

## MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION

August 28, 2020 MINUTES (DRAFT)

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) was held at Cannon Mountain's Peabody Lodge.

**Call to Order.** Chairman Bradley called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. Members present were Ed Bergeron/for Public, Dir Phil Bryce/Div Parks and Rec (DPR), Paul Fitzgerald/for Public, Paul Ingersoll/for Public, Jack Middleton/MWObs, Rep Wayne Moynihan/House, Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, Drew Scamman/Townsquare Media, Diane Taliaferro/WMNF designee, Chris Thayer/AMC, and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road.

Also present were Allen Brooks/AG Office for MWC, Donna Dunn/MWObs Interim Exec. Director, Earl Duvall/Cog Railway Counsel, Michael Haley/AG Office for DNCR, Patrick Hummel/MWSP, Rob Kirsch/MWObs, Prof. Tim Lewis/Northern VT University, Gary MacDonald/MWObs Trustee, Tom Mansfield/DNCR, Jill Perlow/AG Office for DNCR, Seth Prescott/DNCR, Edith Tucker/Berlin Sun, and Torene Tango-Lowy/MWC clerk.

**Minutes.** Mr Ingersoll moved to accept the minutes of June 19, 2020; seconded by Mr Middleton. The minutes were approved as written by a voice vote.

**Capital Improvements.** Mr Mansfield reported that the well is reaching its capacity for meeting the water needs at the summit. The capital budget request is for installing new tanks behind the Sherman Adams Building (SAB) for a year-round, single system. DNCR is also testing the well near the Yankee Building.

**Summit Utilities & Sewage Treatment Plant.** Mr Prescott, Underwood Engineers and the State's Bureau of Public Works held a workshop for vendor presentations for a new sewage treatment plant. A membrane bioreactor plant is still the best option for the site and estimates ranged from \$1.8M to \$4.7M, depending on the model selected. DES was consulted for cost-cutting options, including modifying a portion of the existing treatment plant. DNCR is preparing the bid documents for a spring release. The project cost is beyond DNCR's capital budget allocation of \$1.87M. Dir Bryce said he may use federal LWCF funds for the shortfall and is seeking approval from the Governor's Office to move forward with the project. Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) come from federal off-shore drilling leases. Grants are given to municipalities and state parks (60/40) for public outdoor recreation projects. Mr Middleton said that sewage treatment has been a long-standing issue and called a MOTION "that the Commission recommends that a task force be established to explore providing adequate water and waste water treatment for the Mount Washington State Park and the task force report to the Commission its recommendations in 90 days, including a review of possible avenues to fund the work related to its recommendations." Rep Moynihan **SECONDED.**

Discussion continued: Mr Presby reiterated that the Cog offered to install a sewage pipe along their ROW to a treatment plant constructed at the base, as is currently done at Cannon Mountain. Mr Prescott said HEB considered that option and did not recommend it as feasible for Mt Washington (see [HEB memo](#), dated Jan 26, 2018). Mr Prescott said the current plant is operating as designed, but that actual summit visitation has maxed out the capability of the plant. Both the well and septic projects are important to meet the summit's operational needs.

Sen Bradley said it is his prerogative as chairman to establish subcommittees and would like a subcommittee of the Commission to consult with DNCR on the sewage treatment plant project. He appointed Mr Bergeron as chair of the subcommittee and will solicit members to serve on the subcommittee. Mr Middleton then **WITHDREW** the motion.

**State Park Report & Operating Plan. Financials.** Dir Bryce reviewed the financial reports and the FY2019 and FY2020 (unaudited) comparison. In FY2020, the State Park lost \$355K in Revenues-Over-Expenditures due in part to the Cost of Goods Sold (\$185K) and the loss of spring revenue; and also \$18K Indirect Costs (SWCAP) paid to the Dept. Administrative Services. Parks pays \$325.6K/yr. in SWCAP on a \$12M budget, including Indirect Cost assessments on federal grant programs administered by Parks. Dir Bryce is looking into the SWCAP assessment further. The extra kerosene delivery expense of \$5,700 is listed under Utilities

in the FY2020 report. The communications revenue is applied to the debt service of the Dartmouth land acquisition bond. Parks has applied for GOFERR funds for reimbursement of COVID-related expenses, such as PPEs and \$50K for portable toilets.

Sherman Adams Building opening. Mr Hummel said the SAB opened on July 18<sup>th</sup> with a 75 maximum capacity using an online advance reservation system that has worked well. The museum and Tip Top House remain closed. The Reopening Task Force guidance are in place and visitation is at 21K as of Aug 23<sup>rd</sup>. Visitation would normally be 131K. The Auto Road and Cog Railway have provided additional portable toilet facilities at the summit. The water filling station outside the SAB is heavily used. Although retail is down by 56%, Parks hopes to break even by spring 2021. Chair Bradley said the partners are doing a good job dealing with the current situation.

Admission fee. Dir Bryce explained that park fees are to cover costs and be according to fair market comparable to the private sector (see [RSA 216-A:3-g](#)). The Fiscal Committee has statutory authority to approve fees. The last Fee Package was submitted in 2012, and Parks will look to submit an updated Fee Package in the coming months. The current lease with the MWObs, which is in negotiation, prohibits Parks from charging fees. Mr Middleton said that Parks needs revenue to support the summit facilities and made a MOTION that the Commission recommends that the Division institute an admission fee of \$5.00 for each adult entering the SAB, \$1.00 of which will be paid to the MWObs for admission to the MWObs museum, and subject to such other terms and conditions which Parks deems necessary and appropriate. Mr Wemyss SECONDED. Chair Bradley said much care and consideration is needed to determine the amount and implementation of fees, including the long-term financial viability and capital projects for the park that would convince both the Fiscal Committee and Capital Budget Committee. He suggested a subcommittee that would work with Dir Bryce and frame the discussion. Mr Middleton WITHDREW the motion.

Ventilation. Mr Mansfield said the Bureau of Public Works met with park and MWObs staff to consider ventilation improvements on the ground floor of the SAB. Parks is waiting for a proposal and may use unit ventilators to improve current air flow. Mr Hummel said fall operations will be weather dependent, but that capacity will still be held at 75 people until visitor use of both floors in the SAB could be understood.

**Master Plan.** Summit communications facilities. No update to report.

Cog Railway proposal. Although the pandemic delayed discussions, the Commissioner and the Cog Railway are still working on a revised proposal that will be brought forward to the Commission.

**Partner Reports.** AMC. Mr Thayer said it's been an interesting summer. The lodges were reopened on July 1<sup>st</sup>, but the huts are still closed and offer limited services such as restrooms and water. AMC hopes to break even by the end of the calendar year. They are working on several trails projects, including the Coos Trail, Camp Dodge Trail, Cathedral Ledge project, and Lonesome Lake Trail in the fall. They've had reasonable success with the modified operations.

Auto Road. Mr Wemyss reported that guided tours are down 93% and self-driving is off by 17%. Staffing has been challenging, but they have a new retail manager. Retail is of 6% and café sales down 38%. Events and capital improvement projects have been postponed to 2021.

MWObs. Ms Dunn started as Interim Executive Director on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. Only the summit weather station is currently staffed. Under the pandemic, both museums are closed as many of their staff are older. Educational programs are now virtual reaching over 1000/week. The weather discovery programs are available to school children and the Science in the Mountains series will reach over 300 participants. The MWObs received a PPP loan and NERF grant that has enabled them to maintain most of its staff.

Cog Railway. Mr Presby said things have been challenging; they were closed April-June. July revenues are down 71%, with retail down 34% and food down 44%. Rail line replacement is 80% done and track cleanup will occur in fall. Their new 34K s.f. maintenance facility is near completion with move-in before snowfall.

State Parks. Dir Bryce said the challenges started in early March with 400 cars overwhelming Monadnock in early March. The reservation system has restricted capacity to 200 cars. Park staff made parks available early on when there were many unknowns about the pandemic. Hikers fill the Flume and Tram lots on weekends.

Townsquare Media. Mr Scamman said they are doing maintenance work and it's been otherwise uneventful. Townsquare's radio stations, media and especially website and internet outlets are being heavily used.

WMNF. Ms Taliaferro reports that Derek Ibarque starts on Monday as Forest Supervisor. He current post is Deputy Forest Supervisor for the Bridger-Teton National Forest, and is originally from Maine. COVID has stressed the importance of reaching out to our partners and working together. The WMNF is open and seeing unprecedented use. They are seeing a different kind of user, facilities have been damaged, graffiti, and visitor altercations. They've received CARES Act funds for installing additional portable toilets, PPEs and hiring staff. The American Great Outdoors Act was approved by Congress and will provide funding to the Forest Service, including \$35M to the WMNF for deferred maintenance.

**AOB**. Chair Bradley said that there was a lot of uncertainty in June. The Commission represents the public interest and the cooperation of all has helped to make the best of a difficult situation. Although not always easy, the MWC is the process for establishing partner relationships and coordinating effort. New Hampshire has fared better than other states in this pandemic and he thanked everyone.

Mr Bergeron was appointed chair of the septic subcommittee, with Rep Moynihan and Mr Ingersoll serving as subcommittee members. The subcommittee will consult with DNCR to gain a better understanding of the septic and well water projects.

The Mt Washington State Park fees subcommittee members are Mr Fitzgerald, Mr Wemyss, Mr Presby and Ms Dunn, with Sen Bradley serving as chair. The subcommittee will meet with Dir Bryce to outline a proposal for discussion by the full Commission. Proposed state park fees would be approved by the Fiscal Committee for implementation in the spring.

The next MWC meeting will be scheduled for Oct 30<sup>th</sup> at Cannon's Peabody Lodge, if the subcommittees have completed their work. Otherwise, the MWC will meet in early December at the Legislative Office Building in Concord or the Littleton Town Hall. Agenda items will include the Cog Railway summit rail line proposal, the septic subcommittee findings, the fee structure subcommittee findings, an update on the ventilation project, and a post-season analysis.

Mr Ingersoll provided copies of the MWC powers and duties under [RSA 227-B:6](#).

Adjourn. Mr Middleton MOVED to adjourn; SECONDED by Mr Ingersoll. The meeting adjourned at 11:55 p.m.

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