,000 Peabody Express outer fixed jaw replacements
- \$40,000 Peabody Express foot passenger ramp planning and supplies
- \$30,000 Work road repairs to regrade and reestablish sections and water bars
- \$8,000 Vehicle maintenance commercial shop compressor replacement
- \$55,000 F350 plow truck replacement

New Business and Adjournment

Frank proposed organizing an informal CMAC ski gathering for members. The next meeting is scheduled for March 13, 2026. Frank then motioned to adjourn the meeting at 11:37 AM, and the motion was seconded by Representative Vail.