

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL PUBLIC BRIEFING – March 30, 2016

I come before you this afternoon with the culmination of over a year and a half of work, but that amount of time is modest in comparison to the nearly 65-years that the State of New Hampshire has been pursuing the expansion of the Mount Sunapee State Park ski area. Since the days of Governor Wesley Powell in the early 1960s, the State has laid out a vision for expansion of the Mount Sunapee ski area to enhance the recreational resources for the public, improve travel and tourism in New Hampshire and be an economic stimulus for the region.

After decades of effort, it became clear the state's resources were lacking to make the needed investments to maintain Mount Sunapee as a first rate ski area. Then in the late 1990s, the legislature directed the agency to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the leasing of the Mount Sunapee ski area. In 1998, the Governor and Executive Council approved a 20-year lease agreement, with two 10-year extensions options, with Okemo Mountain – which is currently doing business as Mount Sunapee Resort. And today, thanks to the collective efforts of many, Mount Sunapee ski area is one of the most successful ski operations not only in New Hampshire, but throughout the region.

However, despite the nearly two decades of progress, the Mount Sunapee Resort has not been able to execute the vision outlined within its RFP to the State - an expansion of the ski area. The Mount Sunapee Resort's initial plan called for expanding within the State Park boundary in what is referred to as the East Bowl. In fact, the State's master development plans dating back to 1961 called for expanding in the East Bowl. However, upon further examination, it was determined the ecological impacts in the East Bowl were too significant due to the

discovery of Old Growth forest, and the plans were abandoned. It was determined that a better and more appropriate location existed, based upon the characteristics of the land and the potential of the terrain. This was the genesis of the West Bowl Expansion, and it was brought forward within the Mount Sunapee Resort's 5-year Master Development Plan (MDP) over a decade ago.

While the initial West Bowl Expansion proposal was not acted upon by the then Governor and Council, much has changed over the past decade. The plans have been significantly refined; the Mount Sunapee Resort continues to perform as an outstanding operator of the ski area, the zoning ordinances in Goshen have changed and today do not allow for residential or commercial development on abutting lands within its Recreation District; and the will and recognition for executing the long term vision of the mountain has evolved.

What I bring to you today is a well-balanced and responsible proposal that is beneficial to the State and the region. It's a distinctively New Hampshire solution to the project; it respects and protects our natural resources, enhances the public's recreational experiences, brings economic benefits, promotes travel and tourism, and further solidifies the strength of the State's unique park system. It's truly a win – win for all parties and interests, and reflects a thoughtful balance that defines us a State.

The plan that is before you today benefits greatly from an extensive, transparent, and thorough public process. As required by the lease agreement, the Mount Sunapee Resort brought forward its Master Development Plan (MDP) in June 2014, which among other things, outlined its request for approval of the West Bowl Expansion. A public

comment period was held, which included a well-attended public hearing, and the agency received over 300 comments. Together with key leaders within the agency, I read through the comments, and last April, issued a draft decision on the MDP. Recognizing that there were significant and substantive changes from the initial MDP, the agency called for a second public comment period and held a second public hearing. Again, we benefited from extensive public engagement and received comments from nearly 700 people, plus several petitions. Each of these comments has been read, recorded, and considered by me and my team. The public input has provided the fundamental basis for the deliberations that have led to this final decision, and ultimately, to the lease amendment before you today. This 20-month journey has been extremely rewarding, engaging, and deliberate, and I am confident our extensive effort has led us to a proposal worthy of the local communities, our agency, and the state as a whole.

The key components of the lease amendment before you include accepting approximately 150 acres of private land for the West Bowl expansion improvements, which will be included within Mount Sunapee State Park and the leased boundary. These improvements include 4 new ski trails, a new chairlift and ski area amenities. The lease amendment requests the permission to accept approximately 260 acres of conservation lands to become part of the state park, but not included in the leased boundary. Permission to accept and to grant various easements, agreements, and rights necessary for the State and Mount Sunapee Resort to access the West Bowl Improvements and move the project forward. And an additional 10-year option to the lease agreement, which would potentially extend the lease to 2048.

Each of these elements within the lease amendment requires the approval of the Governor and Executive Council; however, I recognize that there are many components within the approved MDP that are also likely of interest to the Council. For your convenience, I have prepared a summary chart of the final MDP, and how it's evolved through the process. The chart helps explain how the agency has addressed the key issues within the MDP proposal; including,

- Ownership of the West Bowl lands and improvements
- Efforts to avoid, minimize and mitigate for impacts within the Exemplary Natural Community known as Polygon D
- Requirement of conservation lands and additional environmental protections
- Relationship between the public and abutting private lands
- Year round hiking on the Summit Trail
- Mountain Coaster within the State Park
- Economic benefits of the West Bowl expansion
- Other conditions and components of the proposal

As the Council carefully considers the lease amendment before you, I encourage you to review the agency's updated public comments analysis and response. This extensive summary document helps directly address the major comments and questions from the public during this process, and provides how the agency worked to address these elements within the revised MDP, the Lease Amendment, and the conditions required for the approval. I'm proud of the extensive efforts of the agency and our responsiveness to the public throughout this process.

The management of public lands needs to be open, transparent, and holistic. The benefit of any one project needs to be evaluated from the perspective of how it serves the public good and state as a whole. The Mount Sunapee Resort's revised MDP and subsequent Lease Amendment is a balanced approach to the future of Mount Sunapee State Park. It reflects extensive public input, the history of the park, and careful consideration of the mission of our agency. It will improve recreational opportunities, enhance resource conservation, and provide an economic stimulus. I hope you agree and will support the Lease Amendment before you.

Thank you.