

## MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION

April 28, 2017 MINUTES (Approved, as amended on 07.21.17)

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) was held at the Mount Washington Observatory Weather Discovery Center in North Conway.

**Call to Order.** Walter Graff/AMC, having a quorum of members, called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. Members present were Sen. Jeb Bradley/Senate, Dir. Phil Bryce/Div. Parks and Rec (DPR), Mark Ericson/Townsquare Media, Paul Fitzgerald/for Public, Jack Middleton/MWObs, Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, Rep. Karen Umberger/House, and Clare Mendelsohn as designee for Tom Wagner/WMNF.

Also present were Allen Brooks/AG Office, Nate Camille/MWSP, Rob Kirsch/MWObs, Tom Mansfield/DRED Architect, John Mitchell/MWObs, Sharon Schilling/MWObs President, Anne Skidmore/Public, Edith Tucker/Reporter, and Torene Tango-Lowy/MWC clerk.

**Minutes.** Rep. Umberger moved to accept the minutes of December 16, 2016; Mr. Ericson seconded. The minutes were approved as written.

**Master Plan. Yankee Building.** Members discussed DRED's FY2018-19 Capital Budget request of \$11.4mil that included \$200K toward the Yankee Building assessment. The Capital Budget request was reduced to \$3.6mil, cutting several proposed projects including the Yankee Building assessment, as the budget headed to the House. Under House Bill 25 (HB 25), the House added an additional \$1.2mil to DRED's Capital Budget, but it did not include the assessment project. DRED will present its Capital Budget request before the Senate Capital Budget Committee on May 5<sup>th</sup>. Members discussed the importance of the Yankee Building, the critical need for the assessment, and how to advocate for the needed funds (see below).

**Summit Capacity.** Carrying capacity is a topic being discussed park-wide, including Monadnock, Mt. Washington, and Franconia Notch. Components that determine carrying capacity include ecological constraints, capacity of the facilities, and the visitor experience. The MWC Master Plan subcommittee recommended conducting a carrying capacity for the summit. Members discussed how other recreation areas are managing access through advance reservations and the issues unique to Mt. Washington, such as multiple access points, the constraints of the sewage treatment plant, and visitor tolerance levels. Some funding from the State Park Fund may be available. A Request-for-Proposals (RFP), -Qualifications (RFQ), Information (RFI), or bid request is needed. Can the WMNF studies be used as a template? The MWC can assist with the framing of the RFP: Rep. Umberger and Ms. Schilling offered their assistance.

**Mt Washington Park Manager.** A proposed Supplemental Job Description (SJD) for the Park Manager position was provided to the MWC at the last meeting. This person could help with the RFP and seek grant funding. The Parks Accountant is leaving State service to relocate to Texas.

**Fee Collection.** Dir. Bryce reports that Mt Washington State Park's FY 2017 revenue is up 5% from the previous fiscal year, including \$1mil in concession revenue. He will provide more information at fiscal year-end.

**Capital Improvements. MWObs requests.** In accordance with its Lease with the State, Ms. Schilling brought forward three requests to expend restricted summit funds. The first request

was to expend \$3,240 from the State's facilities repairs account to be used to replace some carpeting in the MWObs section of the Sherman Adams Building. The request was discussed, as was the private agreement between the MWObs, Cog Railway, and Auto Road and whether the agreement was being upheld in accordance with revenue allocation; and the Lease between the MWObs and the State and its revenue allocation and expenditure procedures. Following the discussion, the MWObs withdrew this request.

Ms. Schilling brought forward the request to expend \$800 from the summit museum display account to be used to replace the archival enclosure of the 1934 log book that was vandalized. Mr. Presby moved to approve the request, Rep. Umberger seconded, and the motion was adopted.

Ms. Schilling requested to expend \$8,000 from the summit museum display account to be used for the replacement/addition of exhibit materials, specifically, to fully fund the development and installation of the Oral History Project. Grant funding is also being sought for this project. Mr. Wemyss moved to approve the request, Mr. Presby seconded, and the motion was adopted.

*State updates.* Mr. Mansfield reports that the most urgent concrete repairs on the Sherman Adams Building were done, but that after two bid releases there were no acceptable bids received for the remaining work. The State will combine this work with other projects to make the bid request more attractive to potential contractors. HEB Engineers will test and monitor the sewage treatment plant as part of the capacity assessment effort. They will also assess the feasibility of relocating the water tanks closer to the Sherman Adams Building. See below for further discussion on funding the Yankee Building assessment project that was cut from the FY2018-19 capital budget request. DRED's request for \$936K for the sewage treatment plant was also cut.

**Park Operations.** Mr. Camille reported the hire of a new SnoCat operator. The lease for the Husky vehicle ends in May; Parks is reviewing the cost of another lease or contingency plans for keeping with one SnoCat. There were ~150 Cog visitors on the summit on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. Plans are to have concessions open on Saturday. Mr. Camille reported on summit improvement projects: water system compressor, heating zone improvements, restroom flooring, general cleaning and maintenance, and new cafeteria-style tables and seating.

**Partner Reports.** Auto Road. Mr. Wemyss reported a great winter season with good snow cover. The Auto Road opens to tree line this Saturday and anticipates a good opening to the summit. The Climb to the Clouds event will return this July. A groundbreaking ceremony was held for the new hotel and completion is expected in Spring 2018.

Cog Railway. Mr. Presby reported that the Cog brought Discover New England tour operators to the summit on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Cog Railway hopes to be able to provide trips to the summit year-round, as is done by similar operators in Europe during the winter season.

MWObs. Ms. Schilling reported a tough winter for access to the summit and thanks Mr. Camille and his staff for their assistance and experience in operating the SnoCats so they could reach the summit. The MWObs had to, in some cases, cancel some of their trips. They were able to open the summit museum for the April 23<sup>rd</sup> visitors and will formally open the museum when Parks concessions open. They are interested in coordinating with the State the need for SnoCats.

Townsquare Media. Mr. Erickson also thanked Mr. Camille and crew for their assistance this past winter. Twice, he had to turn around and cancel his trips to the summit due to weather.

Townsquare may need to move some of their equipment to the Yankee Building because they need to relocate one of their studios based in the valley.

WMNF. Ms. Mendelsohn reported that the Snow Ranger Program is ending its season, which was relatively smooth despite a turnover in staff. The dandelion removal project will continue this year: 200 lbs. were removed in 2015 and 80 lbs. in 2016. Upgrades are planned for the Crawford Path, the oldest trail in the nation and celebrating its 200<sup>th</sup> year. WMNF can share its data on their visitor studies conducted with University of VT, but the context has not yet been completed. They will merge the results with future ecology studies. Their fees will be increasing; the last increase was 15 years ago. The US Forest Service will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018.

AMC. Mr. Graff reported a good winter season for AMC. Summer crews are arriving for work in the hut system. AMC continues its outdoor programming at local schools. They have conserved nearly 75K acres of forest land as part of the Maine Woods Initiative.

**Other Business.** Members discussed the best way to advocate for reinstating \$200K in the capital budget for the Yankee Building assessment. Since a duty of the MWC is to advise DRED, Dir. Bryce suggested a letter from the MWC to Commissioner Rose to make the request of the Senate Capital Budget Committee on May 5<sup>th</sup>. Rep. Umberger and Sen. Bradley explained the legislative process. Rep. Umberger suggested that letters can also be sent separately and directly to the Senate Capital Budget Committee. Mr. Presby moved that the MWC send a letter to Commissioner Rose; Mr. Erickson seconded; the motion was approved. Mr. Erickson will send a separate letter to the Senate Capital Budget Committee with more technical justification behind the request.

Dir. Bryce reported that DRED is looking into a Northern Borders Grant to help fund the replacement of the fiber optic line. He thanked Mr. Brooks for attending the meetings. He apologized to Mr. Presby and Mr. Wemyss for not recognizing the earlier efforts of the Cog Railway and Auto Road in providing financial assistance to the MWObs, and indirectly the to the State.

Rep. Umberger asked that Dir. Bryce provide an update at the next MWC meeting regarding the status of DRED and its reorganization that is being considered under the budget bill.

Adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m. Thank you to MWObs for hosting this meeting.

*Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.*