

MOUNT WASHINGTON Commission
April 22, 2022 MINUTES *(Approved 05/20/22)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) was held at the Pope Memorial Library, North Conway.

Call to Order. Chairman Bradley called the meeting to order at 9:34 a.m., with a quorum present. Present were Sen. Jeb Bradley/Senate, Ed Bergeron/for Public, Derek Ibarguen/WMNF, Jack Middleton/MWObs, Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, Drew Scamman/Townsquare Media, Chris Thayer/AMC, and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road. Also in attendance were Allen Brooks/DOJ for the MWC, summit partners, State Park employees, and several members of the public. Director Phil Bryce/Div Parks and Rec arrived at 10:00 a.m.

Minutes. Mr. Middleton MOVED to accept the minutes of March 25, 2022; SECONDED by Mr. Presby. The minutes were approved as written.

Master Plan. Chair Bradley passed out two versions of a draft master plan that Mr. Brooks wrote and that was based on discussions from earlier meetings. Mr. Brooks explained that the intention of the drafts is to show commission members what a final plan could look like. Mr. Brooks said that one copy has brackets around copy points where either he added language or where commission members need to develop consensus. Mr. Brooks further explained that in the instances where he added information, he did so to balance the needs of all partners. Even without consensus on every item, Mr. Brooks felt that commission members were so close to agreement that he provided a second “clean” copy with no brackets so commissioners could see what a final plan could look like, which he described as a “celebration of what commissioners cherish about Mt. Washington.”

Chair Bradley asked commission members to take 15 minutes or so to read the documents. Extra copies were shared with the public in attendance. Mr. Earl Duvall/COG handed out one-page document that listed items for the 1970 Master Plan and the status of those items as of today. Chair Bradley addressed the public and asked them to treat the document as a draft. At 10:00 AM, Director Bryce joined the meeting, having had a previous appointment.

After commissioners finished reading the documents, Chair Bradley asked for their thoughts. Commission members thanked Mr. Brooks for his work. Commissioners were very appreciative of the effort undertaken by Mr. Brooks and several suggested opportunities to include additional information such as the mountain’s historical and environmental aspects. Chair Bradley emphasized the focus on the cooperative nature of the partners found throughout the document. M. Before discussion got underway, Chair Bradley once again reminded the public to keep in mind that the draft is a proposal at this time.

Chair Bradley led the commissioners through a discussion of each section noting that the Purpose Statement captures the commission’s intent. During the discussion of the Purpose Statement, commissioners expressed a desire to develop a baseline understanding of the current conditions at the summit. Mr. Jamie Sayen of Stratford spoke and said he agreed that a broad representation of interests is needed but asked the commission to keep environmental concerns top of mind. Chair Bradley thanked Mr. Sayen and noted that the commission will include an environmental baseline study. Dir. Bryce noted that Mt. Washington is the most impacted of state parks by invasive species and asked if the Natural Heritage Bureau could make a presentation at the next commission meeting. Commission members also discussed surveying the public with a focus on why visitors come to Mt. Washington and the potential to engender a sense of stewardship. Chair Bradley asked each commissioner to write a narrative of recommendations for visitor experience and to provide this to Mr. Brooks by May 2 so that he could add a new section on visitor experience.

Chair Bradley said that he liked the focus in the Process section on the cooperative nature of the partners, and commissioners agreed. Several commissioners suggested that this section should include a bullet point stating that the commission will look to third-party expertise where appropriate.

During the discussion of Section IV Capital Improvements, commissioners discussed the need to determine what kind of capital improvements will be made, for example to save energy or to enhance revenue, which could go towards enhancing the visitor experience. Commissioners noted that some items were not included in the section, including a discussion of the Sherman Adams Building. Several commissioners suggested that perhaps an entrance fee should be looked at again. Chair Bradley requested that commissioners include three topics for further discussion at the next meeting: fees, loop trail and the Sherman Adams Building. Chair Bradley also recommended that Mr. Brooks email commissioners a MS Word version of the document so that they could track their changes. Mr. Larry Garland of Jackson spoke and asked if the master plan could include sustainable considerations like using gray water. Dir. Bryce suggested that the opening sentence for subsection C Water and Waste be revised to include “appropriate technology and techniques”. Commissioners also discussed capital improvements for the visitor experience and what that would mean. Several commissioners suggested revisiting entrance fees. Mr. Brooks noted that Rep. Umberger, who was not present, had spent a lot of time and work on the Capital Improvements section. Chair Bradley said he would request her comments for Mr. Brooks to include in the next draft.

Prior to the discussion of Section V Operation and Maintenance, Mr. Duvall/COG and Mr. Thayer handed out visitor summaries. Members acknowledged that they are doing the best they can with estimates to determine carrying capacity. Dir. Bryce raised the question of capping visitors and said it would have to be a commission-wide discussion. Mr. Kirsch/MWObs suggested that carrying capacity should be looked at in light of the impact and with respect to objectives. Mr. Jamie Sayen of Stratford spoke and expressed concern that carrying capacity include more than the impact from flushes but also on the environment.

The commission broke for lunch and returned at 1 PM. During the discussion of subsection B Finance, Dir. Bryce shared a document prepared by Mt. Washington Park Staff on Retail and Food Concessions. Dir. Bryce acknowledged that all partners are sensitive to each other’s retail arrangements. Retail revenue goes right back into the park. Chair Bradley said that Mr. Brooks would include the handout in the financial section.

Commissioners continued their discussion of subsections of the final subsections under Operations and Maintenance with commissioners agreeing that educational goals should be aspirational. Donna Dunn/MWObs said that the plan also should evaluate what already is happening at the Observatory. Chairman Bradley asked her to provide this information to Mr. Brooks. Mr. Thayer said that the Education section may be too detailed with a list of tactics and needs to be brought up to a master plan level that proposes strategy.

During the discussion of the Environment subsection, Mr. Larry Garland of Jackson said that the section seemed too reactive and asked if it could be made more proactive. Mr. Ibarguen noted that this section could also suggest ways to enhance the resources at the Summit. The commission discussed air quality issues, which were poor in the past. Mr. Patrick Hummel, Mt. Washington Park Supervisor, said that DES has a tenant at the summit that does continuous air quality monitoring, Kendall Perkins. Dir. Bryce noted that this section talks about Parks having the responsibility but not all of these items are park decisions but should be made through the commission. Mr. Brooks asked Dir. Bryce to review this section and he would be sensitive to this concern.

After discussion of the draft document ended, Chair Bradley recommended two more meetings, May 20th and potentially on June 10th, before holding a public meeting sometime in late June or early July. Chair Bradley suggested that the commissioners discuss where to hold the public meeting at the commission’s June 10th meeting.

Chair Bradley asked if the partners had any news to report. Mr. Presby reported a successful winter season with the COG in operation for 365 days (except for Christmas and Thanksgiving); Mr. Thayer reported that AMC huts open May 7; Mr. Ibarguen reported that the WMNF trails skills classes were fully booked; and Donna Dunn/MWObs said she has announced her retirement and that the search is on for a new Director.

AOB. The next meeting is scheduled for May 20th at 9:30 a.m. at Peabody Lodge, Cannon Mountain.

Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 2:28 p.m.