

**MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION**  
**July 21, 2017 MINUTES** (*Approved 10/13/17, as amended*)

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) was held at the Tip Top House, Mount Washington State Park.

**Call to Order.** Chairman Walter Graff/AMC, having a quorum of members, called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. Members present were Dir. Phil Bryce/Div. Parks and Rec (DPR), Mark Ericson/Townsquare Media, Paul Fitzgerald/for Public, Paul Ingersoll/Public, Martha McLeod/Public, Jack Middleton/MWObs, Wayne Presby/Cog Railway (Vice-Chair), Rep. Karen Umberger/House, Tom Wagner/WMNF, and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road.

Also present were Tracey Boisvert/DNCR Land Agent, Allen Brooks/AG Office, Nate Camille/MWSP, Tom Mansfield/DNCR Architect, Clare Mendelsohn/WMNF, Sharon Schilling/MWObs President, Edith Tucker/Berlin Sun, Hal Wilkins/public and Torene Tango-Lowy/MWC clerk.

**Minutes.** Rep. Umberger moved to accept the minutes of April 28, 2017; Mr. Ingersoll seconded. The minutes were discussed and amended, then approved as amended.

**Master Plan. Yankee Building.** Dir. Bryce thanked Sen. Bradley and the MWC for advocating for an additional \$200K in the department's FY2018-19 Capital Budget request that will be used for the Yankee Building assessment. Mr. Mansfield gave an overview of the Request For Qualifications (RFQ) for the assessment work. Members discussed the Scope of Work (SOW) and the evaluation procedure with suggested changes to the SOW to include a broader range of communications use and the weighted scoring.

Members discussed the lifecycle of the summit buildings and alternate uses for the Yankee Building. Mr. Presby suggested the use of "sprung structures" as an alternative to concrete. Rep. Umberger and Mr. Erickson will represent the MWC as subcommittee members and serve on the RFQ review team. The RFQ will be finalized and released by July 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Summit Capacity.** Dir. Bryce reported that the Division has started research on carrying capacity and will develop an RFQ at the end of the year. The RFQ will include the study of Mt. Washington and Monadnock. A draft of the RFQ will be sent to the MWC and Monadnock Advisory Committee for review.

**Fee Collection.** Dir. Bryce said the FY 2017 division financials are being completed and the consolidated FY 2016 report will be posted on the division website. He provided historical financial data for the Mt Washington Fund, whose balance (currently at \$462K) has steadily eroded each year since 2014. Concerned about the Mt Washington Fund balance, the carrying capacity RFQ work will be funded by the State Park Fund.

With the State reviewing the value of its leases, Mr. Presby questioned the State's agreement with the Auto Road for the summit parking lots at \$1/year in exchange for the State's (and its contractors) use of the Auto Road. Dir. Bryce iterated the importance of a Master Plan that takes a broad view of summit conditions and needs, and sets the direction for the vision of the plan. The summit relationships are important and complex and would benefit from a facilitated discussion. The MWObs and Auto Road agreements will be sent (posted on the MWC website).

Ms. Boisvert, DNCR's new land agent, was introduced and gave a brief update on the communications leases: 19 tenants; four executed leases w/ new pricing structure; three signed and being readied for G&C approval; eight scheduled for negotiation and four to follow. Dir. Bryce said the revenues from the communications leases (approx. \$212K) are applied to the land acquisition payments to Dartmouth College.

Attorney Brooks gave an overview of the distribution of funds received by the State from the MWObs lease. The agreement between the MWObs, the Auto Road and the Cog Railway is a private agreement separate from the State and the MWC.

**Capital Improvements. State updates.** Mr. Mansfield reported that HEB and Underwood Engineering are testing and monitoring the sewage treatment plant over the next 15 months to determine the potential for system improvements and increasing capacity. They will also study alternatives to sewage treatment, including the feasibility of piping sewage along the Cog railway to the base for treatment, and study improvements to the summit water system. \$75K is earmarked for water system improvements, but

additional capital funds may be needed. DNCR (formerly, DRED) requested approx. \$3 million in the FY2020-21 capital budget for the Yankee Building.

**Park Operations.** Mr. Camille reported strong staffing for this season. They are conducting sampling tests of the sewage treatment plant as part of the engineering studies. He summarized the maintenance projects, including major repairs to the generators and temporary emergency repairs to the MWObs kitchen drainage. Cedar shakes will be installed at the bottom of the “Welcome” wall entrance to improve the visual effect. Director Bryce thanked Nate and his staff for their work while the search for a park manager continues. Two internal candidates are being considered.

**Partner Reports.** Auto Road. Mr. Wemyss reported a reasonable season to date. The Climb to the Clouds event was fantastic. Construction on the Auto Road hotel is underway with an anticipated opening date for Spring 2018.

Cog Railway. Mr. Presby reported that 2016 was their 5<sup>th</sup> record year in a row, and they are up by 17% through July. They will add a new coach and re-rail the line. Next year, they plan to operate year-round to Upper Waumbek. The Cog Railway has submitted its application for their hotel to the planning board and is working on meeting federal and state regulations.

MWObs. Ms. Schilling reported a tough winter season: having new SnoCat operators and only 5 of their scheduled 13 winter EduTrips completed. They opened the summit museum for the Discover New England event in April. MWObs is considering a process for collecting museum admissions from hikers and Cog riders and are preparing for their Seek the Peak fundraiser event this weekend. They are partnering with the Weather Channel for a Cool Experiences in New England piece that will be broadcasted live and including interviews with the Cog Railway and Auto Road. They are planning for their winter operations.

Townsquare Media. Mr. Erickson reported this past winter as having the least amount of ice damage to the communication towers, although their concrete structure took a beating. Their microwave gear in the Yankee Building was damaged, but it was not due to an electrical spike.

WMNF. Ms. Mendelsohn reported that Tom Wagner is retiring on Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> after 16 years of service. She will serve as acting Supervisor and the position has been posted. They anticipate a reduction in their budget. The Dolly Copp campground is under major renovation and the dandelion removal effort will continue for the 2017 season. WMNF is monitoring trail capacity concerns, including the parking occurring along the highway through Franconia Notch, and is considering short-term solutions for managing visitor distribution and alternative transportation. They conduct trailhead monitoring every five years, but have stationed staff with local law enforcement at certain trailhead lots. Increased capacity is occurring across the nation: recreation providers will need to work with tourism promotion and local enforcement. The MWC members thanked Tom for his involvement with the commission.

AMC. Mr. Graff reported strong hut reservations; their numbers are up. AMC is working with WMNF, state, and local groups to get the word out about trail etiquette, especially along Franconia Ridge. He is interested to hear the results of the engineering studies.

**Leases, agreements and franchises.** Ms. Schilling requested MWC approval to expend up to \$5,000 from the MWObs restricted summit museum fund for the replacement/addition of summit museum exhibit materials. The fund will be used to develop and install the Artist in Residence project. Rep. Umberger motioned to approve the request, Ms. McLeod seconded, and the motion was approved.

**Other Business.** Dir. Bryce said a grant application was made with the Northern Border Regional Commission for the fiber optic project. DNCR is one of 25 applicants and although success for receiving an award is slim, we have not yet heard otherwise.

The Cog Railway and the Auto Road monitor public comments they receive from TripAdvisor. Comments related to the State Park are forwarded to the park staff. It was noted that visitors don't seem to mind crowding on the summit.

Adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at noon.

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