

MOUNT SUNAPEE ADVISORY COMMISSION (RSA 21-G:11)
JUNE 14, 2021 MINUTES (DRAFT)

A meeting of the Mount Sunapee Advisory Commission (MSAC) was held at the Newbury Town Offices.

In attendance. Members present were Chair Sarah Stewart/DNCR Commr, Dir Phil Bryce/Div Parks and Recreation (DPR), Meghan Butts/UVLSRPC, John Duclos/DES, June Fichter/LSPA, Doug King/DOT, Nancy Marashio/ SPNHF, Sabrina Stanwood/NHB, and Dan Wolf/Town of Newbury. Absent. Ashlee Rowley/Sunapee Chamber (excused) and Derek Tremblay/Town of Goshen.

Peter Disch/Mount Sunapee Resort and staff and members of the public. Torene Tango-Lowy served as MSAC clerk.

Call to Order. Chair Stewart called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and reviewed the agenda. The MSAC members introduced themselves.

Minutes. Rep Wolf moved to accept the minutes of June 8, 2020; Ms Stanwood seconded. Mr Duclos made a correction to the minutes were adopted as amended.

Mount Sunapee Resort (MSR) Update. Mr Disch introduced his staff: Chris Corliss/Dir Mountain Ops and Adam Robinson/Sr Mgr Base Ops. He gave an overview of the past summer season, including the Adventure Park, the return of the NH Craftsmen Fair and the B2NH bike tour, 2021-2022 winter operations, and the challenges of during the past ski season, including staff shortages, traffic, and mitigation strategies. Mr Disch thanked DNCR, DOT and the Town of Newbury police for their assistance with mitigation.

Annual Operating Plan 2020-2021 (AOP). Mr Disch gave an overview of the AOP that follows the format outlined in the Lease. Highlights included: Traffic congestion mitigation, p. 26 and Appx. B, Parking and traffic ops maps, p. 41; Lift operations, p. 13; Return of the League of NH Craftsmen fair; Collaboration with the LSPA for the DES Watershed Assistance Grant project to stabilize Beck Brook, p. 31; Significant repairs to campground road, p. 35; Reduction of solid waste of 51% by composting food scraps and using EcoProducts, p. 26; Converting from oil to propane heat for Sunapee Lodge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and removing four unused USTs, p. 30; Curtail mowing to the fall to protecting rare plant resources, p. 30; and Signage, p. 35.

Mr Disch said that MSR recognizes the importance of each of its team members and is investing in its employees through wage increases, health benefits, leadership education and HR support.

Planned improvements during the 2022-2023 AOP are listed on p. 38, including: Installing a ski school locker room, Appx. C; Sunbowl Express refurbishment; Stairway replacement in Sunapee Lodge; Snowmaking improvements; and the construction of Parking Lot 4.

Mr Wolf heard from skiers who are concerned about capacity. It is difficult to assess this issue without skier visit numbers. Would adding lot 4 exceed capacity? Should MSR use a reservation system? Mr Disch said that 2021-2022 season was not a record year, but that it was more about staffing challenges and management of the volume. MSR did restrict ticket sales on peak days and balancing the pass holders. Lot 4 would provide more efficiency and less dependence on the beach lot. They do not intend to return to the use of a reservation system and have developed mitigation measures to address traffic concerns. The goal of the Master Development Plan is to balance infrastructure with skier activity around the mountain.

Ms Fichter heard from disgruntled skiers from Boston, especially on the Jan 8 snow event when MSR lots were full. Dir Bryce said skiers can purchase day tickets online in advance; and that Cannon allows for

season passholders and limits day tickets. Ms Butts said real-time information from MSR was helpful, including encouraging skiers to carpool.

Mr King said DOT is reviewing the traffic data of last ski season and may provide traffic counters to help quantify the issue. DOT will review the lot 4 access to the main road.

Mr Duclos said DES is reviewing the DES-related activities and permits. DES asked for an updated copy of MSR's Emergency Operating Plan, p. 22. He congratulated the Base Ops Manager on passing the "Green SnowPro" exam and for the reductions in solid waste sent to the landfill, p. 26. DES offers businesses free consultation to improve operating efficiencies. They are working with MSR on the removal of the USTs and will review the parking lot 4 project. DES has issued the necessary permits for the MSR and LSPA Beck Brook project, p. 31.

Ms Marashio asked about the permanent protection of the exemplary natural areas within the leasehold and in the West Bowl. Ms Stanwood said that there currently is no instrument for permanent protection, but that the protection of the ENC areas is identified in the updated EMP. Mr Wolf asked if the protections could be memorialized in the Registry of Deeds office. Ms Stanwood said the NHB is working on statewide determination of Natural Areas based on scientific analysis to include upland forest areas and the processes for protecting such areas. Chair Stewart suggested having a separate meeting to discuss this further.

Dir Bryce thanked MSR for the work they did on Campground Road located outside the leasehold. Chair Stewart said that MSR's reduction of waste should be emulated around the state.

Hiking Trails. The trails report from Volunteer Coordinator Jess Zacrow was provided to the MSAC and will be posted on the MSAC website.

Any Other Business. Chair Stewart opened the floor to public comment on the AOP.

Steve Russell, Friends of Mount Sunapee (FOMS) was concerned about MSR's promotion of its partners, such as Toyota, in its signage and asked if it was permissible under LWCF. Mr Disch said that such promotions are standard across the ski industry on race days, and that MSR will comply with required rules.

John Major said that MSR does a fine job. Prior to the Epic Pass, he did not see lines before lift opening. Epic Pass sales are increasing. He asked if the infrastructure is adequate and if MSR would consider a reservation system especially for weekends. Mr Disch responded that MSR is working with the state and local officials to mitigate the traffic and that Vail is providing marketing and staffing resources. He thought that MSR can effectively manage the operation. Chair Stewart said that outdoor recreation has boomed everywhere. Franconia Notch State Park staff worked with its stakeholders to manage hiker's parking their vehicles alongside I-93; and ran a hiker shuttle service. Dir Bryce said that Cannon has had to balance its day skiers and pass holders to maintain a good experience, but also had overcrowding. MSR has made investments to the ski area that the state would not have been able to provide for.

Patrick Phelps is a passholder and thought that the new parking lot will miss the mark, but that mountain capacity needs to be addressed. He has no problem making reservations, but that the mountain and resources need to be managed.

Sue Russell sent in her comments and said that the Wildlife Action Plan needs to be updated. Ms Stanwood said she met with Mr Disch on updating the Wildlife Action Plan references.

Ms. Fichter supports a reservation system and asked about lift capacity and slope usage. Mr Disch said the slopes support a variety of factors that affect utilization: slope flow, balanced use, and skill levels. MSR is always looking at lift infrastructure and other improvements.

Linda Hobbs, FOMS is a former skier and former MSR employee. She asked if the pay increase was the minimum starting range, if pay is adjusted by skillset, and if pay would be upgraded across the board. She thought the reservation system was a good idea and said that Mount Sunapee is not Cannon or Vail. In answer to her question, Mr Disch said that MSR pays for police detail.

Tracy Woods asked if lot 4 would impact the trails. Mr Disch replied that it would not impact the trails nor the cemetery.

? Landers, FOMS asked if MSR has the autonomy to operate the mountain, separate from Vail. Mr Disch said that unless they are required to implement social distancing measures, as was required for public health under the pandemic, MSR will support availability to new, returning, and local skiers. The Cataract Lift is still in the MDP.

Jeff Stall(?) of Newbury asked if MSR should offer paid parking, like at Stowe. Dir Bryce said that such a proposal would have to be reviewed by the State regarding the lease. Chair Stewart said that it has not been proposed by MSR.

Chair Stewart thanked the MSAC and the public for their comments. She will continue to accept comments on the AOP, due by June 21, 2022. Dir Bryce announced that he is retiring and that running a self-funded state park system has been challenging and rewarding. He said it is important for communities to show up even though we may not always agree, and places are made better by their active participation.

Adjourn. Mr Wolf motioned to adjourn; seconded by Ms Butts. The meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

Submitted by Torene Tango-Lowy, MSAC clerk.