

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
September 24, 2021 MINUTES *(Approved on 10/29/21)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) was held at the Mount Washington Auto Road Visitor Center. Weather prevented a safe visit on the summit.

Call to Order. Chairman Bradley called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Introductions were made and Chair Bradley thanked Mr. Wemyss for hosting the meeting on short notice. PRESENT were Sen Jeb Bradley/Senate, Ed Bergeron/for Public, Dir Phil Bryce/Div Parks and Rec, Chris Thayer/AMC, Brooke Brown/WMNF, Paul Ingersoll/for Public, Jack Middleton/MWObs, Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road. Paul Fitzgerald/for Public, Drew Scamman/Townsquare Media and Rep Karen Umberger/House were ABSENT. Several members of the public and state employees were in attendance, including two from the Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinical Program (HNMCP).

Minutes. Mr Ingersoll MOVED to accept the minutes of June 4, 2021; SECONDED by Mr Presby. The minutes were APPROVED as written by unanimous voice vote.

Capital Improvements. Dir Bryce thanks the Fiscal Committee, G&C and legislature for their support of the \$22M ARPA (America Rescue Plan Act) federal funds allocated to Parks. Mr Hummel reported on the status of the sewer treatment plant and the water system projects. An onsite pre-bid meeting was held on 09/17. The bid documents will be released in Jan. ARPA funds will be used for SAB concrete and chimneystack repairs with bid documents released next year. Chair Bradley supported the \$22M ARPA funding for Parks and looks to provide legislation that will support the remaining project needs at Mt Washington.

State Park Report & Operating Plan Review. Dir Bryce said Parks has seen unprecedented demand and use of the reservation system has helped to prevent overcrowding. The Mt Washington Fund is ending FY21 with \$846K, thanks to reduced expenses and deferred work. He thanked the MWSP staff.

Mr Hummel reported that they had a busy season since the 05/21 opening date, but are slightly down in visitation without the usual number of international visitors. He was glad to have ended the fiscal year in the black. Retail operations is performing well and he hired a custodial services employee. Park staff continues work on the Tip Top House as time allows. The portable toilet facilities provided by the Auto Road and Cog Railway have been a help. Repaving of the service road is complete, with Parks providing the materials and the Auto Road providing the labor. A fatality (heart attack) occurred on the Jewell Trail.

Mr Presby said that the Cog Railway and DNCR are still in discussions regarding the Cog track extension project, with the anticipation of an agreeable resolution.

Master Plan. Mr Haley introduced the Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinical Program (HNMCP) members. They spoke briefly about the program and the next steps for the Mt Washington project that will culminate with recommendations for improving the master planning process. Ms Erin conducted an exercise with the members by asking questions and posting their written comments on the wall. The questions were: 1) How would you describe the efforts toward the master plan so far? 2) What makes it challenging to make progress toward a master plan? 3) What specific actions will make it better?

Chair Bradley encouraged the MWC members and summit partners to quickly schedule their interviews with the HNMCP team. He would like to revive the Master Plan subcommittee and seeks volunteers to serve on the subcommittee.

Partner Reports. AMC. Mr Thayer said that the hut system reopened to full capacity on July 1st. COVID mitigation procedures were put in place. Overnight use is strong, although off from previous years, and day use is on pace. Huts are beginning to close for the season with all huts closed by October 16th. AMC is working with the WMNF, the White Mtn Trail Collective and Parks on trail maintenance and investment projects. AMC has provided hiker safety information and assisted with search and rescue efforts. They are working with the Dept. of Business and Economic Affairs and the Granite Outdoor Alliance on issues pertaining to NH's outdoor recreation economy.

Auto Road. Mr Wemyss said that the summer season was down as COVID continues to impact tourism. The Auto Road increased its toll pricing. Retail is up with the Visitor Center dining area was temporarily used as retail space. The Stage Office is nearly complete and looks the same as the previous building. Travis Pastrana broke his own 2017 record in the 2021 Climb to the Clouds event.

Cog Railway. Mr Presby reported that they are finishing several major projects during the COVID slow-down, including the new shop, rail replacement and debris cleanup along the track. Like many others, they are experiencing staffing shortages however, the Cog has been busy with ridership up since 2019.

MWObs. Ms Dunn said the 2021 has been more difficult than 2020 due to staffing challenges and the priority to keep the summit weather observers safe from COVID by not hosting summit tours. The North Conway museum is staffed for fall, but challenges remain, including the resupply of retail operations. Ms Dunn thanked Mr Hummel for his assistance in the break-in of an Obs vehicle over Labor Day weekend. She reported on the various educational programs offered to middle school students. The Seek the Peak fundraiser was successful due to the scheduling of alternate hike days for participants.

WMNF. Ms Brown reported a busy summer with the visitor centers open and the staff assigned to help fight the western wildfires. They are preparing for autumn operations and gearing up for winter. The WMNF has promoted its hiker safety and planning programs. Campgrounds are open through Columbus & Indigenous Peoples Day weekend. The Dolly Copp campground is operated at half capacity.

AOB. The HNMCP team will visit the summit next weekend. Members discussed the next steps in the HNMCP project, the process for public input, holding public hearings in the North Country and in Concord, collecting visitor feedback and social media comments.

Mr Presby recommended reading the 1956 Mount Washington Survey report by Boston University prepared for the Mount Washington Study Committee and the NH Forestry and Recreation Department. A copy is posted on the MWC website and is a survey of visitors and businesses of the Mount Washington area "to determine the status of the Mount Washington Railway and Summit House as attractions and facilities to Mount Washington visitors."

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, October 29, 2021, at 10 a.m. at Cannon's Peabody Lodge. The agenda will include the next steps in the HNMCP project and master plan effort, including a presentation by the HNMCP team.

Adjourn. Mr Ingersoll MOVED to adjourn; SECONDED by Mr Middleton. The meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.