

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
January 29, 2021 MINUTES (approved 02/19/21)

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) was held by videoconference.

Call to Order. Chairman Bradley called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. and read the *Checklist to ensure meetings are compliant with the Right-to-Know law during the State of Emergency*. PRESENT by roll call were Ed Bergeron/for Public, Sen Jeb Bradley/Senate, Dir Phil Bryce/Div Parks and Rec (DPR) (DNCR staff, also present), Paul Cunha/AMC, Derek Ibarguen/WMNF, Paul Ingersoll/for Public, Jack Middleton/MWObs, Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, Rep Karen Umberger/House, and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road. Rep Umberger was welcomed back to the Commission. Paul Fitzgerald/for Public arrived later during the meeting.

Also known to be in attendance were Allen Brooks/AG Office for MWC, Donna Dunn/MWObs Interim Exec. Director, David Goulet/DAS-Public Works, Michael Haley/AG Office for DNCR, Patrick Hummel/MWSP, Rob Kirsch/MWObs, Prof. Tim Lewis/Northern VT University, Tom Mansfield/ DNCR, Michael Martin/McFarland Johnson Engrs, Seth Prescott/DNCR, Commr Sarah Stewart/DNCR, Edith Tucker/Berlin Sun, and Torene Tango-Lowy/MWC clerk.

Minutes. Mr Bergeron MOVED to accept the minutes of Dec 11, 2020; SECONDED by Mr Presby. The minutes were APPROVED as written by roll call YES vote by Mr Bergeron, Sen Bradley, Dir Bryce, Mr Cunha, Supv. Ibarguen, Mr Ingersoll, Mr Middleton, Mr Presby, and Mr Wemyss. Rep Umberger abstained.

Mr Bergeron MOVED to accept the subcommittee minutes of Jan 8, 2021; SECONDED by Mr Presby. The minutes were APPROVED as written by roll call YES vote by Mr Bergeron, Sen Bradley, Dir Bryce, Mr Cunha, Supv. Ibarguen, Mr Ingersoll, Mr Middleton, Mr Presby, and Mr Wemyss. Rep Umberger abstained.

Capital Improvements. Mr Mansfield said the sewage treatment project is in final design in preparation for bid. The project estimate is \$2.3-\$2.9M, with \$1.87M requested in the capital budget and LWCF to be used as match. Dir Bryce said the outgoing U.S. Dept of Interior Secretary pulled back all state-side LWCF funding to focus on land acquisition. DNCR's capital projects would not be eligible for LWCF funding. Commr Stewart is working with the Governor's Office and other states to get the decision reversed. Sen Bradley and Rep Umberger were concerned if additional money needs to be added to the capital budget.

Rep Umberger MOVED that the MWC encourage DNCR to use all efforts to reverse the LWCF funding change; and in the interim, to include the additional \$1M needed for the Mt Washington sewage treatment plant project in the DNCR capital budget request. SECONDED by Mr Presby, the motion CARRIES by roll call YES vote by Mr Bergeron, Sen Bradley, Dir Bryce, Mr Cunha, Supv. Ibarguen, Mr Ingersoll, Mr Middleton, Mr Presby, Rep Umberger and Mr Wemyss.

DNCR has not yet decided on the plans for the replacement of Cannon's sewer system. Mr Presby noted that should the new treatment plant at Mt Washington require a licensed Level 3 operator, that it would be an added ongoing expense.

State Park Report & Operating Plan Review. Mr Mansfield reviewed the SAB capacity, based on the state's building codes and discussion with the state fire marshal's office. The main floor has an allowable occupancy of 340 based on the current capacity of the exits. The ground floor occupancy is 298, limited by the occupancy load factor calculation. With the addition of new doors, the main floor occupancy could be increased to 500 for a total occupancy of 798, provided that the capacity of each floor is not exceeded. The cost of retrofitting the exit door of the main floor is approx. \$50K.

Ms Dunn said she had been in touch with a company willing to assist the MWObs with evaluating the flow and metering of visitors, pro bono. Parks will work with Ms Dunn to provide the necessary documents and data for this effort. The capacity discussion continued: occupancy is based on the size of the space and egress, and a sprinkler system would not affect occupancy. Onsite staff is included in the total occupancy allowed.

Admission fee. Dir Bryce reviewed the list of open items from the Fee Subcommittee meeting: 1) the MWObs lease amendment needs to happen; 2) Mr Mansfield discussed the SAB capacity; 3) With a potential

increase in capacity, the sewage treatment plant as proposed is needed; 4) Ms Dunn is working with a company on visitor flow; 5) Dir Bryce welcomes additional comments from the partners regarding weekday v weekend pricing and timed visits; 6) DNCR is internally discussing an analysis of summit contracts, and suggests the need to continue work on the master plan and its operations as a whole; 7) a reservation system can be used in the context of managing capacity, but the potential need for shelter should be monitored; 8) the use of the Mt Washington Fund for administrative overhead costs is in review. Commr Stewart agreed that the summit and its operations deserves a complete Master Plan.

Mr Presby emailed his comments and analysis of the proposed entrance fee to the MWC last night. Over the last 10 years, the Cog has contributed over \$650K to the MWObs through an admission fee contract. Visitation ebbs and flows through the operating season and during the day. He is concerned about lost revenue and increased labor costs needed to manage capacity. The state may be missing out on up to \$700K/yr. in the market value of its summit leases: revenue that could be enough to pay for the sewer and water needs. He would like to see the state concentrate on and allocate its funding toward infrastructure that supports tourism needs rather than the \$15M for the communications building.

Mr Wemyss and Mr Presby briefly discussed the US Post Office space located in the SAB. Chair Bradley said the review of summit contracts is on-going, but that the questions raised would be the types of questions asked by the Fiscal Committee. Chair Bradley will call the next MWC meeting on Feb 19th to continue the fee discussion, as well as the LWCF and capital budget funding, and SAB capacity.

Ventilation. Mr Martin from McFarland Johnson Engineers presented two options for portable air filtration units: the Trio by Field Controls and the Hospi-Guard by Envirco. All units can be obtained within weeks at a cost between \$700 and \$6K per unit, depending on the model. The units are easy to use, are self-contained and can be moved around, and run on 120 volts. The two models can work in combination, and for operational redundancy.

Mr Middleton seeks authorization from the MWC to use funds from the MWObs restricted account towards the purchase of air purifiers for the museum area. Mr Brooks agreed that the MWObs restricted account referenced in the lease could be used for this purpose. Ms. Dunn said there should be enough funds to cover the needed air filtration units. Mr Middleton MOVED that the MWC approve the expenditure of up to \$20,000 of the MWObs restricted fund to purchase the necessary portable air filtration units for the museum and gift shop area located on the ground floor of the Sherman Adams Building. Mr Presby SECONDED and the motion CARRIES by a YES roll call vote by Mr Bergeron, Sen Bradley, Dir Bryce, Mr Cunha, Mr Fitzgerald, Supv. Ibarguen, Mr Ingersoll, Mr Middleton, Mr Presby, Rep Umberger and Mr Wemyss.

Partner Reports. The AMC, Auto Road and Cog Railway had no new updates to report.

MWObs. Ms Dunn reported that some of the MWObs exhibits are now on display at the McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center in Concord. The Discovery Center in North Conway is being used as a COVID vaccination site.

WMNF. Forest Supervisor Ibarguen said that they are working on operational protocols for the upcoming season.

AOB. The next meeting is scheduled for Feb 19, 2021, at 1 p.m. by videoconference. The agenda will include: 1) the capital budget request and an update on LWCF funding, 2) continued discussion on the SAB capacity and fees, including the comments and analysis provided by Mr Presby.

Adjourn. Mr Wemyss MOVED to adjourn; SECONDED by Mr Ingersoll. The meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m. by a YES roll call vote by Mr Bergeron, Sen Bradley, Dir Bryce, Mr Cunha, Mr Fitzgerald, Supv. Ibarguen, Mr Ingersoll, Mr Middleton, Mr Presby, Rep Umberger and Mr Wemyss.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.