

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
June 23, 2023, MINUTES *(Approved 07/21/23)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) took place at the AMC Highland Center. Chair Bergeron called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m., with a quorum present. Attendees introduced themselves.

PRESENT were Chair Ed Bergeron/Public, Phil Bryce/Public, Chris Ellms/Public, Carrie Gendreau/Senate, Derek Ibarguen/WMNF, Vice-Chair Rob Kirsch/MWObs, Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, Drew Scamman/Townsquare Media, Sarah Stewart/DNCR Commissioner, Chris Thayer/AMC, and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road. Also in attendance were Allen Brooks/DOJ for the MWC, Dir Brian Wilson/DPR, summit partners and state park staff, and members of the public.

Minutes. Mr Kirsch made a MOTION to accept the minutes of May 19, 2023; seconded by Mr Ibarguen. The motion CARRIES, unanimously.

Master Plan. Scope of Work. Commr Stewart said that the state budget, which includes \$1M for the summit assessment, was signed by the Governor. Dir Wilson spoke to the revised, draft Statement Of Work (SOW) and the Request for Qualifications process used to find qualified consultants. Once the consultant team is selected, the final SOW and contract fees are negotiated. The MWC members discussed the SOW at length. Comments included:

- provide a solid focus to convey expectations
- building & infrastructure and the environmental assessments were the priorities
- the environmental assessment drove the Master Plan process
- assessing the environmental damage would help evaluate improvement recommendations
- assessing the existing conditions will help address what should/should not be done
- the assessment is a baseline and should include the carrying capacity to determine future investment, see Master Plan pg. 5
- should recommendations and estimates for capital investments be Phase II of the assessment? With Phase III as the implementation of the prioritized capital projects? Phases can be timed and overlap
- the goal is sustainability; see Master Plan assessment language on p. 4 and p. 13, item 2
- the consultants should show how they plan to meet the goals of the assessments; we should not limit the scope; does the weighted scoring appropriately reflect the priorities?
- the objective is to determine needed investments, such as the lack of restroom facilities
- the SOW should be broad enough to attract the right talent pool
- reorder the bulleted key components list to make the environmental assessment as the top priority
- Master Plan p. 13, item 2 contains the language intended for the assessment

Mr Brooks said that everyone is on the same page. He offered to help DNCR with incorporating the MWC's comments and have the next draft SOW circulated to the MWC prior to the September meeting.

Proposal to rename Mount Washington More information is needed before the MWC can take action on the renaming proposal. Members discussed whether they need to appoint a media spokesperson. It was decided that the media should refer to the MWC minutes of May 19th regarding the MWC's current position on the renaming of Mount Washington. The issue is complex, and the Master Plan includes as a deliverable an investigation into the significance of the summit to indigenous people, see p. 18. Mr Thayer suggested that the MWC could serve as a forum for sharing information. Mr Kirsch said that he has reached out to the faculty of the Native American Program at UNH. Mr Presby asked if we could obtain copies of the public comments sent in to the Board on Geographic Names through a Freedom of Information request. Mr Ellms asked about the economic impacts of a name change. This item will remain on the agenda.

Fees paid to the State. Earl Duval/Cog Railway is talking with Bretton Woods Telephone about installing fiber optic service to the summit. NH Electric Coop declined the project because the summit is outside their territory. Mr Duval also met with DNCR Communications Tech Ben Eosue about surveying the summit tenants to gauge their interest in fiber communications service. A meeting is scheduled for next month to consider the options and financial viability of the fiber optic service to the summit. Members took a short break.

Capital Improvements / Park Ops. Patrick Hummel said the water and sewer projects have started this week. Public access to the observation deck will be re-routed so that the new water tanks can be buried next to the Sherman Adams Building (SAB). A concrete pad will be poured for the new sewer treatment plant scheduled to be delivered in August. They will adjust the construction schedule as best as they can to avoid the busiest times. Interviews for the wastewater treatment operator position are being conducted.

Mr Hummel gave a presentation on park operations: the June 7th snowstorm set a record of 8.4"; the Cog's first train to the summit was on April 30th; Parks opened the SAB on May 26th; the Auto Road began its weekend operations on May 13th with its full schedule on May 27th; new summit trail signs were installed; and the new dining tables are now in use.

Negotiations. The lease with the Auto Road for their use of the summit parking lots will be extended for one year. Dir Wilson and Mr Hummel will be meeting with Mr Reichert next week.

Promotions. Mr Hummel appreciates the MWObs posting the "Located at: MWSP logo" on its Current Summit Conditions webpage.

Protection of natural resources. The NH Fish and Game Department is conducting a butterfly study of the area. We will ask if they can present their findings at a MWC meeting once the study is complete.

Partner Reports. AMC. Mr Thayer reports that they have been busy with trainings, guided programs and lodging at the huts. He appreciated the assistance of the summit partners during the June snowstorm that enabled the AMC to prepare the huts for the season and with educating the hiking public.

Auto Road. Mr Reichert thanked MWSP and the MWObs for their assistance during the June storm that had washed out a portion of the Auto Road. This has been a strong start of the season with the numbers returning to pre-pandemic levels. The solar project at their garage was completed.

Cog Railway. Mr Presby agreed that the season started strong: they are back to 2019 levels. They are in a holding pattern for construction while engineering and permitting is being done. They have 8-10 projects scheduled out over the next 4-5 years.

MWObs. Mr Bush said that they will hold their Annual Meeting tomorrow at the McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center in Concord. June did have a record snow event. He appreciates working with the Cog on the pilot educational field trips for Coos County and Laconia area schools. The Cog has signed a sponsorship agreement and pledged to help fund the Mt Washington Regional Mesonet in the event that the MWObs is awarded another grant for this program. MWObs continues to work with the WMNF on winter season internships and weather forecasting to support the Mt Washington Avalanche Center. Their Seek the Peak fundraiser event is showing a 20% increase from last year.

Townsquare Media. Mr Scamman said that a tower crew will be onsite in the next couple of weeks to repair the WHOM main antennae. Their communications building needs maintenance work.

WMNF. Mr Ibarguen said that the WMNF is preparing for the Rainbow Family gathering of up to 5,000 people who will be camping in the Kilkenny area near the fish hatchery over the July 4th weekend. The U.S. Forest Service has sent an additional 60+ staff to assist with resource protection, providing information and ensuring public safety. The Rainbow Family has a long history of holding peaceful gatherings on national forest lands every year. It is an unauthorized event as they refuse to obtain a permit. The WMNF has set up an Incident Management Team that will coordinate with state and local officials and law enforcement agencies. Rehabilitation of the area will be needed at the end of the event.

AOB. The MWC joined Commissioner Stewart in wishing Mr Bryce a happy birthday.

The 2023 MWC meeting schedule is:

- Friday, July 21 at 10 a.m. at the WMNF Campton office
- Friday, Sept 15 at 10 a.m. at the DNCR Gorham office
- Friday, Oct 13 at 10 a.m.
- Friday, Nov 17 at 10 a.m.

Adjourn. Mr Bergeron MOTIONED to adjourn the meeting; Mr Kirsch SECONDED. The meeting adjourned at 12:25 p.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.